

Empirical Study of Formative Evaluation in Adult ESL Teaching

Qin Yi

Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities

536 Huolinhe Street, Kerqin District, Tong Liao, Inner Mongolia, China

E-mail: carolineqinyi@126.com

Received: September 30, 2011

Accepted: October 17, 2011

Published: February 1, 2012

doi:10.5539/elt.v5n2p27

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n2p27>

Abstract

Formative Evaluation is a method of evaluating a program while the program activities are forming or happening. Formative evaluation focuses on the *process* during which problems are timely spotted, corrected and adjustments made so that an intended goal can be accomplished. Through a four-month empirical research work with students of Grade 2010 of Continuous Education College of Dalian University of Technology as the subjects, the author in this article compares the teaching process and result of the experimental and the controlled groups, discusses the positive effects that formative evaluation gives to learning ESL by adult students while points out some of the problems that exist in this connection. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the degree of effectiveness of formative evaluation as applied in teaching adult students to learn English. The result of the author's research works reveals that the formative evaluation is effective in teaching adult students of English.

Keywords: Formative evaluation, Adults, ESL, English language teaching

1. Introduction

Nowadays in China, very few teachers are specially trained for teaching adult students on continuous education programs. Teachers who have once been teaching full-time students in colleges or in universities rarely receive any special training before they are moved to teach part time or full time adult students in colleges or universities of continuous education. And due to inadequate teaching staffs, teachers often cover both full time and part time classes of adult students who are of diversified background and knowledge levels and mix. It is not a bad thing to teach classes of different age groups and diversified backgrounds at the same time. The real problem is that most teachers just teach them the same way when they should have been treated differently. Even if some teachers have tried to change their teaching methods when they face different adult students, there are still some problems that worth discussions:

Firstly, teaching materials do not adequately correlate to the motleys of background knowledge and life experiences that most of the part time adult students acquire as they grow up. The fact is that teachers just teach what's in the textbook unit by unit, disregarding whether the texts suit the taste of the students or not. When an adult student with working background in a trade company learns a science article, he may unlikely be interested in it. Yet a passage on the American economy may be more meaningful to him. Thus choosing the right teaching materials will help arouse interest in the students and make possible a good beginning for the class.

Secondly, there often seems a lack of comfortable learning environment for adult students on part time programs. Classes for adult students are more or less the same as those for other college students. Long lecture hours, tedious and rigid class attendance, lack of practicing opportunities as well as frequent interruption by teachers for correcting their mistakes when they do have a chance to speak in class are all factors that make the adult students feel uncomfortable.

Thirdly, there lacks appropriate teaching method with monotony being the common way of teaching the adult classes.

The above situation is the status quo for teaching adult students to learn English on part time basis in China. There is indeed a big room for improvements to be made. Teaching adult students to learn English as a second language in colleges or universities of continuous education is a challenging job for the education sector in China. Due to deficiency and ineffective measures, little progress has been made despite of the teachers' strenuous efforts. How to make English language teaching tailored to the requirements of the society is a topic of great significance. This paper aims at examining the degree of effectiveness of formative evaluation as applied in teaching adult students to

learn English.

2. Current Development of Teaching Adult Students to Learn English in China

2.1 Characteristics of Teaching Adult Students to Learn English in China

2.1.1 Characteristics of Learning Style

Due to the influence of the traditional non-communicative and purely analytical teaching methods that was examination-oriented (such as those specifically designed for dealing with the Grade 3, 4 or 6 English Examinations), Chinese students are usually given excessive trainings on reading and facts reciting. They are better at receiving visual information and hence highly proficient in English vocabulary and grammar but in the meanwhile poor at listening and spoken English. Taught by such traditional methods, students tend to focus on memorizing words, phrases and grammatical rules and text reading, their learning of English is for sheer purpose of passing exams, they just cram their mind for the exams and are interested in nothing but solving the trickiest test questions. Their English learning is hasty, superficial and far from mastery (Liu, 2003:81).

Some scholars find through study that a person's learning style is to a large extent influenced by the culture backdrop against which he or she is brought up (Reid, 1987). Influenced by the traditional Chinese notion that advocates harmony and mutual assistance, students are more used to orthodox and disciplinary mode of learning. Learning English in a circumstance dominated by the mother tongue and with teachers playing the controller and organizer of the class, the students are usually left to play the much neglected roles in class. The "tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand" concept is not yet widely implemented in the classes of Chinese schools. Class teaching in China is still confined by the traditional hierarchy between teachers and students, with teachers being authoritarian in the eyes of the students and the students being dependent on teachers' directions. And as such, the students are accustomed to teacher-centered class and have not been immersed in educational opportunities that are student-centered, collaborative and inter-disciplinary.

2.1.2 Psychological Characteristics

US educationalist for andragogy (adult teaching) Malcolm Knowles introduces the self-concept: As a person matures his self concept moves from one of being "a dependent personality" toward one of being a "self-directed human being". This means that an adult is a matured person who knows what he wants to learn and is purposeful in learning. He is therefore capable of making appropriate plans for learning and is expected to have the ability and strength to assume responsibility and carry out his own plan. Adults are under greater life and work pressures and are unable to afford enough time and energy for learning. Problems confronting adult students weaken their motivation for learning and render their learning less effective (Huang Shusheng, 2004:157).

2.1.3 Cognitive Characteristics

Roger Brow, through comparative study of second language learning by adults and by children, concludes that children are more dependent on linguistic acquisition mechanism that is deemed innate to human beings while adults make more use of the cognitive mechanism that features the ability to find solutions to problems. Adults, as social creatures, are motivated to learn to deal with the numerous obstacles posed by the very necessity for subsistence and personal development, such as finding a job, making a living and supporting a family. Adults learning are therefore practically oriented, with definite and utilitarian purposes. The process for adults' learning is the process for them to recognize, analyze and resolve problems (Brown, 2001).

2.1.4 Characteristics of Knowledge Acquisition

As a person matures, he gradually accumulates a rich pool of life and job experiences that are the resources for furtherance of his development. During an adult's learning process, he will either purposefully or subconsciously draw upon his accumulated experiences to enhance his understanding on the substances he further learns. Thanks to their strong cognitive ability and ability for abstract thinking, adult learners can promptly master grammatical rules and other abstract linguistic concepts by adopting deduction and inference and by using correlative imaginations as have been enriched by their experiences (Lou Jianli, 2005:94).

2.2 Motivations for Chinese Adults to Learn English

Motivations for Chinese adults to learn English can be categorized into the instrumental type and the integrative type (Gardner, 1985). Instrumental motivation means the learner is motivated by certain practical aims such as to pass an exam, to study abroad, to find a job or to be able to read data and materials in English. Integrative motivation is for simple purpose of directly communicating with native speakers. Instrumental motivation plays a determinative role for adults who learn English for very specific purposes such as to pass an exam, to find a job or to deal with job related tasks, or more broadly to keep in pace with a competitive society. It is after all for something

realistic. The instrumental motivation helps rectify the approaches to learning, encourages the learner to face up difficulties and prompts them to quickly and effectively master what they learn. For adults so motivated, pursuit of objects and sense of fulfillment are of key importance in their class activities. Teachers should therefore bear clearly in mind the intended purpose of each of the class, arrange designed class activities closely related to practical life so that the adult students can have a sense of fulfillment each step they take forward, which sense of fulfillment in turn will further heighten their interests, enhance their ability to learn and help them master what they want to learn in the end (Chen Jinzhong, 2004: 292).

3. Empirical Study

3.1 Subjects

The author chose 40 students randomly as the study subjects. With a view of obtaining more reliable results, a detailed study of prospective subjects had been made, taking into consideration of such factors as age, gender, education background and English level already attained. The author used a questionnaire (Questionnaire 1) to collect necessary data which are summarized in the table.

From table 1 we can see that all students from both the experimental and control classes had started learning English from at least six years before, and all had a basic command of English vocabularies and grammatical rules. The two classes would learn the same text book. The experiment was conducted from March to July of 2010 in the experimental class. There were no other clear differences among the 80 students, so the author randomly chose 40 of them as her study subjects. Teaching results of these students in the experimental group would be evaluated and improved by way of formative evaluation. The remaining 40 students would be taught in the normal way. Both classes were taught by the same teacher for the same length of time each week during the experimental term. Subjects of this experiment were the students of Grade 2010, College of Continuous Education of Dalian University of Technology.

3.2 Instruments

Instruments adopted in this experiment were questionnaires, interviews and case studies. Two sets of questionnaires were designed and distributed. They were Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2. Questionnaire 1 was a pre-experimental questionnaire containing the personal details like the major, the scores on the entrance examination and the time the students studied English for the purpose of the needs analysis and background investigation. This questionnaire was designed for needs analysis and background investigation. Questionnaire 2 was used both before and after the experiment. It concerned with the students' attitudes toward English learning and their comments on the new formative way of teaching. The purpose was to evaluate the experiment and to find out what the students had gained as a result of the experiment. During the experiment period, the author also held interviews with the subjects to timely get their feedbacks and track the experiment results. Case studies represented the entire process of the implementation of the theory.

3.3 The Process of Application of Formative Evaluation

3.3.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaires that the author has designed for the research is to find out the students' attitudes towards English learning, and the problems and difficulties they encounter during their study. Before distributing the questionnaires, several points were made clear to the subjects to make sure that they treat the questions seriously:

1. A brief introduction of the thesis was given to the subjects so that they had a clear and preliminary understanding of the questions;
2. The questionnaire had nothing to do with the scores of the subjects' mid-term or final English exams so that they were able to tell their true mind;
3. The questionnaire was made in Chinese, which could make the subjects feel being at ease and confident;
4. Students were required to make only one choice from the multiple possible answers to the questions in the questionnaire.

Questionnaire one was designed with a view of collecting basic information of subjects of both the experiment class and the controlled class to make sure that the two classes were no much different. While questionnaire two is given only to the experimental class both before and after the experiment was implemented. Questionnaire 2 was given to check out the students' previous learning habits, attitudes, and class performance. Questionnaire 2 was meant to reflect changes in students' psychology, attitude, behavior, and in classroom atmosphere as a result of the application of formative evaluation in experimental class.

There are six items in Questionnaire 1 and 10 items in Questionnaire 2. Questionnaire 2 is composed of 4 parts:

1. The first two items were designed for the purpose to find out if any positive changes occurred in terms of the students' learning interests and self-confidence as result of the implementation of formative evaluation.
2. The third item was meant to find out whether the students were satisfied with the teacher's new teaching method of formative evaluation.
3. The fourth item was to check whether the students spent more time to learn English than before. If the answer is yes, it can be concluded that this method does stimulate students to learn.
4. The last five items of questionnaire 2 each had 4 scales for responding to each statement: A= strongly agree, B=agree to some extent, C=I don't know, and D=disagree and the purpose was to get the students' comments on the teaching method of formative evaluation.

The questionnaires were both translated into Chinese, since answering questionnaires was a new experience to most respondents, and the English versions could cause misunderstandings due to the students' different English levels.

All of the 40 students polled carefully answered each of the questions in the questionnaires and all submitted their comments on basis of being well informed. The questionnaires were responded to truthfully and without misunderstanding or bias.

3.3.2 Interviews

At the end of the semester, twenty students, ten male and ten female, in the experimental group were randomly chosen and given the interviews during a period of five days. Four students were interviewed. Questions asked during the interviews were intended to figure out the students' attitudes towards the program based on formative evaluation, what merits if any they thought the new teaching method had, and whether they became more interested and more confident in learning English as they progressed thanks to the flexible and corrective nature embodied in formative evaluation. The author took down the answers given by all the interviewees in details, categorized them and made analysis.

The following questions were asked during the interview:

1. What do you think about the course in general?
2. Do you think the way the course is taught suits your needs and accomplishes your goals?
3. What progress if any have you made so far from attending the course?
4. Do you think you have become more interested and confident in learning English than before you were chosen to attend the experimental class?

3.3.3 Case study

The case study is the main part of the experiment. It embodies the author's application of the theory of formative evaluation and the difference made in comparison with the traditional way of teaching.

Preparation for the application

Preparatory works were of great importance for the implementation of the formative evaluation method. For this experiment, the author made the following preparations:

1. The teacher adopted a positive view to the students potential to attain the expected level of mastery and placed her trust in them. She also had full confidence in herself to accomplish her goals and helped the students build up their own confidence as well.
2. The teacher evaluated the scope and content of the program supposed to be suitable for adult learners and clearly defined objectives of the program through detailed and in-depth analysis of the teaching materials. Then the teacher compiled some sets of definitive tests and designed pertinent means for testing the results. The tests were comprehensive as well as effective and purpose-oriented aiming to test the level the students had attained and assess how far they were above or under the prerequisite objectives. Finally, the score for classifying mastery and failure was decided for future and further improvement.
3. The teacher defined learning units aiming for the mastery of learning. The text was first divided into some smaller units and the teacher taught unit by unit, leaving time for feedbacks and corrections. This is one of the very important steps to achieve mastery of learning and can be implemented in the following four sub-steps: First, after explanations on each unit, the students were given the "formative assessment tests" that were not scored in order to diagnose how the students learn. Second, the teacher determined the standard for the mastery of each unit learnt. Third, corrective tests were designed on the basis of the formative tests and corrections were made through group

discussions or individual teaching.

According to the above description the author divided the teaching material into four units. The main contents and the objectives of unit one was set as an example to show how formative evaluation is applied in the experiment.

Materials

Presently in China, there is a trend towards standardization of teaching English to adults, which trend is represented by a series of seven volumes English text books compiled by the Teaching Materials Writing Group for Higher Education for Adults, an agency under the Ministry of Education of China. These text books, from book 0 to book 6, in my opinion, incorporate freshly interesting texts written in a variety of styles, each with a rich content closely and actively related to daily life, aiming to make the complex simple and to ensure gradual progress for the learners. The books integrate knowledge and practical skills in a scientific way, bracing their structures with grammatical rules and practical exercises. Many texts are designed for practical use, some are about situational dialogues like interviews, tourist sightseeing, family gathering or dialogues in the post office or the restraint; others are personal or business correspondence; still others are about English of certain specific subject such as accounting or legal issues. In my view, this series of teaching materials are well written and properly suit the needs of adult students.

Steps of the Experiment

1. Step One: Teaching

This is a very important part in the implementation of the experiment. The author used a variety of means and methods to make the students master the teaching objectives of each unit. The teaching plans and teaching goals were printed and given to each student in the class before the teacher gave the class presentation. The class presentation included 4 parts: 1) before teaching a text the author explained all the new words and phrases in the word list to make the students understand the way of how to use them by giving examples and ask the students to make sentences. The teacher also gave the students the correct pronunciations of each and every word and also asked the students to practice the pronunciation. 2) Explaining the main idea of the text and ask students questions according to the text to make sure the students understand the text and during the practice of this the students can practice their listening and speaking ability. 3) Training the students to grasp the grammar focus of each unit. 4) Summarizing the whole text which included training the students listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating ability.

2. Step Two: Formative Evaluation

After the material from the unit was presented, an assessment was made to measure each student's progress and to identify areas where more instructions would be needed. Information was given to the students about their learning process (feedback). In this "feedback" the teacher emphasized the key knowledge points for the students to learn in each unit, acknowledged where students performed well, identified the specific concepts that students needed to spend more time on and gave specific instructions appropriate to students' levels of learning. Any student who well performed his currently supposed duty and excelled from the criteria on assessment would move directly into activities that provided opportunities for them to broaden, expand or deepen their learning (enrichment) or move on to the next unit or group of objectives of higher level (acceleration). Students who had not mastered the material were engaged in activities during which they would be given instructions on how to correct the errors and solve the learning problems (correction). Students were provided with alternative learning methods and then given another formative assessment to check for mastery.

During formative evaluation, it is very important to let the students know that the aim of a formative test is to expose to the teacher the problems and misunderstandings they encounter during their language study so that the teacher can adjust his teaching. In the past, students usually got frightened when they had a test because the teacher used to use tests as a powerful means to push the students to work harder. In fact another very important usage of test is to help the teacher know what the students had already known and mastered as well as what they haven't known or mastered but need to. In this way, the teacher can help the students to clarify their misunderstandings, correct the mistakes and finally master what they are required to learn.

3. Step Three: Reflection, Correction and Supplementary Instruction

To achieve the prescribed teaching objectives, it is very important to establish a mechanism of communication and feedbacks between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves. Through inspiring and eliciting instructions, by speech or kinetics, the teacher tries to draw the students' attention, procuring that the students concentrated on achieving certain designated objectives. During this process, the teacher must be extremely observant so as to immediately spot whether or not the students have understood. Take as an example a grammatical class with teacher-directed exercises. Such type of exercises is intended to enhance precise use of grammatical rules

and is an important means for the assessment of language proficiency. For Chinese students who learn English, instead of saying “Has he been a teacher for more than two years?” they will say, “Is he a teacher for more than two years?” This is because verbs in Chinese do not change forms to mark the tenses. And instead of saying “Am I late again”, they will say “Do I late again”, as the word “late” in the underlying Chinese sentence is right after the subject word “I” and is used as the predicate meaning being late. Pinning down where the mistakes are, the teacher then can use his tactics spot-on and make corrections effectively. Step by step, the teacher can assess which objectives have been attained and which demand further efforts. For students who are relatively slow for the time being, supplementary teachings and additional instructions and exercises are given till they catch up and meet the requirements. For those who have done well or better than required, the supplementary and additional class works are not simple repetition, nor a waste of time, rather, they can as well bring additional benefits and further strengthen the learning. For double surety, supplementary teaching is specifically designed in that students are taught in accordance with their aptitude in flexible and diversified ways, and for the definite purpose of promoting attainment of prescribed objectives. It can be detailed in the following aspects and dimensions:

- 1). The mistakes generally made by many students are tackled by repeating previous explanations and by giving instructions from new points of view. Teaching can be combined with class discussions, students are encouraged to point out and correct mistakes by themselves.
- 2). For untypical problems, solutions will be flexible, specific and to a large degree involve the teacher’s wisdom and experiences to find a quick knack. It is also advisable to encourage the students who excel to help those who are temporarily at a loss.
- 3). In case some students do somehow lag behind, the teacher should pay special attention to them, designing tailor-made supplementary instructions and giving head-on solutions to their problems. It’s important for the teacher to keep track of the way the students have gone through so as to how they have come to the wrong end, then starting from where they fall, the teacher will point out where their problems lie and how to solve them, and direct them to the correct path. One thing that can’t be dispensed with are the tests given for assessment and enhancement. Such efforts must be continuously made till at least 80% to 90% students have fully mastered the given units. Then a new unit can be started through similar process. There should be a gradually heightened expectation for objective attainments, with target rate of 100%, meaning every student meet the prescribed standard and master what they have learnt.

4. Step Four: Second Formative Evaluation

After the reflective, corrective and supplementary instructions are finished, a second formative evaluation will be given in order to prove that every student has mastered what he is supposed to and hence the teaching goals accomplished. Because most of the misunderstandings that appeared in the first formative evaluation test have already been clarified, almost no students made any mistakes in the second formative evaluation test. The level of the second formative evaluation paper is equal to the first evaluation test.

5. Step Five: Summative Evaluation

At the end of the unit(s), the teacher evaluated the final competence of students by giving a summative evaluation covering the objectives of the unit. After the assessment was given, the teacher evaluated the results and planned next steps. Summative evaluation means an all over evaluation of all the teaching objectives after all teaching tasks have been finished. It is usually used in the way of the final examination. It is by summative evaluation that the teacher can know whether the students have mastered the learning tasks of the term and decide whether and how to adjust its teaching method and design new teaching objectives. The above description can be shown in the chart 1 (Huang Shusheng, 2005).

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Questionnaire Analysis and Discussion

After the experiment, the author collected all the questionnaires and analyzed them, the result can be summarized in Table 1.

From the table we can clearly see that before the experiment, very few students (6 students) of the experimental class are interested in the English language learning and most of the students (24+10) admit that they have less or no interest in the English language study at all and on the other hand only four among the 40 students have a strong confidence in the English language study and the rest 36 have a much more diffident attitude toward learning English language well. While after the experiment the students’ attitude change greatly. Among the 40 students become interested in learning the language and 25 students build up confidence in the English language learning. In one word, after the experiment the attitudes of the students of the experiment class changed significantly.

Their interests and their confidence in learning English well improves a great deal after the use of formative evaluation.

Table 2 shows us clearly that the students attitudes changed a great deal. Among them, almost (67.5% strongly satisfied and 25% satisfied to some extent) all the students thought this new way of teaching quite satisfying. Only few (7.5%) showed that it was acceptable and no students said that he or she was not satisfied. After the experiment the time students became more willing to spend more on learning English. Most of the students (30 students) would like to spend at least half an hour a day to learn English and no one said he didn't spend any time on it. This means that the students are willing to use more or less of their spare time to learn and improve their English. As for item six before the experiment, half of the students (21 students) held an indifferent attitude to the materials that they should use while after the experiment 34 students among the 40 students realized that the more the teaching materials suited the students, the better they would learn. The last four items were to some extent concerned with the formative evaluation itself and according to Table 2 we can see that most of the students realized the importance of communication between the teacher and students and among the students themselves so that they were fully aware of the program's objectives and their own tasks.

In summary, after the experiment the students became more interested in and spent more energy and more time on learning English. They developed more positive attitudes about their ability to learn English well through the implementation formative evaluation.

4.2 Interview Analysis and Discussion

Interviews (see Table 3) with the students indicated that 90% of the students liked the approach, 85% of them said they had improved a lot in their English learning after the teacher adopted the method of formative evaluation, and also 85% of them thought the approach most suited them and greatly helped them with their English learning. Almost all the students (19 out of 20) the author interviewed were full of confidence in their future English language learning and they all expressed their eagerness to learn English and 100% students expressed that they were no longer frightened when they had a test. Besides, 80% students showed that they were to some extent looking forward to having a formative evaluation test. When asked why, they said by such method, they could submit their questions, their misunderstandings and their difficulties all to the teacher who would timely work a way out for them by adjusting the course design, method of teaching, class activities and way of communication between teacher and students and among students themselves to make sure the accomplishment of the intended goal.

4.3 Case Analysis and Discussion

The pretest was given and evaluated at the very beginning of the semester without giving prior notice to the students either in the experimental and controlled classes. The pre-test was intended for proving that both two classes had the same language ability. Then a posttest would be given to examine whether the experimental class could outperform the controlled class after one semester's study under different teaching methodologies.

Figure 2 shows the marks that the controlled class students got both before and after the experiment. The table clearly shows that there's basically no change in the results of learning for the controlled classes in which the traditional teaching method is adopted. It can be concluded that traditional teaching method does not have a very positive effect during English learning by adult students.

Figure 3 shows the marks students in the experimental class get both before and after the experiment. It can be seen from the statistic chart that noticeable progress has been made for the experimental class in which formative evaluation has been adopted. The extent of progress may vary for different students, yet each student does take certain steps forward from where they were. It can be concluded that occasional application of formative evaluation does positively influence the result of learning and help break the bottleneck of learning by adult students.

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the experiment class and the controlled class both before and after the experiment. The table exhibits the differences of the means and standard deviations between the experimental class and the controlled class before and after the experiment. In terms of the mean scores before the experiment, that for the controlled class is 82.10 and that for the experimental class is 76.38, which is 5.72 less than that of the controlled class. After the experiment, there is no noticeable change of mean score for the controlled class subjected to the traditional teaching method while that for the experimental class has reached 87.80, an increase of 11.42 from its previous 76.38. Such increase is sufficient to demonstrate the feasibility of formative evaluation in teaching adult students to learn English. In terms of standard deviations, that for the experimental class and that for the controlled class before the experiment are respectively 5.72 and 5.35, which means the scores for the controlled class are more evenly distributed than those for the experimental class. After the experiment, the standard deviation for the experimental class decreases from 5.72 to 4.99, narrowing down towards the mean with the scores more

evenly distributed than before the experiment. For the controlled class, there's basically no change in terms of standard deviation before and after the experiment (5.35 before the experiment and 5.22 after the experiment). Such practical experiment shows the effectiveness of formative evaluation.

5. Conclusion

Through empirical studies, the author comes to the following conclusions:

1. In the cognitive aspect, the students' school records have been improved on the whole. The fact suggests that over 80% students in the experimental class have reached the level (usually A or B) that only the top students in the ordinary classes can reach. By comparing the controlled class with the experimental class, the author finds that the experimental class also acquires much more knowledge and almost all the students in the experimental class can master what they are supposed to learn.
2. In the subjective aspect, the teacher shows her genuine beliefs in the students' ability to attain the objectives of each unit, this has definitely boosted the students' self confidence and greatly aroused their interests and enthusiasm to learn and to master what they learn.
3. In the aspect of the enhancement of teachers' beliefs in teaching, the author concludes through the study that the application of formative evaluation not only helps teachers adopt new point of views towards their students, believing that every student has the ability to learn, it also augments the teachers' confidence in education itself, in its higher attainments and greater achievements which might otherwise be denied by the traditional way of teaching.

Since the very beginning when foreign languages were taught as a subject in Chinese schools, there have been many different teaching approaches. Which one is better? No one can tell exactly. It depends on who the students are. For different students, different approaches should be applied. Nowadays lots of adults go back to colleges for continuous education. These adult students do have certain rudimentary knowledge of English that they got from their middle school studies. However, there's usually a lot of room for improvement in terms of their mastery of the English language. And the aim of the teachers of those adult students is to find the knack to boost their confidence, to correct their mistakes and solve their problems so as to help them greatly improve their language skills. Through the empirical studies, the author concludes that the method of formative evaluation is an approach more suitable for helping adult students learn, improve and master English.

References

- Brown, H. Douglas. (2001). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Beijing: Foreign Language and Teaching Research Press.
- Chen, Jinzhong. (2004). Survey of English learning motivation of young cadres and their teaching strategies. *Journal of Cheng Du University of Information Technology*, 06
- Gardner, R. C. W. Lambert. (1975). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Roeley, Mass: Newbury House.
- Huang Shusheng. (2005). *On Bloom's Mastey Learning Theory*. *Comparative Education Review*, 07
- Liu, Naimei. (2003). Adult Language Learning Motivation and Teaching Strategies to Deal With. *China Adult Education*, 09
- Lou, Jianli.(2005). Adult English Language Teaching Strategies. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Radio & TV University*, 010
- Reid, J. (1987). *Learning Styles in the ESL/EFL Classroom*. Shanghai: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Table 1. The change of the students' interests and confidence for English language study before and after the experiment

Contents	Option	Pre-experiment		Post-experiment		Difference in the number of students	Difference in percentage (%)
		Number of students	Percentage (%)	Number of students	Percentage (%)		
Students interests	A	6	15	31	77.5	25	62.5
	B	24	60	6	15	18	45
	C	10	25	3	7.5	7	17.5
Students Confidence	A	4	10	29	72.5	25	62.5
	B	25	62.5	10	25	15	37.5
	C	11	27.5	1	2.5	10	25

Table 2. Questionnaire table

Question	option	Pre-experiment		Post-experiment		Difference in the number of students	Difference of Percentage (%)
		Number of students	Percentage (%)	Number of students	Percentage (%)		
3	A	7	17.5	27	67.5	20	50
	B	8	20	10	25	2	5
	C	15	37.5	3	7.5	12	30
	D	10	25	0	0	10	25
4	A	2	5	30	75	18	45
	B	0	0	8	20	8	20
	C	0	0	2	5	8	12.5
	D	38	95	0	0	31	77.5
5	A	4	10	25	62.5	21	52.5
	B	3	7.5	12	30	9	22.5
	C	28	70	0	0	28	70
	D	5	12.5	3	7.5	2	5
6	A	8	20	14	35	6	15
	B	8	20	20	50	12	30
	C	21	52.5	0	0	21	52.5
	D	3	7.5	6	15	3	7.5
7	A	9	22.5	26	65	17	32.5
	B	10	25	14	35	4	10
	C	20	50	0	0	20	50
	D	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5
8	A	6	15	30	75	24	60
	B	9	22.5	10	25	1	2.5
	C	25	62.5	0	0	25	62.5
	D	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	A	5	12.5	38	95	33	72.5
	B	8	20	2	5	6	15
	C	27	67.5	0	0	27	67.5
	D	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	A	11	27.5	40	100	29	72.5
	B	9	22.5	0	0	9	22.5
	C	20	50	0	0	20	50
	D	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3. Interview

question	Positive attitudes		Negative attitudes		Neutral attitudes	
	Number of Students	Percentage (%)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	18	90	0	0	2	10
2	17	85	1	5	2	10
3	20	100	0	0	0	0
4	19	5	0	0	1	5

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of the experiment class and the controlled class before and after the experiment

	Experimental class (N=40)		Controlled class (N=40)	
	Pre-experiment	Post-experiment	Pre-experiment	Post-experiment
Mean	76. 38	87. 80	82. 10	82. 28
Standard Deviation	5. 72	4. 99	5. 35	5. 22

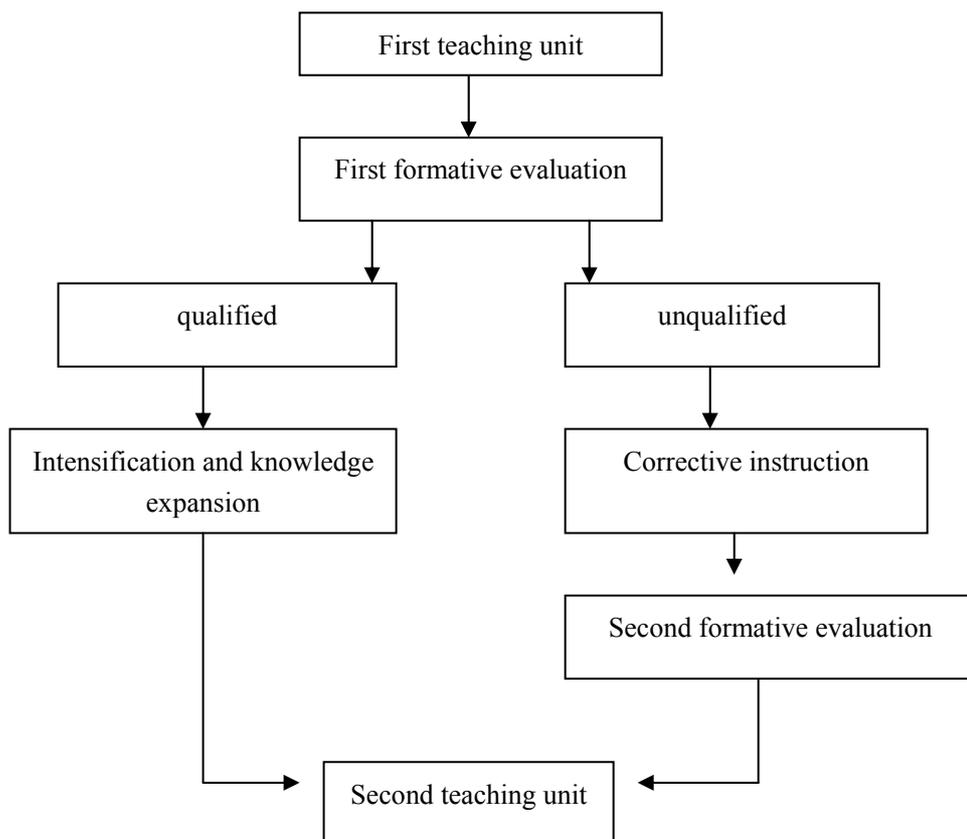


Figure 1.

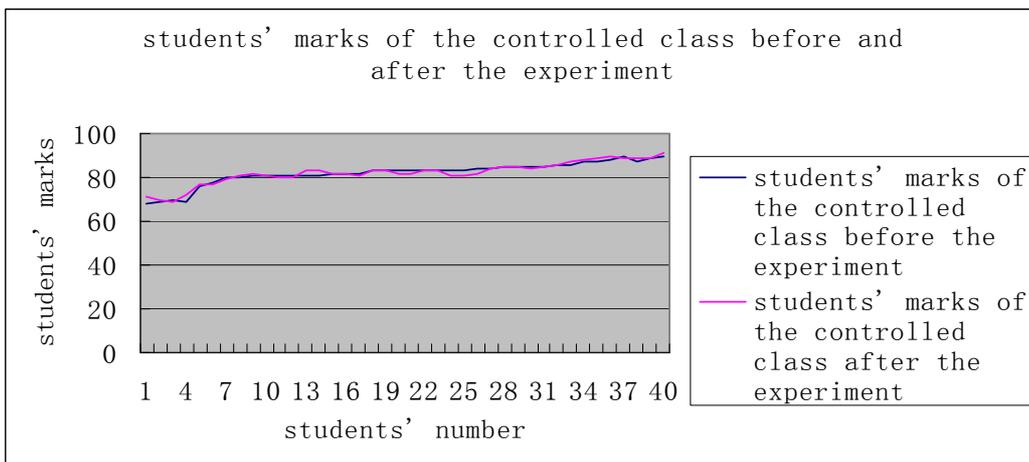


Figure 2. Marks of students in the controlled class before and after the experiment

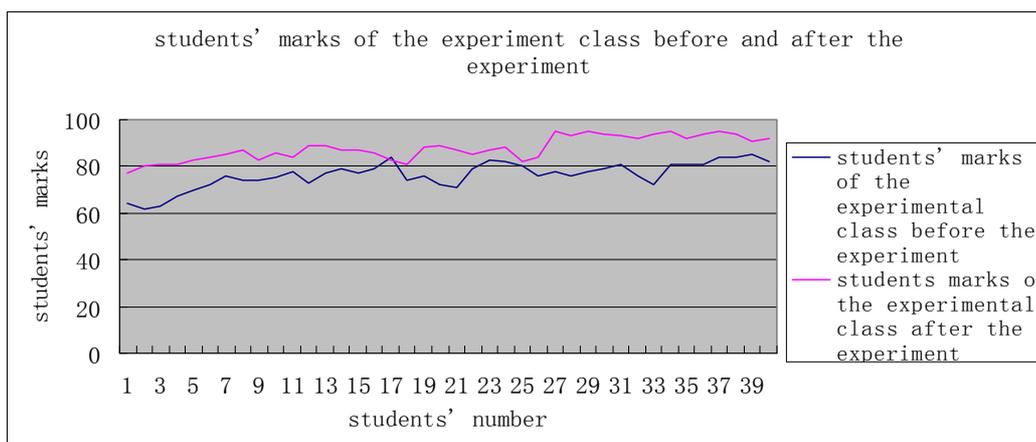


Figure 3. Marks of students in the experimental class before and after the experiment

Appendix

Questionnaire 1

Age:

Gender:

Years of learning English:

Scores of the the English test in entrance examination:

Time spend on learning English each week:

Marks of the English test in entrance examination:

Basic Information of Students from Whom Subjects Are Chosen

Average age	Average years of learning English	Average time spent weekly on learning English	Average English marks of entrance examination	Gender distribution
22.2	7.1	6	60.2	F:41 M:39

Questionnaire 2

1. Are you interested in English class?
A. Very interested B. Interested to some extent C. Not interested at all
2. Do you have confidence in learning English well?
A. Strongly confident B. Confident to some extent. C. Not confident
3. Are you satisfied with the teaching method your English teacher use?
A. Strongly satisfied B. Satisfied to some extent
C. Neutral D. Not satisfied
4. Time spend on learning English everyday (at home or in school).
A. Half an hour a day B. One hour a day
C. Two hours a day D. Almost learn nothing
5. During the process of learning I changed my attitude to English language.
A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent
C. I do not know. D. Disagree
6. I think the contents of the English textbooks should be close to our life and foster our integral capacity.
A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent
C. I do not know. D. Disagree
7. I think the teacher should have the whole teaching task at her fingertips.
A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent
C. I do not know. D. Disagree
8. I think the teacher should let the students know the teaching task.
A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent
C. I do not know. D. Disagree
9. I think it is important to set an aim in order to learn English well.
A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent
C. I do not know. D. Disagree
10. I think it is important for student to communicate with both the teacher and his or her fellow classmates.
A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent
C. I do not know. D. Disagree

Unit one

Items	Main contents	Objectives (analysis of the materials)
1	Introduction and description	Usage of the word be
2	Ownership and possession	Usage of the word have
3	Action	Usage of the word do
4	Summary	Comprehensive usage