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**Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment to Enhance the Students' Writing Skill:
The Case of Second Year Students in the Department of English at Mouloud
Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou.**

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I dedicate this humble work to:

*My beloved parents Karima & Brahim whose love
strengthen my will,*

my sweetest sisters Nesrine & Faiza,

my lovable brothers Menouar & Zinne,

my dear grand-mother Fatma,

my adorable Uncles, Aunts and Cousins.

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Abstract

The core of the present investigation is to shed light on one of the main approaches in teaching EFL which is formative assessment. The aim behind this study is to fulfill two key objectives. First, it intends to explore the extent to which formative assessment is integrated in EFL classes to evaluate the students' writing skill in the Department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou. Second, it seeks to examine the effectiveness of formative assessment strategies on the students' writing enhancement. To reach the aforementioned purposes, our study relies on Wiliam et al. (2005) key strategies of formative assessment as a theoretical framework. Besides, to proceed in our inquiry, a mixed method research has been adopted. In fact, two data collection instruments are used: a questionnaire addressed to one hundred second year students in the department of English at MMUTO and an interview conducted with writing teachers from the same department. The conclusion drawn through the outcomes of the current research demonstrates that teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO emphasize the implementation of formative assessment's principles to develop the students' writing ability. Furthermore, the analysis of the results shows that assessment for learning highly assists students to improve their writing achievements.

Key Words: Formative assessment, writing skill, FA strategies.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

- ❖ **EFL:** English as a Foreign Language.
- ❖ **ELT:** English Language Teaching.
- ❖ **ESL:** English as a Second Language.
- ❖ **FA:** Formative Assessment.
- ❖ **FL:** Foreign Language.
- ❖ **H:** Hypothesis.
- ❖ **L2:** Second Language.
- ❖ **MMR:** Mixed Method Research.
- ❖ **MMUTO:** Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-ouzou.
- ❖ **OECD:** The Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development.
- ❖ **Q:** Question.
- ❖ **QCA:** Qualitative Content Analysis.
- ❖ **SPSS:** Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

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General Introduction

Statement of the Problem

One of the most challenging issues for language teachers is to establish an accurate approach which covers the learning process and the instructional objectives. However, instructors need to select cautiously the kind of assessment supporting these goals.

Educational assessment denotes any formal procedure of gathering information about the teaching/learning process for the sake of teaching/learning improvement.

An effective assessment method not only allows providing feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of the learners, but also permits to teachers ascertain the efficiency of their teaching methods and then contributes on the appropriate decision making of the syllabus. With regard to the different types of assessment, the most visible are mainly: summative and formative assessments. Summative assessment generally takes place at the end of the unit, it is referred to as an assessment of learning. Formative assessment (FA) on the other hand, is carried out during the learning process. The primary focus of formative assessment is to check the students' progress and identify the areas of need and misunderstanding during the instructional unit in a way to promote learning and adjust teaching properly; thus, it is called assessment for learning (Scriven, 1967).

Assessment is an integral part in foreign language teaching and learning. Of the four skills, speaking, reading, listening and writing, assessing writing is actually considered as a challenging task in the teaching process since it is a complicated procedure. In fact, it has been noticed that English Foreign Language students encounter several obstacles in writing and express dissatisfaction towards their written productions which might hinder them from succeeding to learn the foreign language and even to further their academic instruction.

Various reasons might lie behind the students' failure in writing, among which the poor implementation of formative assessment. Consequently, this has been the main motive that leads us to carry out this investigation since none of the previous works at MMUTO context have explored the concept of formative assessment in relation to writing. However, a related study in this department has debated formative assessment but with regard to professional life.

In the light of what has been said, the present work seeks to investigate the significance of formative assessment in EFL writing classes putting stress on its impact on enhancing the students' writing competency with reference to 2nd year EFL classes. In addition, it tends to highlight the extent to which formative assessment approach is applied in this context.

Aims and Significance of the Study

The overall aim of the current research is to investigate the significance of formative assessment in EFL classes and its impact in enhancing the students' writing proficiency. In addition, this study seeks to critically evaluate the extent to which the implementation of formative assessment is beneficial to both students and teachers. First, it makes students aware of their writing deficiencies through teachers' formative feedback and then, it provides deeper insights for teachers about their students' strengths and failures. In fact, this dissertation aims at promoting the use of formative assessment throughout an exploratory study in EFL writing classes in the Department of English at MMUTO. Indeed, it intends to provide evidence about the major role formative assessment plays in helping students develop their writing ability.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Considering formative assessment as an integral part for improving the learners' written composition, the present dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions:

Q1-To what extent do teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO use formative assessment to evaluate the students' writing skill?

Q2-Does formative assessment enhance the students' writing performance?

In an attempt to answer the above research questions, the following research hypotheses are advanced:

H1-Teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO highly use formative assessment to evaluate the students' writing skill.

H2-Formative assessment enhances the students' writing performance.

H3-Formative assessment does not enhance the students' writing performance.

Research Techniques and Methodology

To carry out this investigation, we have adopted a mixed method and approach. It combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches for data collection and data analysis. The quantitative procedure serves to present the data statistically, whereas the qualitative procedure is meant to provide explanation and interpretation of the qualitative data. In order to explore the extent to which formative assessment is put into practice in the Department of English at MMUTO and its effectiveness in enhancing the students' writing proficiency, two data instruments have been used. A questionnaire is conducted with 2nd year EFL classes in the English department at MMUTO through random sampling process. To obtain more reliable data, an interview is administered to 2nd year writing teachers at the same department that aims to discuss the impact of formative assessment approach in teaching the writing skill.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured following the traditional complex design. It comprises a General introduction, four chapters and a General conclusion. The General Introduction presents the aims and the significance of the study, the research questions and hypotheses, the research techniques and methods and the outline of the dissertation. The first chapter provides the '*Review of the Literature*' of the core theoretical notions concerning formative assessment and the writing skill. It also includes the theoretical framework adopted in the current research. The third chapter is entitled '*Research Design and Methodology*' which describes the research methods and techniques that are used to collect and analyze data which give validity to the work. The third chapter is named '*Presentation of the Findings*', it is assigned to present the outcomes gathered in the course of the study. The qualitative findings take form of paragraphs or texts, while quantitative ones are introduced in the form of figures, pie charts and tables. The fourth and the last chapter is called '*Discussion of the Findings*'. The latter discusses the results of the work with regard to the literature review and theoretical framework, it seeks to answer the research questions and confirm or reject the hypotheses that are postulated at the beginning. Lastly, this research ends with a General Conclusion that presents a summary of the key items undertaken throughout the research.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The current chapter aims at shedding light on the process of formative assessment as an essential educational component to both teaching and learning. It is divided into three parts. The first is named formative assessment, it attempts to clarify the important issues related to formative assessment by exploring the process of assessment in general followed by a brief distinction between assessment and evaluation. Then, it tends to deeply clarify the notion of formative assessment and provides differences that exist between the two common assessment types that are formative and summative assessments. It also highlights the elements, the importance and the main components of formative assessment. The second part consists of a general overview about the writing skill and the basic approaches to teaching writing. By the end, it introduces the role of formative feedback in writing improvement. The third and the last part of this chapter involves the theoretical framework with reference to Wiliam et al. (2005).

1/Formative Assessment

1-1/Definition of Assessment

Palomba and Banta (1999:4) define assessment as “*the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs and development*”. In other words, assessment refers to the range of planned procedures which comprise gathering, discussing and analyzing information about the students’ acquisition of an intended knowledge for the sake of improvement. It means that assessment serves as a tool to promote learning. In the same sense, Huba and Freed (2000:8) describe assessment as follows:

Assessment is the process of gathering information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop deep understanding of what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.

This definition reveals that assessment is a data collection process that intends to evaluate the students' knowledge, abilities and what they have grasped through their learning experiences. Accordingly, such information is used to promote the learning process.

According to Chapelle and Brindley (2002:267) assessment is seen as *“the act of collecting information and making judgments about the learners' knowledge of a language and ability to use it”*. That is, assessment is crucial to any successful educational program, and to foreign language teaching and learning more specifically. For instance, through assessment teachers can deduce easily the extent to which their students could or not make use of their language abilities so as to remedy the learning or to move on.

From this perspective, assessment is recognized as one of the vital precepts of instruction that would help to determine the efficiency of the teaching methods and contributes on the students' achievement of the desired learning outcomes.

1-2/Assessment and Evaluation

In the educational setting, the concepts “assessment” and “evaluation” play a fundamental role for information gathering about the students' performance. Hence, they are considered as interrelated terms that are used to refer to the same activity (Cunningham, 2005). Although the terms have been used interchangeably by researchers, they are still different in their purposes. Wiliam (2003:297) claims that *“although assessment and evaluation are often used synonymously, they are not exactly the same”*.

Assessment is considered as a part of the whole educational process. Carr and Harris (2001:35) define assessment as “*an integral part of instruction... effective classroom assessment is relevant to immediate learning*”. Simply put, it is regarded as a systematic process of describing, collecting, and interpreting information about students’ improvement. Evaluation, on the other hand, it is seen as an important item in the field of language teaching. TenBrink (1974:8) views evaluation “*as a process of obtaining information and using it to form judgments which in turn are to be used in decision making*”. That is to say, evaluation is considered as an effective tool for making appraise about students’ enhancement and the extent to which the curriculum or the program and teaching approaches are effective for teaching and learning. In the same context, Madani (2012:10) asserts that “*evaluation is a process of using methods and measures to judge the learners’ achievement for the purpose of grading and reporting*”.

According to Nunan (1992:185), evaluation is distinguished from assessment in the sense that “*assessment refers to the processes and procedures whereby we determine what learners are able to do in the target language... Evaluation, on the other hand, refer to a wide range of processes which may or may not include assessment data*”. In brief, assessment is concerned with continuous evaluation during the learning process while evaluation is concerned with teachers’ outcomes about students’ improvement at the end of the course. For example, in assessment process teachers assess students through classroom activities in order to check their understanding of the intended goals. Whereas evaluation process is based on tests that measure what the students have learnt through the unit. To sum up, assessment is process oriented whereas evaluation is product oriented.

1-3/Formative Assessment

The concept of formative assessment has been interpreted differently by many scholars.

According to Black and Wiliam (1998:2) formative assessment “*refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged*”. In other words, formative assessment refers to an ongoing process that creates feedback which would be used by teachers as well as students during the course to modify the teaching and learning processes for the sake of improvement. By the way of illustration, the students’ outputs being negative or positive during the course are going to serve as information that would lead teachers to instantaneously take decision of either to keep going the positive outputs or to regulate the negative ones. That is, improvement occurs when evidence about the students’ performance is elicited while the learning is still occurring in order to identify and adjust the areas of need and ambiguities.

Moreover, the term “assessment for learning” is frequently used by many scholars (e.g. Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D., 2002; Jenkins & Johnson, 2009; Wiliam, 2013) as an alternative term to “formative assessment”. Thus, assessment for learning is the process through which teachers assess the students’ knowledge and progress towards the learning objectives through continuous feedback so as to promote their achievements, in this regard, Jenkins and Johnson (2009:416) assert that:

Formative assessment is commonly referred to as assessment for learning, in which the focus is on monitoring student response to and progress with instruction. Formative assessment provides immediate feedback to both the teacher and student regarding the learning process.

Indeed, according to Black and Wiliam (1998b), assessment is not being formative unless the information about the learning situation is used to meet the learners’ needs. Furthermore, formative assessment is most of the time related to the notion of feedback. In the light of this, Irons (2008:7) argues that “*any task that creates feedback or feedforward to students about their learning achievements can be called formative assessment*”. In other

words, formative assessment implies the use of feedback to facilitate and improve teaching and learning. For example, an effective feedback could be addressed to inform the students how to progress in their learning, suggest solutions to close the gap, or simply encourage them to go forward.

On the whole, formative assessment is defined as a continuous activity where teachers and students are generating data about the teaching/learning progress during instruction to be used as feedback on which instructional adjustments are based to foster teaching and increase the learning outcomes accordingly (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

1-3-1/Formative Assessment VS Summative Assessment

In FL teaching and learning the use of assessment can target diverse purposes as it can occur in different times. Therefore, assessment is shaped in many forms, the most significant are namely summative and formative assessments. In this context, Torrance and Pryor (1998:8) assert that *“distinctions are now routinely drawn between formative and summative assessment, with definitions of the two usually revolving around differences in both function and timing”*.

As distinct from formative assessment, summative assessment occurs at the final stage of the instructional unit, course, semester, or a year, thus, it is called “assessment of learning” (Scriven,1967). In fact, it is a kind of assessment that aims at evaluating as well as measuring the students’ achievement of the learning outcomes most frequently at the end of the educational program. According to Brown (2004:6) *“summative assessment aims to measure, or summarise what the students have grasped, typically at the end of course or unit of instruction, final exams in course and general proficiency exams are examples of summative assessment”*. More importantly, in the forms of tests or final exams, summative assessment is

implemented in order to come with final judgment regarding the students' graduation or admission to upper levels of education (Irons, 2008).

As compared to formative assessment which includes the use of continual feedback as a device to promote learning while occurring, in summative assessment however, feedback is exploited to evaluate the successfulness of the educational program through final tests at the end of instruction. In other words, it is all about collecting evidence to support learning, but unlike formative assessment, summative assessment deals with the learning process for the sake of measurement not improvement (Torrance and Pryor, 2002; Irons, 2008).

1-3-2/The Elements of Formative Assessment

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development OECD (2005:44) has introduced six key elements of FA, whereby teachers create a framework to shape teaching and assessment that are as follows:

- 1. Establishment of a classroom culture that encourages interaction and the use of assessment tools.*
- 2. Establishment of learning goals and tracking of individual student progress toward those goals.*
- 3. Use of varied instruction methods to meet diverse student needs.*
- 4. Use of varied approaches to assessing student understanding.*
- 5. Feedback on student performance and adaptation of instruction to meet identified needs.*
- 6. Active involvement of students in the learning process.*

The former element implies that it is necessary to ensure a fitting learning environment that incites the learners' interaction, and make assessment tools into practice. The second point is around setting up the instructional objectives and making sure each individual student successfully achieves those objectives. The third element stresses the impact of formative assessment methods to address the different student needs. The fourth element emphasizes the importance of using multiple approaches in a way to assess the student's individual progress and understanding from diverse perspectives. The fifth item additionally, concludes that

feedback is crucial tool of formative assessment, however in order to meet the expected learning outcomes, feedback should be selected effectively and appropriately. In the last point, OECD focuses that students should be active participants in their learning. Finally, it is through the complementary role of these elements that assessment and the teaching process could be appropriately shaped.

1-3-3/The Importance of Formative Assessment

Several research works and studies draw a conclusion that formative assessment is of a great importance for promoting teaching and learning, it is *“one of the most important interventions for promoting high-performance ever studied”* (OECD, 2005: 22). Similarly, Black and William (1998:12) in their work *“Inside the Black Box”* put high emphasis on the prominence of the use of formative assessment in the classroom, in which they state that *“formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work”*.

Furthermore, the significance of formative assessment has been highlighted with respect to both teachers and students. First, formative assessment provides teachers with clear idea about what their students has grasped from the lesson and the extent to which they are improving, so they could make decisions that meet the intended learning objectives (Greenstein, 2010). In this regard, Popham (2008:7) states that *“one component of formative assessment process is for teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional activities”*. Second, it has been argued that formative assessment is a key item that reinforces the students’ self-confidence and motivation through teachers’ positive feedback, specifically, Cauley and McMillan (2010:1) assert that formative assessment *“is now recognized as one of the most powerful ways to enhance student motivation and achievement”*.

More importantly, formative assessment increases the students’ involvement in the learning process. Hence, this promotes the enhancement of his learning level and progress, on

the light of this, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2005:22) posits that *“formative assessment methods have been important to raising overall levels of students’ achievement”*.

1-3-4/The Main Components of Formative Assessment

An effective FA goes hand in hand with the appropriate use of its components. The five following concepts introduced by Bremner (2014) shed light on the main FA strategies and the impact they have on the students’ achievements:

1-3-4-1/Learning Targets

The starting point and the most principal strategy in formative assessment is to share clear learning targets, as described by Clayton (2017:2) who states that: *“one of the most powerful formative strategies for improving student learning is clear learning targets for students”*. The latter as its name suggests, implies the students’ clear understanding of what they are expected to learn during the lesson. That is, it is crucial for teachers to share and communicate clearly the learning objectives and the success criteria by providing a sample of how well or bad work is described. Consequently, the intended learning outcomes would be properly achieved as it is stated by Cauley and McMillan (2010:3) that *“examples are powerful because they enable students to more fully understand where they are going and why the teacher provides feedback. Furthermore, providing clear expectations enables students to set realistic, attainable goals”*. As a result, students become more actively engaged in their learning, since according to Jones (2005) students are going to be informed about what they are asked to do, why and how to do it, and finally what they are expected to learn from doing it.

In the same context, Reed (2012:17) asserts that *“research on instructional techniques in all core content areas has found that explicitly linking classroom activities to learning*

goals helps students understand the purpose of the instruction and feel motivated to engage with the ideas". Thus, students are more susceptible to perceive the learning targets when these matters are associated with classroom tasks. Consequently, this practice helps students deduce by themselves what is expected to be thought from the course. However, in formative assessment, teachers not only have to identify visible learning objectives, but also need to know how well students are performing towards the mastery of those objectives (Moss and Brookhart, 2009). Put briefly, the most meaningful teaching and learning occurs when teachers shape the appropriate learning targets to be used in order to check and evaluate understanding during the learning session (ibid, 2012).

1-3-4-2/Monitoring Learning

Once the learning targets are identified, teachers have to monitor the students' progress toward meeting these targets. This stage is extremely important in formative assessment. A recent definition implies that "*monitoring is a means by which information is gathered while evaluation is the judgment on the effectiveness of action taken based on the impact on the quality of children's learning*" (Ndungu et al., 2015:11). Wiliam (2011) clarifies that monitoring learning comprises eliciting students' understanding through diverse questioning types, activities, and classroom discussion. Monitoring is an aid for teachers since it helps them gather data about every student's steps and missteps towards learning goals achievements. Eventually, these data are going to be used to evaluate the efficacy of the instructional teaching methods and make decisions to support learning. According to Safer and Fleischman (2005:81) "*student progress monitoring is a practice that helps teachers use student performance data to continually evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and make more informed instructional decisions*". Effective learning monitoring leads the teacher to appropriately assess students' skills and abilities, in order to provide feedback conforming to their needs and situations that will help them achieve the expected outcomes.

1-3-4-3/Feedback

Feedback is one of the pillars of formative assessment. Brookhart (2008: 1) states that *“feedback is an important component of the formative assessment process”*. That is to say, feedback is a fundamental part of classroom work that should be constantly integrated and implemented (Norlin, 2014). It is defined by Shute (2008:153) as *“information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior to improve learning”*. More precisely, feedback is information or any comment teachers provide about the students’ current performance that helps to close the gap between what the learners are learning and what they are intended to learn (Sadler, 1989). Actually, it makes students aware of their potentials and where improvement is needed.

However, a successful formative assessment depends on effective feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007: 104) note that *“to be effective, feedback needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students’ prior knowledge and to provide logical connections”*. In other words, the more feedback is effective the more it promotes learning. As a matter of fact, accurate timing, mode (i.e., aural or written feedback) and type of feedback (i.e., positive or negative) have a notable impact on the students’ learning achievement. Regarding this issue, Hattie and Timperley demonstrate in their work that *“although feedback is among the major influences, the type of feedback and the way it is given can be differentially effective”* (ibid: 81). In addition to that, effective feedback plays an important role in fostering the students’ motivation. In this respect, Cauley and McMillan (2010:5) argue that *“formative assessment and, in particular, feedback and instructional correctives, can be a powerful technique to support student motivation and achievement”*. Feedback is acknowledged not only as being a formative tool that supports students’ performance, but also serves as information that helps teachers shape instruction.

1-3-4-4/Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is an ongoing process by which students monitor and evaluate their own learning. In fact, involving students in self-assessment enhances their learning attainments. That is to say, it is considered as an additional source of feedback about the students' performance that aims to promote their achievements (Andrade, 2010). According to Andrade *“self-assessment is a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria and revise their work accordingly”* (ibid:92). In short, self-assessment is a strategy which engages students to assess their own performance for the sake of changing, adapting and improving their learning with regard to explicit standards. In the same sense, it is defined by Boud as *“the involvement of students in identifying standards and or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards”* Boud (1991, cited in Boud, 1995:12). Indeed, Boud (1995:182) suggests that the process of self-assessment should entail the following elements to be successfully implemented:

- **Clear rational:** Students should clearly understand the goals of such activity.
- **Explicit procedures:** Students should be aware of their teachers' expectations.
- **Resources:** Teachers should provide their learners with a safe learning environment in which they can be honest and feel comfortable to communicate their thought.
- **Confidence:** Teachers should make control over the students' learning to avoid any kind of cheating or collusion between learners and make sure that all the learners act similarly.

Self-assessment is regarded as a key component of formative assessment that plays a significant role in language teaching and learning. This point is supported by Sadler's (1989:119) assertion who states that *“a key premise is that for students to be able to improve,*

they must develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production". Indeed, one of the major effects of self-assessment on students' learning progression is developing their autonomous learning (Spiller, 2009). Moreover, it also allows learners to take control of their learning and become more motivated, that is to say, students perform as an active agents rather than passive consumers of knowledge during instruction through classroom discussion with their mates and teachers (Alobaid, 2016).

1-3-4-5/Peer Assessment

Like self-assessment, peer assessment is another component of formative assessment which gets learners involved in determining their learning achievement. In this regard, Lee (2006:61) points that *"peer assessment and self-assessment are important forms of assessment that engage pupils in talking about their learning and therefore help them to become self-critical and independent"*. Topping and Ehly (1998, cited in Topping, 2010:62) define peer assessment *"as an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners"*. In simple words, it is a key technique that engages students judging each others' performance based on a given criterion. Freeman and Lewis (1998:126) assert that *"by the mean of peer assessment, students are likely to develop a better understanding of what is looked for in their work as they became familiar with the criteria when they have to apply them"*.

As a matter of fact, peer-assessment is considered as another source of feedback in the process of formative assessment. More importantly, feedback provided by students on each others' work is more elaborated, qualitative, and formative one (Topping, 2010). Indeed, students feel more comfortable to express themselves in front of their friends rather than teachers as they are likely to accept their comments and remarks during learning instead of

teachers' ones. Since, they have the same educational level or as Topping (2010) calls it "*Equally status*".

Peer-assessment plays an important role in the learning process which presents many advantages to the students' progression. It serves as a technique that makes students more motivated in classroom in evaluating and monitoring their peers' achievement. More precisely, it provides students with an opportunity to take responsibility of their learning in order to highlight areas where they are skillful and those in which they have to reinforce rather than relying only on their teachers. Moreover, it promotes collaborative learning through classroom interaction and discussion that allows students to exchange their ideas, learn from each other's and enlarge their knowledge which are likely to develop their level. It also develops students' critical thinking and cognitive abilities (Spiller, 2009).

2/The Writing Skill

2-1/Definition of Writing

Writing is one of the focal productive skills for language learners. It is a meaning-making process that implicates the mastery of the other three language skills, that is to say, reading, speaking and listening as well as a wide range of linguistic and cognitive abilities (Nik et al., 2010). It is defined differently by several authors. According to Lyons and Kroll (1997:8) writing is viewed as "*an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience*". From this perspective, we come to a conclusion that writing is a context sensitive skill that targets a specific objective and audience for the sake of communication.

From another point of view, Widdowson (2001) sees writing as the use of visual device to transform the graphic symbols, grammatical structure and appropriate vocabulary into

coherent texts. Thus, students are required to be competent and skillful to be able to transform the linguistic knowledge into coherent written productions. Other scholars go further to maintain that writing is not restricted to the graphic and linguistic representation of one's own thoughts or ideas into written form, but it extends to be a social interactive activity. Hyland (2003:27) notes that *“while every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, it is also interactional and social, expressing a culturally recognized purpose, reflecting a particular kind of relationship, and acknowledging an engagement in a given community”*.

It is commonly argued that writing is a basic language skill. However, it represents a challenging task particularly for English Second Language learners (Nik et al., 2010), because it requires the mastery of many cognitive abilities (Gillespie and Graham, 2011).

In nutshell, it can be deduced that writing is a social cognitive skill and a means of communication as well, that is extremely important for the acquisition of a foreign language.

2-2/ Approaches to Teaching Writing

Varieties of methods and approaches have been developed to be used to teaching writing. In fact, each approach has a given characteristic which differentiates it from the other, however; they are not contradictory but they play a complementary role which leads to writing improvement. Similarly, Hyland (2003:2) claims that the different approaches for teaching writing are viewed as *“complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of writing”*. Actually, during the last two decades the most common approaches that are emphasized in EFL classes are: product approach and process approach.

2-2-1/Product Approach

Product approach or text-focused approach introduces the writing process as the final

product. Nunan (1991:86) claims that “*a product-oriented approach, as the title indicates focuses on the end result of the learning process, what is that the learner is expected to be able to do as fluent and component user of the language*”. This writing approach involves the production of final text through the imitation of model essays which are provided by teachers (Hyland, 2003). Moreover, the product approach mainly focuses on language form with attention to the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices, on the basis of this view, “*learning to write in foreign or second language mainly involves linguistic knowledge and vocabulary choices, syntactic pattern, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts*” (ibid:3). However, writing within the principle of the product approach entails the use of four basic stages namely: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing (ibid).

2-2-3/Process Approach

As a reaction to the traditional view which looks at writing as a final product, new approach for teaching writing has emerged. The process approach to writing focuses on the writer as an independent producer of the text (Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, process approach puts emphasis on students’ linguistic skill instead of the linguistic knowledge which is the essential basis of the product based approach. Moreover, the main aim of this recent approach is to train students how to generate and plan for ideas, draft and redraft in order to produce the final text which communicates their thought (Nemouchi, 2008 cited in Zitouni, 2015).

The process oriented approach to teaching writing entails different classroom activities that students deal with to maintain their writing development, these activities go through various stages such as: pre-writing, drafting, revising, and re-writing. In this context ,writing is considered as “ *planning , drafting, revising, and editing do not occur in neat linear*

sequence, but are recursive, interactive, and potentially simultaneous, and all work can be reviewed, evaluated, and revised even before any text has been produced at all” (Hyland, 2003:11). This means that, writers could move backward and forwards through these stages so as to improve the final work. Additionally, the process approach to writing rise new opportunities for students to take responsibility of their own productions which make them active participants in their learning (Shing and Joe, 1992).

2-3/The Role of Formative Feedback in Promoting the Writing Skill

According to Abdulahi et al. (2017:32) *“feedback is recognized as one of the driving forces in writing development and as an essential pedagogical tool in writing instruction”*. Several research works and studies have addressed the effectiveness of formative feedback as an important element in teaching and learning the writing skill in the field of second language acquisition.

Hyland and Hyland (2006:83) point that *“feedback is widely seen as crucial for encouraging and consolidating learning, and this significance has also been recognized by those working in the field of second language (L2) writing”*. Thus, over the two last decades feedback on the process-oriented approach to writing has been integrated and established by teachers as a fundamental component that puts forward the students’ composition ability (ibid). In the same context, Abdulahi et al. (2017:32) assert that *“teaching writing is demanding, and formative feedback has become a prime concern of any writing teacher”*. However, with the emergence of the process-based approach, a criticism about the traditional way of providing feedback calls for using a different perspective that meets the students’ writing expectations as pointed by Shing and Joe (1992:48) who posit that *“the emergence of a process-oriented approach argues for a completely different feedback system”*.

Furthermore, formative feedback throughout the writing process gives more consideration to the process itself rather than to the form or the grammatical errors, which makes the learners actively involved by working in collaboration with their teachers (ibid).

A recent study has been conducted by one of the members of University of Oslo, Drita Abdulahi where she has investigated the extent to which formative feedback addresses the students' writing needs in the Norway context. About this issue, Abdulahi (2017) concludes that it is the feedback generated from formative assessment pedagogy which develops the students' writing because it focuses mainly on evaluating their multiple drafts along the process of writing, while summative feedback has to do with the final written product so as to solely assign grades.

3/Theoretical Framework

The objective of the current study is to explore the extent to which the implementation of formative assessment is beneficial for both EFL teaching and learning, and its effectiveness in enhancing the students' writing proficiency. To fulfill these objectives, the present work will be guided by Wiliam et al. (2005) theoretical framework. In their framework, Wiliam et al. theorize five key strategies of a practical formative assessment or what they call "*the five assessment-for-learning strategies*" (ibid:3) as a recent alternative approach to effective teaching. This theory is appropriate to conduct the current investigation and to obtain reasonable answers to our research questions.

As mentioned before, Wiliam et al. (2005:2) conceptualize five basic strategies of formative assessment namely:

- *Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success.*
- *Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions, and learning tasks.*

- *Providing feedback that moves learners forward.*
- *Activating students as the owners of their own learning.*
- *Activating students as instructional resources for one another.*

3-1/Clarifying and Sharing Learning Intentions and Criteria for Success

It is the most important phase of formative assessment which most of the time takes place at the beginning of the lesson. In their research work, Wiliam et al. (2005:3) point that teachers should put stress on “*making both their criteria for success and learning intentions transparent to students*”. That is, it is imperative for teachers to communicate what the students are supposed to learn from the lesson and how well or bad work is being like. However, the accurate choice of the way and the language by which this information is communicated is very critical to ensure the successfulness of the results. Accordingly, providing students with previous work samples is meant to be an effective method to discuss quality and success criteria, which will help them develop critical thinking (ibid).

3-2/Engineering Effective Classroom Discussions, Questions, and Learning Tasks

An appropriate classroom learning environment is built upon the extent to which teachers can correctly manage classroom discussion and questioning. According to Wiliam et al. (2005:3) teachers should monitor learning “*by thinking more carefully about the questions they ask in class, they can check on students’ understanding while the students are still in the class, rather than after they have left, as is the case with grading*”. It is clear that classroom questions and tasks help teachers to check the students’ understanding of the topic during instruction, such information will guide them to make instructional adjustment when necessary (e.g. reteach). Furthermore, Wiliam et al. (2005) demonstrate that already planned questions are very useful for teachers to stimulate the students’ critical thinking and help them by the way to develop a new knowledge rather than putting students under grading tests of

their previous knowledge. That is to say, it is the shift from product oriented to process oriented (Wiliam et al. 2005).

3-3/Providing Feedback that Moves Learners Forward

Feedback is one of the most meaningful components of an effective formative assessment. Generally, it implies the teachers' instructional comments and remarks about the individual students' strengths and weaknesses that either guide them to cope with their deficiencies or encourage them when they are improving. Wiliam et al. (2005) assert that to be more effective and powerful, teachers' feedback should involve the use of comments without grades, in order to incite the students' thinking and move learning forward. In this respect, they argue that *"to be effective, feedback needs to cause thinking. Grades don't do that"* (ibid:4).

3-4/ Activating Students as the Owners of their Own Learning

According to Wiliam et al. (2005:5) *"students' self-assessments are generally accurate, and students say that assessing their own work helped them understand the material in a new way"*. In formative assessment, Self-assessment is a meaningful strategy that involves the students' active engagement in monitoring and assessing their own learning based upon already identified criteria. Clearly, most students engaged in self-assessment become more autonomous, self-confident and motivated towards meeting the learning objectives that results in improved outcomes.

3-5/Activating Students as Instructional Resources for One Another

In addition to teachers, another important source of feedback is that of peers. Activating students as resources for one another or peer-assessment as suggested by Wiliam et al. (2005) may have a large beneficial sides on students' achievement if implemented accurately and

cautiously. In this regard, Wiliam et al. (2005:5) argue that “*peer-assessment, with subsequent advice on how to improve, can be an important part of effective instruction*”. As its name suggests, peer-assessment includes students’ comments, remark or even feedback about each others’ work. Wiliam et al. (2005) point that students who are engaged in assessing their peers’ work are most likely to understand the success criteria. Indeed, feedback provided by peers has more influential impact on the students than that of their teachers. Moreover, by working in collaboration, students are going to improve their cognitive abilities and plan their own learning.

Conclusion

In the recent decades, a debate about the use of formative assessment as a new alternative approach to teaching has been raised. In this view, the present chapter has shed the light on the fundamental concepts related to formative assessment and the writing skill as well as the main scholars’ views about this concern. In the first part, details about defining formative assessment, an explanation of its key elements, components and importance have been discussed. Definitions of the writing skill and its main approaches have also been highlighted in the second part of this chapter. The final part of this chapter has reviewed the theoretical framework on which the current research is based. This investigation aims at providing some conceptual strategies of an effective formative assessment implementation that will help particularly the second year students to enhance their writing skill.

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter attempts to describe the research techniques and procedures used for both data collection and data analysis. It is divided into two sections. The first section is entitled ‘**Procedures of Data Collection**’. It starts by defining the mixed method used in the present work. Then, it provides a description of the setting and the sample population. Finally, it describes the two instruments (questionnaire and interview) that are used to glean information. The second section is entitled ‘**Procedures of Data Analysis**’. It deals with the explanation of statistical content analysis and qualitative content analysis that are used as data analysis procedures. In what follows, a detailed explanation of the mentioned points is provided.

1/Data Collection Procedures

1-1/Research Method

To proceed in our inquiry, we have adopted a mixed method approach. According to Dornyei (2007:163), “*mixed method study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study with some attempts to integrate the two approaches at one or more stages of the research process*”. It is also defined by Creswell (2008:4) who claims that “*Mixed Method Research is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative approaches*”. More specifically, Mixed Method Research involves the combination of the two trends –qualitative and quantitative– either for collecting or analysing data.

According to Creswell (ibid): the quantitative method “*is a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship between among variables. These variables, in turn, can*

be measured typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures". In other words, it involves data collection procedures that provide numerical data analysed by statistical methods. In this respect, Dawson, C. (2007:16) states that *"quantitative research generates statistics through the use of large-scale survey, using methods such as questionnaire or structured interviews"*. Unlike the quantitative research, the qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting and involves data collection procedures that result in non-numerical data and analysed by non- statistical methods. Deniz and Lincoln (2005:3) hold that *"qualitative researchers studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in term of the meaning people bring to them"*. That is to say, qualitative methodology is concerned with the interpretation and explanation of data. Moreover, it is based on tools such as interview used to investigate the attitude, behaviour, and experience of the participants (ibid: 15).

To make our work more understandable, clear and obvious, we have selected both quantitative and qualitative methods, in this context, Angouri (2010:46) asserts that quantitative and qualitative methods *"arguably contribute to a better understanding of the various phenomena under investigation"*.

1-2/ Setting and Sample Population of Investigation

To carry out this investigation, a case study approach has been selected. According to Yin (2009:2) *"The case study method allows investigator to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events"*. In short, it entails the setting and the participants that provide information which are very important for the validity of the study. The Department of English at MMUTO during the year of study 2017/2018 is regarded as the real context of our research, and the target population under investigation is second year students and their teachers. We distribute our questionnaire to 100 students who are randomly selected from the whole population of 2nd year. Biggam (2008:88) states that *"random sampling is where you*

select, entirely at random, a sample of population". In addition to the questionnaire administered to 2nd year students, eight writing teachers have participated in our interview from the same department to obtain more valid and reliable information.

1-3/ Data Collection Tools

In order to answer the research questions and check the hypotheses, we have relied on two main data collection techniques that are the questionnaire and the interview. The questionnaire is administered to second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO, while the interview is conducted with their writing teachers.

1-3-1/Students' Questionnaire

Questionnaire is one of the instruments that we have used in collecting the findings. According to the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2010:478) "*a questionnaire is a set of questions on a topic or group of topics designed to be answered by a respondent*". In clearer words, a questionnaire is a tool that mainly consists of a list of items or questions used by researchers in order to gather information related to a particular issue. It allows collecting different types of data such as: factual, attitudinal, and behavioural (Dornyei, 2003). Besides, it is an instrument which provides a considerable amount of information in a short period of time.

Our questionnaire is a semi-structured one that is submitted to one hundred (100) second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO. However, only sixty questionnaires were handed back. The questionnaire comprises fifteen questions that are divided into two types: close-ended and open-ended questions. In this regard, Brown (2001:6, cited in Dornyei, 2003:6) defines questionnaire as "*any written tool that contains a series of questions and statement which the respondents answer either by using their own words or*

choosing answers from those they are provided with". In the former type the participants are asked to select the response they think appropriate from the propositions, whereas in the open-ended questions, respondents are given the opportunity to answer the questions freely by sharing their ideas and opinions in relation to the topic of research. Thereby, the questions are organized into three sections namely:

1. Students' Opinion about Formative Assessment and the Writing Skill: attempts to identify the students' view about formative assessment and the writing skill.

2. Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment to Enhance the Writing Skill: tends to collect information about the students' awareness of the extent to which formative assessment is implemented.

3. The Effects of Formative Assessment on the Students' Writing Achievements: sheds light on the impact of formative assessment on the students' writing achievements.

1-3-1-1/ Piloting the Students' Questionnaire

In the current survey, a pilot study has been conducted to pre-test our questionnaire through distributed copies for small groups of 2nd year students that aims to check any particular ambiguity. In this regard, Brace (2004:163) states that "*it is always advisable to pilot the questionnaire before the survey goes live*". Thus, the piloting phase provides us with opportunity to verify the students' understanding of the concepts used in the questionnaire and the clarity of the questions in order to make changes where necessary as to guarantee the validity of the questionnaire. For example, after piloting the questionnaire many open-ended questions have been omitted because students' answers have not been appropriate to our objectives.

1-3-2/Teachers' Interview

As a means to obtain more authentic data, we have conducted a semi-structured interview as another research instrument. It is described by Adhabi and Anozie (2017:88) as “*a form of consultation where the researcher seeks to know of an issue*”. In fact, the purpose is to gain in-depth information about the topic to complement that of the questionnaire, in this concern, Richard (2001:61) asserts that “*Interviews allow for a more in depth exploration of issues than is possible with a questionnaire, though they take longer to administer and are only feasible for smaller groups*”. More precisely, this interview comprises nine questions which have been addressed to eight (8) second year writing teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO, two of them have helped us conduct a piloting interview so as to verify the accuracy and clarity of the questions so we can make changes or modifications as needed. Through this interview, we seek to investigate the teachers' perspective regarding the implementation of formative assessment and their experience with its effects on the students' writing performance.

2/Procedures of Data Analysis

Once the findings are collected, the next procedure to come is entitled data analysis. This step involves converting the collected data into useful information to be used to achieve the objective of the present research. Since the outcomes are both quantitative and qualitative, the analysis of the findings is based on two basic techniques that are namely: statistical and qualitative content analysis.

2-1/Statistical Analysis

Concerning the analysis of the data collected through the close-ended questions of the

questionnaire we have relied on the use of **Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21**. It is a computer program (SPSS) which is extensively used in social sciences, and which allows easy description of the statistical analysis and presentation of numerical data (Landau and Everitt, 2004). It is one of the most sophisticated software packages that enable the manipulation and the treatment of the statistical facts more smoothly and rapidly. The outcomes are presented in tables and figures.

2-2/Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a technique that is used to interpret, describe and analyze the qualitative data obtained through the open-ended questions of both the questionnaire and the interview. It is defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1278) as “*a research method for the subjective interpretation process of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns*”. That is to say, QCA is a method by which texts are analyzed and interpreted critically. Additionally, Hsieh and Shannon state that the major focus of this technique is to “*to provide the knowledge and the understanding of the phenomenon under study*” (ibid). In other words, it is helpful for a deeper comprehension of the subject matter.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research design of the present investigation which describes the way data are collected and analyzed. From the outset, the research methods, setting and sample of population are presented. Moreover, data collection instruments have been outlined starting by the questionnaire which has been administered to the second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO. Indeed, an interview has been conducted

with English writing teachers at the same department. Concerning the data analysis techniques used in this work, the statistical analysis and qualitative content analysis have been selected.

Presentation of the Findings

Introduction

This chapter deals with the presentation of the findings that are obtained through the questionnaire addressed to second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO, and the interview conducted with their teachers of written expression at the same department. This chapter comprises two main sections. The first section is concerned with the presentation of the results gathered through the questionnaire which are shown in figures and tables, and displayed in percentages. The second section presents the outcomes gained from the interview.

1-Results of the Students' Questionnaire

1-1/Section One: Students' Opinion towards Formative Assessment and the Writing Skill

Question One: How would you like to be assessed?

	Formatively	Summatively	Total
Number	46	14	60
Percentage	77%	23%	100%

Table (01): Students' Opinion about the Two Main Types of Assessment.

We can notice from this table that the majority of the students (77%) opted for the first proposition, that is to say; they would like to be assessed formatively, whereas (23%) prefer to be assessed summatively.

Question Two: To which extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “formative assessment highly helps students to go forward in their studies”.

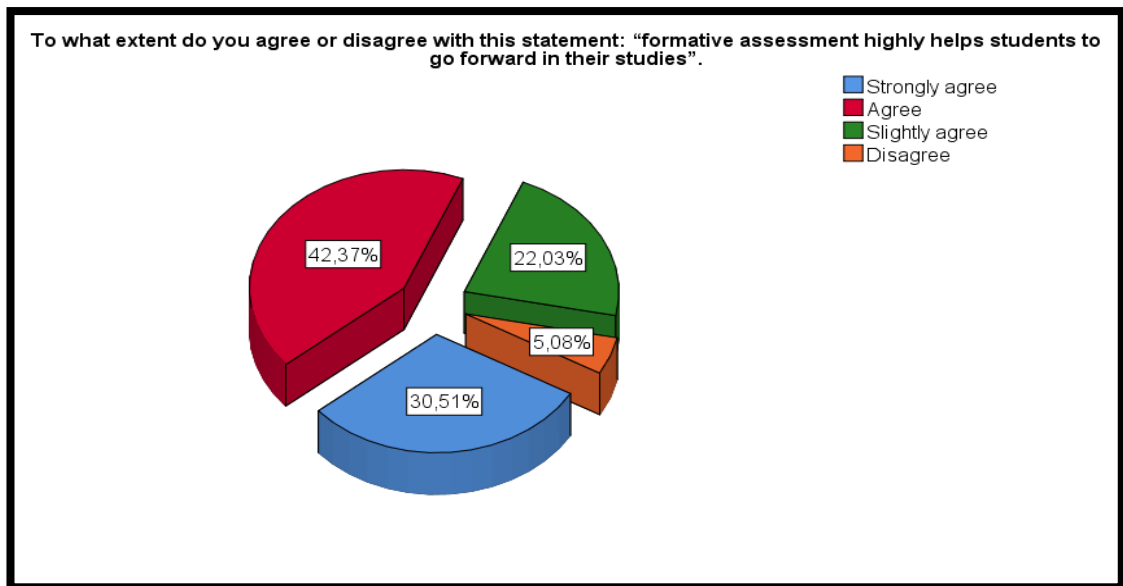


Figure (01): The Students’ View about the Extent to Which Formative Assessment Helps Them to Go Forward in Their Studies.

The results in figure (01) clearly demonstrate that (42.37%) of the students agree with the view that formative assessment highly helps them to go forward in their studies. In addition, about (30.51%) of them strongly agree with that view. On the other hand, (22.03%) who slightly agree, whereas few numbers (5.08%) have expressed that they disagree.

Question Three: How do you find the module of “written expression”?

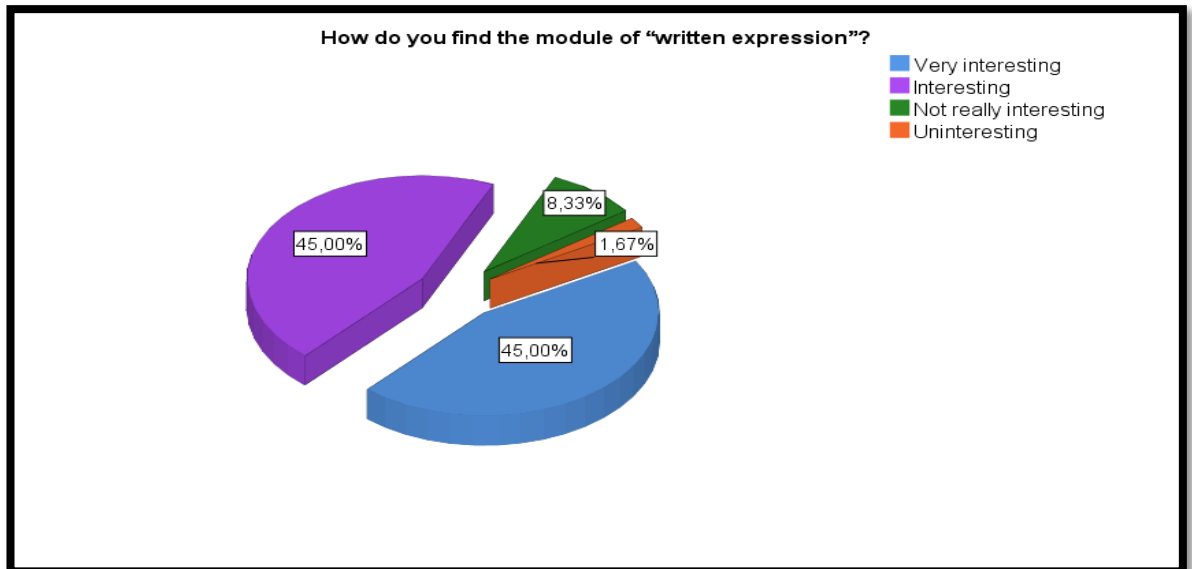


Figure (2): The Students' Opinion about the Module of Written Expression.

The outcomes show clearly that nearly the half (45%) of second year students find the module of written expression very interesting or interesting, while (8.33%) find it not really interesting and only (1.67) who maintain that it is uninteresting.

Question Four: How difficult is learning the writing skill?

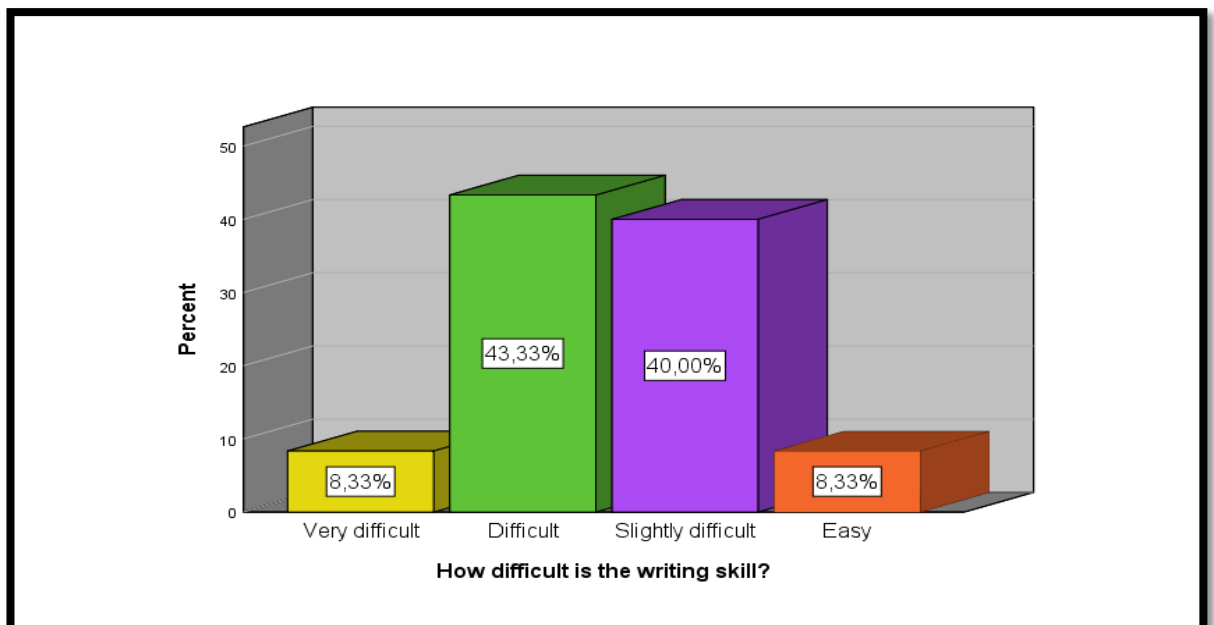


Figure (03): The Students' View about Learning the Writing Skill.

We can depict from this figure that a great number of students 26(43.33%) think that learning the writing skill is difficult, and 24(40%) respond that it is slightly difficult, whereas few number 5(8.33%) who think that it is difficult or easy.

Section Two: Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment to Enhance the Writing Skill.

Question Five: How often do teachers make you aware about what you are going to learn and why you should learn it (the learning objectives)?

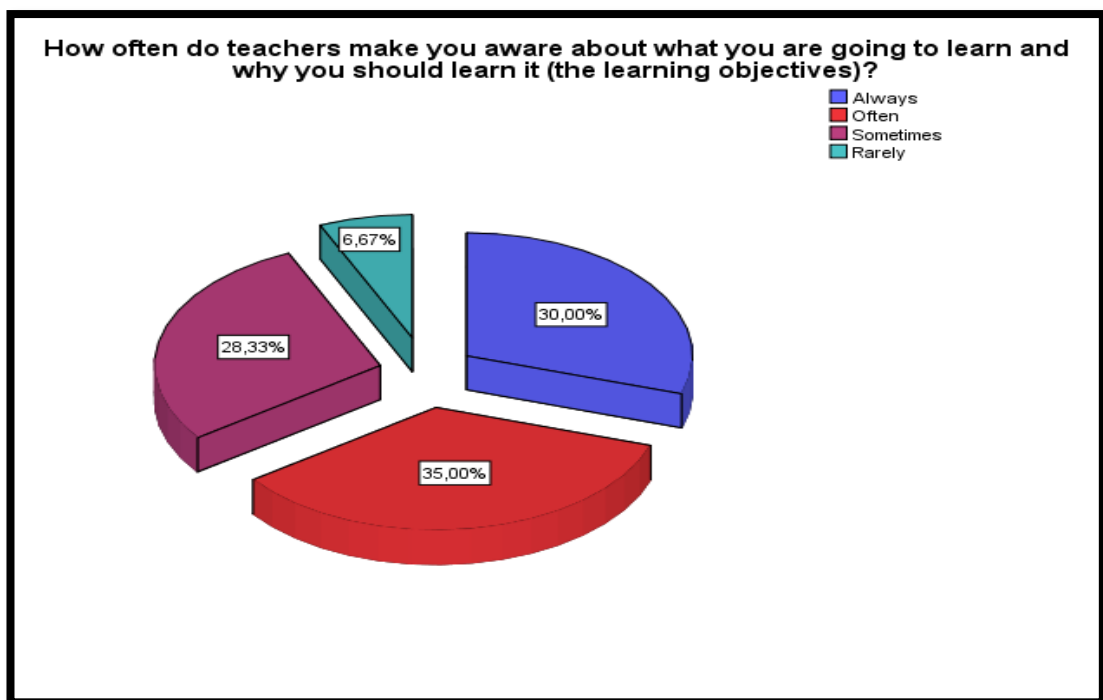


Figure (04): Students' Perception about the Implementation of the Learning Objectives.

The results in figure (04) concretely reveal that the greatest percentage of second year students (35%) report that their teachers often make them aware of the learning objectives.

Question Six: 6. Do your teachers communicate the criteria for success to inform you about how good or bad work is being like?

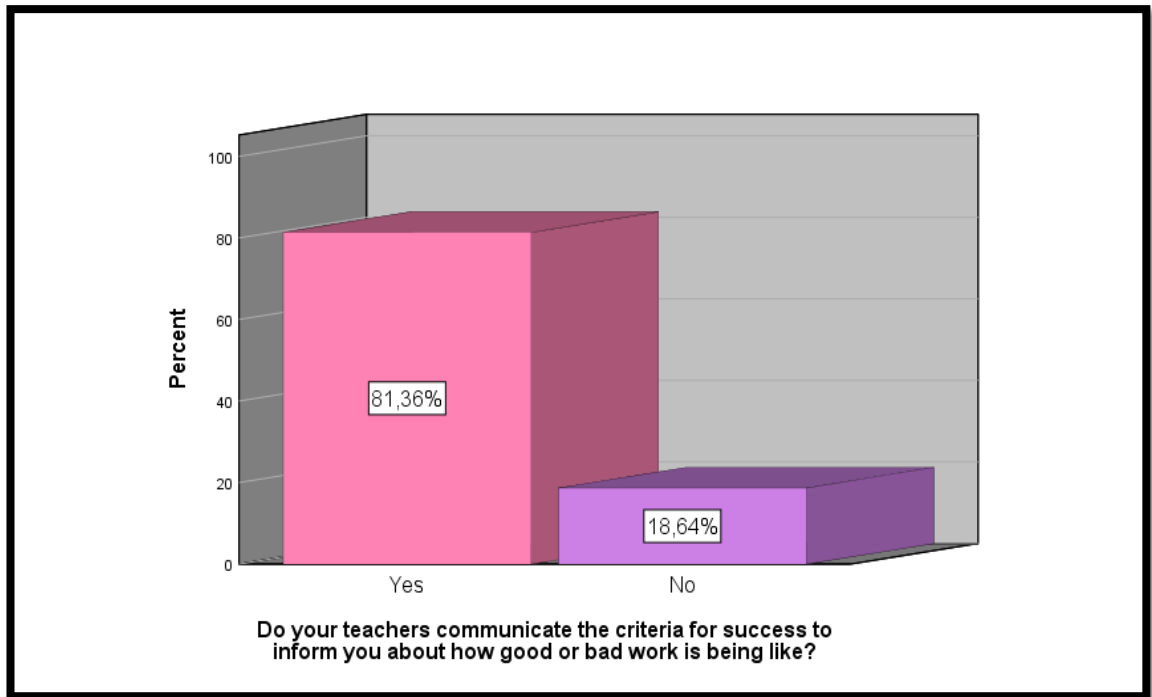


Figure (5): Teachers’ Use of Criteria for Success.

As it is indicated in the figure above, a large proportion of the second year students 48(81.36%) reply that their teachers do communicate the success criteria with them, whereas only 11(18.64%) students have chosen the second answer “No”.

Question Seven: To what extent are you involved in classroom discussions and activities to foster your writing abilities?

	High extent	Intermediate extent	Low extent	Total
Number	51	7	2	60
Percentage	87%	10%	3%	100%

Table (02): Students’ Involvement in Classroom Discussions and Activities.

The results in table (02) display that the majority of the students 51(87%) report that they are involved in classroom discussions and activities to a high extent and (10%) to an intermediate extent, however just (3%) who maintain that they are involved to a low extent.

Question Eight: How often do you receive feedback from your teacher to inform you about your strengths and what needs improvement in writing?

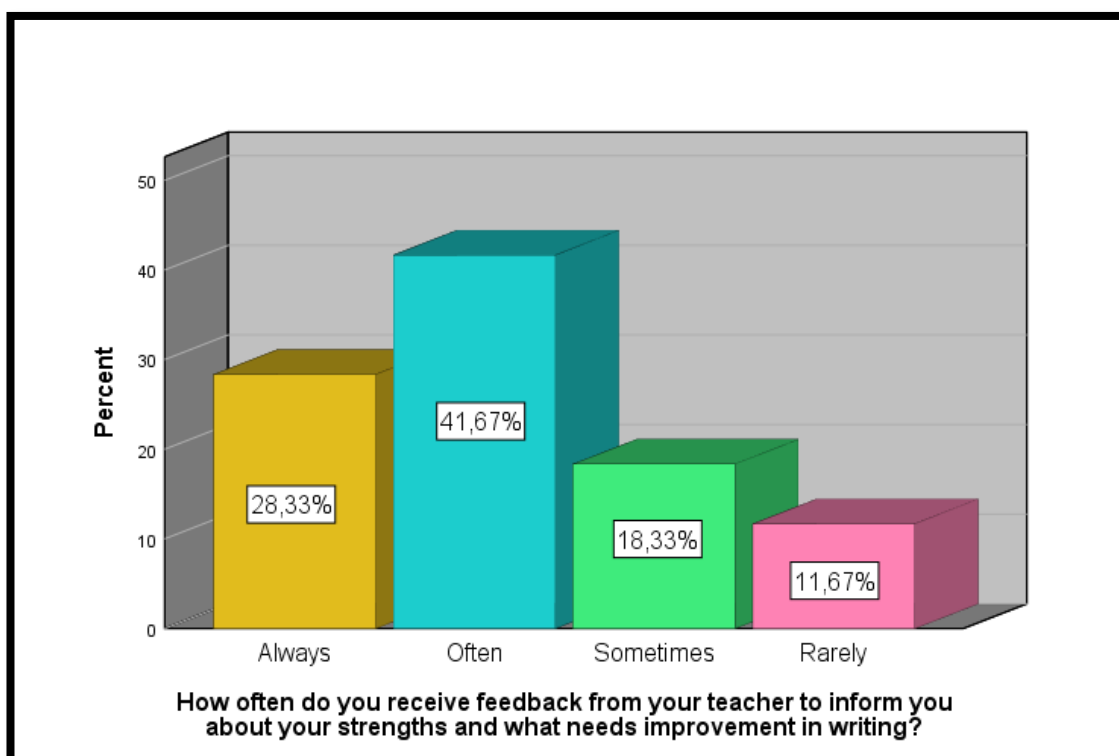


Figure (6): Teachers' Use of Feedback to Improve the Writing Skill.

The results in the figure clearly reveal that 27(41.67%) of the students reply that they often receive feedback from their teacher about their strengths and weaknesses in writing. Moreover, 17(28.33%) students answer that they always receive feedback, while 11(18.33%) choose the third proposition "Sometimes", and the number of students who reply "Rarely" is 7(11.67%).

Question Nine: Do you receive criteria from your teacher to assess your own writing composition (self-assessment)?

	Yes	No	Total
Number	46	14	60
Percentage	77%	23%	100%

Table (3): Students' Involvement in Self-Assessment.

It seems from the results of table (3) that high number of students 46(77%) declare that they do receive criteria from their teacher to assess their own writing composition, however, 14(23%) answer that they do not.

Question Ten: Does your teacher involve you in peer-assessment to correct each others' piece of writing?

	Yes	No	Total
Number	43	17	60
Percentage	72%	28%	100%

Table (4): Students' Involvement in Peer-Assessment.

This table indicates that most of the students (72%) are involved in peer-assessment while (28%) report that they are not involved.

Section Three: The Effects of Formative Assessment on the Students' Writing Achievements

Question Eleven: By knowing the learning objectives and the success criteria you are likely to get actively involved in the writing session.

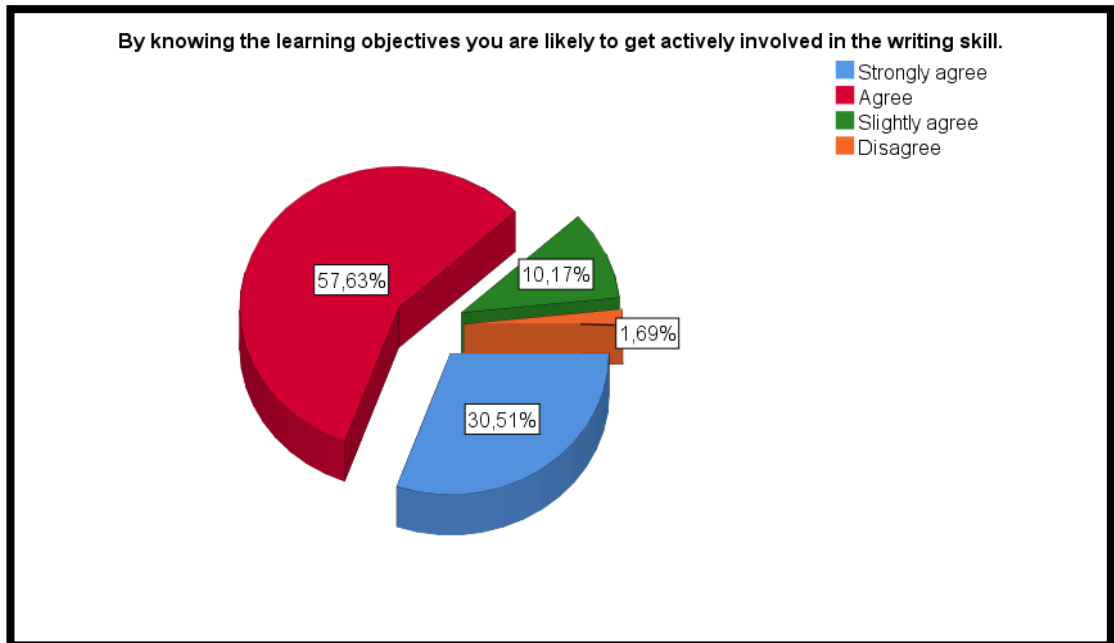


Figure (7): The Students' Perception of the Impact of the Learning Objectives and the success criteria on their writing Performance

The results obtained from this question reflect that most of the second year students (57.63%) agree that knowing the learning objectives and criteria for success have a significant impact on their involvement in the writing session.

Question Twelve: Classroom discussions and activities of writing help you improve your writing performance.

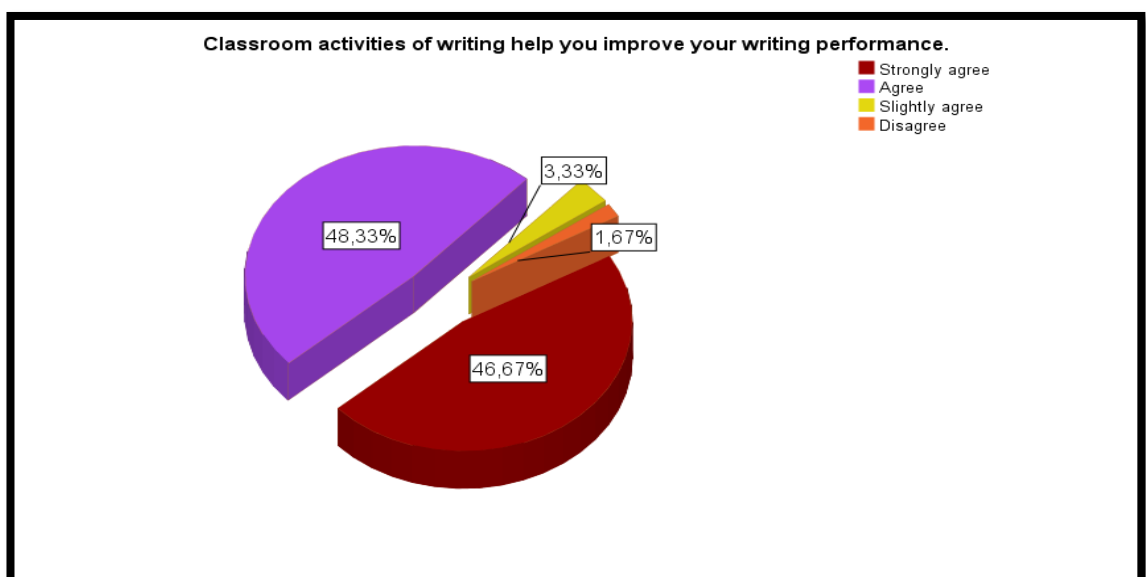


Figure (8): The Effect of Classroom Activities in Developing Students' Writing Ability.

The diagram highlights the impact of classroom activities on students' writing ability. The results show that (48.33%) of second year students agree that classroom activities help them to produce more effective writing composition, in addition to (46.67%) who strongly agree. While the rest of the sample population's answers are between (3.33%) who slightly agree and (1.67%) who disagree.

Question Thirteen: How important is teacher's formative feedback in developing your writing?

A-Very important B-Important C- Not really important D-Unimportant

	A	B	C	D	Total
Number	30	26	4	0	60
Percentage	50%	43%	7%	0%	100%

Table (5): The Importance of Teachers' Formative Feedback in Writing Improvement.

As the table shows, half of the total number of the students (50%) claim that their teachers' feedback is very important for making advancement in the writing skill. As for the rest of the participants, (43%) view teachers' feedback as an important component of the development of their competencies. Finally, few numbers of the students (7%) state that teachers' feedback is not really important. No one stated that teachers' feedback is unimportant.

Question Fourteen: Does your teacher's formative feedback with regard to the writing-based process stages (brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing) help you to improve your writing skill?

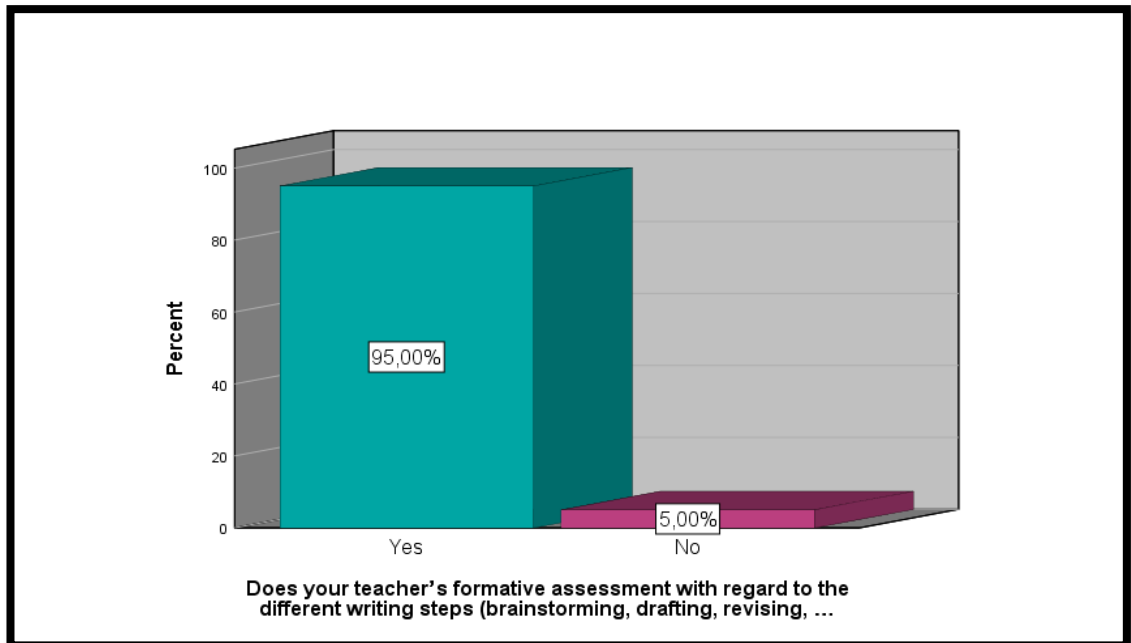


Figure (9): The Impact of Formative Feedback in Relation to Writing-Based Process on Students' Written Composition.

The results displayed in this figure show that the majority of second year students (95%) affirm that teachers' formative feedback with regard to the process-approach to writing helps them improve their written composition.

Question Fifteen: To which extent peer and self-assessment assist you to overcome your writing difficulties?

	High extent	Intermediate extent	Low extent	Total
Number	31	24	5	60
Percentage	52%	40%	8%	100%

Table (6): The Role of Peer and Self-Assessment in Helping Students Overcome their Difficulties in writing.

An analysis of the table above reveals that large amount of second year students (52%) reply that peer and self-assessment help them to get over their writing difficulties to a high extent. About (40%) of the students indicate that making judgment on their own or mates'

work is helpful to an intermediate extent, whereas (8%) of the respondents have opted for the last proposition “low extent”.

2. Results of Teachers’ Interview

Question One and Two: How long have you been teaching English language and the Writing module at university?

From the obtained results, we have noticed that most of the informants have been teaching English over 7 years and the most experienced teachers have been teaching for 21 years. Indeed, they have been working from 1 to 11 years as writing English teachers at university. This leads to say that all teachers have different experience in the field of ELT.

Question Three: What kinds of assessment do you frequently use to evaluate students’ writing ability? We mean the different types such as, formative, summative or other types of assessment. Would you justify your answer please?

Teachers have different opinions about this question, the majority of them affirm that most of the time they rely on formative assessment as a method of evaluation mainly the strategy of portfolio. They argue that it is helpful to them in the sense that they would opt for much needed remedial sessions, and beneficial to students in terms of doing more practice in writing. The rest few teachers who use other types of assessment justify their answer by saying that it depends on the situation.

Question Four: How do you perceive the implementation of formative assessment in the teaching learning process for the enhancement of students’ writing abilities?

All the sample respondents view the implementation of formative assessment very important. They state that the use of this process during the course allows them to check the students’ understanding of the learning objectives and permits to identify their weaknesses

and drawbacks. According to teachers, this helps them adapt or readapt the content of teaching while learning is still occurring. Besides, they state that formative assessment helps students to enhance their writing performance.

Question Five: Do you clarify the learning objectives and success criteria for students in the writing skill? If yes, what impact might this practice have on the students' involvement in the writing session?

When analyzing the respondents' answers, all the teachers answer this question positively using the term “*yes, each time*”, “*of course*” or “*yes, certainly*”. In addition, they assert that students should know and clearly understand the learning objectives of each lesson in order to be more involved. The rest of teachers on the other hand, focus on clarifying the learning targets to their students so that they could use what they have learnt in their real life situation. Concerning the success criteria, we find that all of the informants provide positive answer. Almost all teachers claim that to be easily and clearly understood, success criteria are provided in the form of sample writing essay. Whereas, another teacher answers by saying: “*each time I focus on the criteria for success mainly language mistakes, lengths of sentences, indentation, coherence, and organization of ideas*”.

Question Six: How do the classroom discussions and activities inform you about your students' progress in writing?

Teachers have provided different answers to this question. The most common is that classroom activities and discussion help them to know the extent to what the students have grasped what they are learning. In fact, it is considered as feedback for teachers to check the effectiveness of their teaching and also to recognize whether their students have built a new knowledge from the lesson. Others claim that such practice is helpful in evaluating the students' understanding and in identifying their writing strengths and weaknesses.

Question Seven: Do you provide students with feedback to make them aware of their weaknesses and what needs improvement in writing?

All teachers have responded to this question with “yes” saying that they provide feedback to their students “*all the time*” or “*each time*”. Teachers advance that they provide feedback on the students’ progress through the use of portfolio. According to them this strategy makes it possible to know if the students’ writing ability is improved or not. For example, if the student write a good essay he/she will be congratulated however, if there are some drawbacks in his/her writing, the teacher will give him/her some remarks or comments in order to remedy these errors.

Question Eight: Does your feedback affect positively the students’ writing performance?

The whole respondents have answered by “yes”. The teachers explain that feedback affects positively the students’ writing performance when they take seriously their teachers’ comments and remarks, that is; students should be cautious of their teachers’ feedback regarding their failures or where they are improving as to close the gap between the current and the intended performance. Some teachers assert that feedback without grades or marks has a more positive impact. They add that positive feedback has a large effect on the students’ involvement and motivation.

Question Nine: Do you give students the opportunity to correct their and each other’s work? If yes, to what extent does this enhance the students’ writing ability?

Most teachers have responded to this question positively using utterances such as “yes” or “*it is a very good technique*”. They claim that peer and self-assessment enhance the students’ writing skill to a high extent because when the students are given criteria to assess their own or each others’ written composition they are more likely to practise what they have learnt in comfortable atmosphere which makes them more confident and motivated.

Furthermore, according to teachers, feedback provided by peers tends to be more acceptable to students than that of their teachers. However, other teachers have affirmed that they frequently rely on peer rather than self-assessment because their students feel more motivated toward this type of evaluation.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results gained by the two research tools that are the questionnaire and the interview. The outcomes gathered through the questionnaire have been presented in tables and figures while the findings of the interview have taken the form of paragraphs. From the obtained findings, we have deduced that the English writing teachers in the Department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou emphasize the implementation of formative assessment. Besides, all the participants are aware of its importance on the students' writing improvement.

Discussion of the Findings

Introduction

The last chapter in this research is devoted to discuss the findings gained through the two research instruments, the questionnaire administered to second year students in the Department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou and the semi structured interview conducted with their writing teachers in the same department. These results are in fact, discussed and interpreted with respect to the framework introduced by Wiliam et al. (2005) and the presented literature in chapter one as to answer the research questions and confirm or refute the hypotheses set in the general introduction. This chapter comprises three sections that are categorized according to the research questions, hypotheses and objectives.

1/Students' and Teachers' Opinions towards Formative Assessment and the Writing Skill

When dealing with students' opinion about the two main types of assessment, we deduce that the majority of second year students (77%) would like to be assessed during the course (i.e. formatively) rather than at the end of the unit or the semester (i.e. summatively) (see table 1). They justify their answers by saying that continuous evaluation allows them getting feedback about their mistakes and misunderstanding while the learning is still occurring, hence, this gives them the chance to do remedial learning. This view reflects clearly the effectiveness of FA in fostering the students' learning performance as it is proved by Frey and Fisher (2013:66) who claim that *“when feedback focuses on a summative task, such as an essay or research paper, it is not likely to change students' performance because there is no opportunity for students to redo, or re-think, the work”*. It means that, it is useless

to provide feedback or summative grade on the students' work after the session is getting over, this does not cause improvement, instead, they are going to see the grade and focus on the upcoming topic (Frey and Fisher, 2013).

In the same context, regarding the teachers' answers about the kind of assessment they frequently use to evaluate their students' writing performance, the majority respond that they regularly rely on assessment for learning. However, they do not deny the use of other types of assessment such as summative assessment. They explain that it depends on the situation. This outcome denotes clearly the teachers' awareness about the use of formative assessment. This finding is in conformity with Wiliam et al. (2005:1) assertion that "*there is intuitive appeal in using assessment to support instruction: assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning*".

Regarding the students' view about the extent to which formative assessment helps them to go forward in their studies, the larger number of the respondents' answers are between agree (42.37%) and strongly agree (30.51%). This means that students in the Department of English at MMUTO recognize the fundamental role formative assessment plays in the teaching and learning processes. This result supports the view of Black and Wiliam (1998:12) that "*formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work*". Indeed, this viewpoint is shared by teachers who claim that formative assessment is very important to teaching and learning (see chapter 3).

The results of question three dealing with students' opinion about the module of "written expression" demonstrate that the students' views are equally divided between "interesting" and "very interesting" (45%). This denotes that the majority of second year students are aware of the importance of the writing skill for the acquisition of English as a foreign or second language. In the same context, the results displayed in figure (3) concerning

the students' view about learning the writing skill show that the greatest number of second year students' responses are between difficult and slightly difficult. These findings confirm Nik et al. (2010) view that writing skill is a demanding and difficult task for ESL learners.

2/The Implementation of Formative Assessment Strategies in the Writing Skill

As regards the students' responses about teachers' implementation of the learning objectives and criteria for success, the results reveal that nearly most of the students assert that their teachers do clarify the learning targets and provide them with success criteria (see figure 4 and figure 5).

All these results are sustained by teachers' answers in the interview. Concerning the learning targets, one of the respondents' interviewees claim that *"I never start new writing session without telling my students what they are expected to do by the end"*. As for success criteria, teachers affirm that they supply students with high quality writing samples to be followed. Based on these outcomes, we deduce that teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO are aware of the significance of these two main components of formative assessment. These findings support Wiliam et al. (2005) view who state that to achieve the intended performance, teachers should develop appropriate ways that make learning intention and success criteria more visible to learners.

As we progress in our analysis of the findings of this part, we conclude from the outcomes got through Q7 (see table 2) that English writing teachers highly engage their students in classroom discussions and activities in order to get feedback about the effectiveness of their teaching and the extent to which students are meeting the learning goals. These outcomes are in conformity with Reed (2012:17) who views that *"research on instructional techniques in all core content areas has found that explicitly linking classroom*

activities to learning goals helps students understand the purpose of the instruction and feel motivated to engage with the ideas”.

All these results give evidence to the data obtained from Q8 about teachers’ use of feedback in teaching the writing skill show that a high number of the students (41. 67%) affirm that they receive feedback about their strengths and weaknesses in writing (see figure 6). This result is supported by teachers who state that it is important to supply students with feedback which makes them conscious of their performance, as argued by Norlin (2014) who points that feedback should be integrated to classroom work in view of informing students of the reasons they are making mistakes in their writing and how to rectify them. From these perspectives it is revealed that the use of feedback is emphasized by writing teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO as a formative assessment strategy. This finding goes hand in hand with Abdulahi et al. (2017:32) who claim that *“feedback is recognized as one of the driving forces in writing development and as essential pedagogical tool in writing instruction”.*

Second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO are highly involved in self and peer-assessment. The examination of table (3) and table (4) indicates that the majority of the participants affirm that their teachers give them the chance to be engaged in autonomous learning. That is to say, students are given the opportunity to take part of their own learning by evaluating their or each others’ piece of writing in relation to given criteria. In the same context, teachers have reinforced the students’ assertions using some expressions such as *“it is a very good technique”.* These outcomes come as support evidence to Lee (2006:61) point of view that *“peer assessment and self-assessment are important forms of assessment that engage pupils in talking about their learning and therefore help them to become self-critical and independent”.*

In the light of what has been said in the section above, it is inferred that formative assessment strategies are put into practice in the English writing classes at MMUTO. Hence, these answer the first research question stated in the General Introduction which is *“To what extent do teachers in the department of English at MMUTO use formative assessment to evaluate the students’ writing skill?”* and validate the first hypothesis which posits that *“Teachers in the department of English at MMUTO highly use formative assessment to evaluate the students’ writing skill”*.

3/The Impact of Formative Assessment Strategies on the Students’ Writing Attainments

3-1/Sharing Learning Targets and Success Criteria

As displayed in figure (7), 57.63% of second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO agree and 30.51% strongly agree that understanding the learning objectives and criteria for success makes them actively involved in the writing session. This result comes as a back up to teachers’ affirmation that it is important to clarify and discuss what the students are expected to learn from the lesson and ensure that they highly comprehend the criteria of high quality work. In other words, success criteria describe through specific terms the aspects of an effective attainment of the learning goals. By way of illustration, to achieve the learning intention of writing a good and successful narrative essay the students should follow this criteria : starts the essay with an opening paragraph, uses strong past tense verbs, he is coherent in organizing the events, the readers enjoy the story... etc.

More precisely, this technique encourages them to acquire autonomy as they could assess their own writing. From this perspective, we conclude that this technique helps students to build their own learning, integrate visible knowledge and makes them active learners since they are informed about where they are going in their learning.

The teachers exemplify as well that knowing the purpose of mastering each type of essay is very critical to students so as they can use it in real life situations. They add that they find it very useful to distribute a model of strong written composition to make the criteria more comprehensible to students. That is, the most powerful way by which the criteria for success get more visible to learners and give them clear understanding about the quality of a good composition is providing a sample essay to be imitated. This outcome is confirmed by Cauley and McMillan (2010:3) assertion that *“examples are powerful because they enable students to more fully understand where they are going and why the teacher provides feedback. Furthermore, providing clear expectations enables students to set realistic, attainable goals”*. Based on these results, we can say that the establishment of the learning objectives and the success criteria to writing session helps students getting involved in their study and makes them responsible of their own learning too.

3-2/Classroom Discussion and Activities

Another formative assessment strategy which assists teachers monitor the students' progress and thus helping them forward their writing production is classroom discussion and activities. In fact, the findings gained through the interview demonstrate that teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO monitor the students' learning by engaging them in classroom challenges. Hence, according to them, on the one hand, this gives students the opportunity to discover their mistakes and get feedback aligned with their deficiencies, on the other hand, teachers can assess the students' understanding through diverse types of questions while learning is still taking place.

In the context of the composition skill, the writing level varies from one student to another. Therefore, it is deduced that classroom questions and activities of writing make it easier for teachers to know the students' errors and to cope with each individual's needs and

misconceptions in their essays. Thus, it provides possibility for teachers to plan for re-teaching in the real time or move on if the learning is going on the right track. As it is shown in figure (9), the highest percentages of students ascertain the idea that classroom activities affect positively on their writing abilities. This result is in accordance with Wiliam et al. (2005) affirmation that when questioning takes the principal part of the teaching process, the outcomes are obviously improved since teachers catch-up the students' need in real time situation.

3-3/Formative Feedback and Writing Improvement

The examination of table (5) leads us to say that the greatest number of second year students believe in the fundamental role of feedback in fostering their writing abilities. This positive perspective is confirmed by the teachers' answers in the interview in which they clarify that it is a vital element that cannot be dissociated from language teaching and learning as it impacts positively on the students' attainments and motivation. For example, teachers' comments on the students' errors that cause improvement in their written composition are being like *"that's okay, we're just starting this topic. Try to think of it this way. You'll get it as we work with it more"* or *"You have included quite a few examples in your paper. Can you think of any more unusual examples?"* (Cauley and McMillan, 2010:4). In fact, these positive remarks which do not grade students allow them to think and adjust more carefully where they are struggling in their writing in a more positive, attractive and motivated way. This, has been pointed out by Wiliam et al. (2005) in their research where they conclude that when teachers' comments are joined to grades, students focus mainly on grades and neglect the comments. In the same sense, Cauley and McMillan (2010:5) state that *"formative assessment and, in particular, feedback and instructional correctives, can be a powerful technique to support student motivation and achievement"*.

Furthermore, the outcomes obtained throughout this study (see chapter 3) reveal that writing teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO rely on the use of portfolio as a means to get feedback that informs them about the students' progress in writing. For instance, they have said *"the feedback I have in writing is the portfolio, the more their portfolio is full of essays the more I know that they have been productive"* and *"I have a portfolio, in this portfolio, for each kind of essay they have two essays corrected...and I give them each time feedback"*. The use of this technique within the formative assessment approach gives students the opportunity to improve their abilities in writing and to obtain feedback each time they write an essay. This guides us to rely on the explanation provided by the OECD (2005:108) which points that *"portfolios will primarily serve as a basis for formative feedback...Through the portfolios students will be able to track their own progress in writing"*. That is to say, portfolio reflects the students' progress, because, each time they are given feedback about their performance in writing they could change the previous knowledge to be replaced by the recent one (ibid).

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that the majority of second year students (see figure 9) state that teachers' formative feedback with regard to writing-based process enhances their writing level. This can be explained by the existence of common principles between formative assessment approach and the process-based approach to writing as argued by Abdulahi (2017:130) that *"the basic principles of feedback in both pedagogies (i.e. in process oriented writing pedagogy and in FA pedagogy) are very similar, and in both cases, it is the formative feedback that scaffolds learning and accounts for success"*. In other words, process-oriented feedback as in the case of formative feedback carries out for more students' centered role in their learning rather than being passive receivers of knowledge and gives more consideration to co-operative work between teachers and students (Shing and Joe, 1992).

3-4/Self and Peer-Assessment

The majority of writing teachers in the Department of English at MMUTO stress on the effectiveness of self and peer-assessment in making students more motivated and focused in their compositions as well as developing their self autonomy, while some others claim that they frequently rely on peer-assessment rather than self-assessment because the students are more motivated toward this type of assessment. This shows that the implementation of these two formative assessment strategies have many beneficial sides on the students' writing. According to Wiliam et al. (2005:5), "*students' self-assessments are generally accurate, and students say that assessing their own work helped them understand the material in a new way*". That is, when students are involved in assessing their own writing against specific criteria, they are likely to become active agent and develop their confidence since they are taking the responsibility of their own learning. Furthermore, the students' assessment of each others' performance contributes to developing their writing achievements.

To strengthen the above mentioned points, we rely on Wiliam et al. (2005) affirmation that successful instruction is based upon accurate use of peer-assessment. On the one hand, collaborative work creates an interactional environment through discussion and exchange of ideas that emphasize autonomy and feedback which would be used to reflect the students' drawbacks and failures resulting in improved outputs. On the other hand, feedback provided by students having the same status tends to be easier and more acceptable for students because it is introduced in simpler language than that of their teachers. This result goes hand in hand with Wiliam et al. (2005:5) view that "*students often communicate more effectively with one another than the teacher does, and the recipients of the feedback tend to be more engaged when the feedback comes from a peer*".

Besides, the analysis of the last table in our study (see chapter 3) reveals that the large number of students confirm that making judgments on their own or each other's written productions reinforce their improvement in writing.

All these findings answer the second research question which is *“Does formative assessment enhance the students' writing performance?”* and confirm the third hypothesis which states that *“Formative assessment enhances the students' writing performance”*.

Conclusion

The current chapter discusses the outcomes gained through the two research tools that are the questionnaire and the interview. It provides logical answers to the research questions and confirms the first and the third hypothesis stated in the General Introduction. Based on the results obtained, we deduce that the use of formative assessment is highly emphasized in the Department of English at MMUTO. As far as the impact of FA on the writing skill is concerned, the results of the questionnaire and the interview indicate that assessment for learning strategies enhance the students' writing proficiency.

General Conclusion

The recent decades have witnessed the emergence of formative assessment approach as a fundamental element that frames instruction. Consequently, a plenty of research works have been conducted as a means to explore its effects and importance mainly in the field of language teaching and learning, as well as the different scholars' perspectives regarding this issue. Hence, this latter has served as basis and insights that strengthen the current investigation. The central goal of the present study is to investigate the implementation of formative assessment in the department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou and the extent to which it enhances second year students' writing ability.

To successfully achieve the aims of this investigation, we relied on the theory provided by Wiliam et al. (2005) which guided us and gave us support evidence about the major details related to formative assessment. Indeed, to further our study we adopted the mixed approach which entails the quantitative and the qualitative methods for data collection and data analysis. The quantitative data are gained through the questionnaire administered to one hundred second year students in the Department of English at MMUTO, while the qualitative ones are gathered through the semi-structured interview conducted with eight second year writing teachers from the same department. Moreover, SPSS package is used to analyze the data statistically and QCA is used for the interpretation of the qualitative findings.

The outcomes displayed throughout this study reveal a great deal about the students' and the teachers' awareness of the importance of formative assessment and the writing skill in teaching and learning EFL. Accordingly, the plurality of the informants in the questionnaire asserted that their teachers highly rely on formative assessment strategies to evaluate their writing progress toward attaining the learning objectives. Besides, via the outcomes of the interview, it is inferred that writing teachers in the department of English at MMUTO

implement formative assessment principles in classroom writing sessions. In short, this reflects explicitly that the implementation of FA achieved large extent in the English department at MMUTO and then confirms our first hypothesis.

It is believed that the writing expertise is a complex and difficult task that might hinders EFL learners from achieving the expected proficiency. However, formative assessment strategies offer students more opportunities to deepen their understanding and thus promoting their writing level. The majority of English language teachers at MMUTO affirmed that the students who are given formative feedback concerning their needs and lacks frequently succeed to overcome their deficiencies in writing and feel more motivated. This can be explained by the fact that teachers are directing the students' writing through constructive feedback that does not grade them. In addition, monitoring the students' learning through classroom discussions and activities is beneficial for teachers in the sense that it enables them to figure out how well or bad the students are progressing toward attaining the expected proficiency in writing. As a result, the students' writing failures would be remedied in the right time. Both teachers and students in the department of English at MMUTO realize the effectiveness of these techniques in increasing the writing level.

Moreover, the students' assessment of their own or each others' piece of writing provides them more possibilities to take responsibly of their own learning. That is, when self and peer-assessment take place in classroom session, the students are getting more active role since they are giving and receiving feedback simultaneously. Based on these results, we can say that the third hypothesis which states that formative assessment enhances the students' writing performance is confirmed.

All in all, the findings of the current investigation have exposed a paramount pedagogical issue which is formative assessment or "assessment for learning" (AFL) and an

enlightenment of its main related concepts, hoping that the implementation of formative assessment would be integrated in all educational settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

- ❖ Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment to Enhance the Students' Reading Comprehension Skill.
- ❖ Investigating the Effect of Formative Assessment on EFL Students' Motivation.

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Appendix 1

Students' Questionnaire

Dear Students,

You are kindly requested to answer the following questionnaire whose aim is to collect information concerning the extent to what formative assessment is implemented in the department of English at MMUTO and its impact on the students' writing achievements. Your answers are very important to the validity of our work.

Please, tick [√] the appropriate answer or make full statement (s) when necessary. Your answers will be kept anonymous. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Section One: Students' Opinion towards Formative Assessment and the Writing Skill

1. How would you like to be assessed?

- a- Summatively (evaluation at the end of the unit)
- b- Formatively (evaluation during the unit or the semester)

Justify your answer, please

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2. To which extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “formative assessment highly helps students to go forward in their studies”.

- a- Strongly agree
- b- Agree
- c- Slightly agree
- d- Disagree
- e- Strongly disagree

3. How do you find the module of “written expression”?

- a- Very interesting
- b- Interesting
-

- c- Not really interesting
- d- Uninteresting

4. How difficult is learning the writing skill?

- a- Very difficult
- b- Difficult
- c- Slightly difficult
- d- Easy

Section Two: Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment to Enhance the Writing Skill

5. How often do teachers make you aware about what you are going to learn and why you should learn it (the learning objectives)?

- a- Always
- b- Often
- c- Sometimes
- d- Rarely

6. Do your teachers communicate the criteria for success to inform you about how good or bad work is being like?

- a- Yes
- b- No

7. Are you involved in classroom discussions and activities to foster your writing abilities?

- a- Yes
- b- No

8. How often do you receive feedback from your teacher to inform you about your strengths and what needs improvement in writing?

- a- Always
- b- Often
- c- Sometimes

d- Rarely

9. Do you receive criteria from your teacher to assess your own writing composition (self-assessment)?

a- Yes

b- No

10. Does your teacher involve you in peer-assessment to correct each others' piece of writing?

a- Yes

b- No

Section Three: The Effects of Formative Assessment on the Students' Writing Achievements

11. By knowing the learning objectives and the success criteria you are likely to get actively involved in the writing skill.

a- Strongly agree

b- Agree

c- Slightly agree

d- Disagree

e- Strongly disagree

12. Classroom discussions and activities of writing help you improve your writing performance.

a- Strongly agree

b- Agree

c- Disagree

d- Strongly disagree

13. How important is teacher's formative feedback in developing your writing?

a- Very important

b- Important

- c- Not really important
- d- Unimportant

14. Does your teacher's formative feedback with regard to writing-based process stages (brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing) help you to improve your writing skill?

- a- Yes
- b- No

15. To which extent peer and self-assessment assist you to overcome your writing difficulties?

- a- High extent
- b- Intermediate extent
- c- Low extent

Thank you for collaboration.

Appendix 2

Teachers' Interview:

The following interview is intended to gather information about teachers' opinion toward the use of formative assessment and its impact on the students' writing performance. We will be very grateful if you could answer the questions below since your answers are very important for the validity of this research work. Thank you in advance for your help and time.

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. How long have you been teaching writing at university?
3. What kind of assessment do you frequently use to evaluate the students' writing ability?

We mean the different types such as, formative assessment, summative assessment or others types. Would you justify your answer please?

4. How do you perceive the implementation of formative assessment in the teaching learning process for the enhancement of students' writing abilities?
5. Do you clarify the learning objectives and success criteria for students in the writing skill? If yes, what impact might this practice has on the students' involvement in the writing session?
6. How do classroom discussions and activities inform you about your students' progress in writing?
7. Do you provide students with feedback to make them aware of their weaknesses and what needs improvement in writing?
8. Does your feedback affect positively the students' writing performance? If yes, would you explain how?

9. Do you give students the opportunity to correct their and each other's work? If yes, to what extent does this enhance the students' writing skill?

Thank you for collaboration!