THE EFFECT OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN IMPROVING NON-NATIVE ADULTS PERFORMANCE IN MALAY LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Assessment for learning is one of the teaching and learning process that has been adopted to improve and accelerate learners' ability in their learning especially involving modern foreign language. However, the process of learning becomes more productive when Assessment for learning is implemented in an informal approach for non-native adults. Therefore, the study focused on the implementation of an informal assessment for learning in a Malay language course that is being taught as modern foreign language among non-native adult learners in a higher learning institution. Malay as a modern foreign language is still new at piloting stage in Malaysia. As a result, it would be useful to adopt assessment for learning informally for non-native adults acquiring the proficiency in an intense period. So, qualitative approach, an action

research methodology has been undertaken as it also equally features of Assessment for learning and in parallel to accelerating adult learners' proficiency especially at beginners' level. Moreover, action research methodology is used to study the effectiveness of Assessment for learning applied among non-native adult learners in the Malay course. The research study involved 30 non-native adult learners in a higher learning institution from January 2014 until December 2017. The instruments used to collect data were by means of feedback, observation and continuous assessments. The data were analyzed in a quantified approach using descriptive research method to measure the frequency of non-native adult learners' achievement by using Likert scale rating. The main findings of this research revealed how informal Assessment for learning assists non-native adult learners achievements and also benefits trainers in future to adopt and apply such model to support their teaching and elevate non-native adult learners' achievement in Malay course.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Assessment for learning means any assessment that has preference in its design and practice that serves the purpose of promoting learners' learning rather than the type of assessments designed mainly to oblige the purposes of liability, grading, or certifying competence (Bennett, 2011). An assessment activity supports the learning process by providing information for trainers and their learners as feedback in assessing themselves and one another. The feedback attained is used to modify teaching and learning process in which they are engaged. Such evidence is actually used to readjust the teaching methodologies to meet learners' learning needs and expectations (Black, et.al, 2004).

In order to accentuate the efficacy of Malay as a modern foreign language program, a well-qualified and acceptable formative assessment model is required in which an informal Assessment for learning is selected for non-native adults knowingly of their characteristics, needs and expectations. Assessment for learning (AFL) is implemented for working adults who desired to learn and achieve Malay proficiency for own personal gain, specific needs and necessities. AFL is defined as a vital process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and trainers to decide on the current learning and then work towards improvement so

that they can attain their desired educational goals and achievements (Dylan William, 2011). The purpose to choose AFL in an informal way in this research is to support non-native adult learners to acquire good Malay language skills. Many non-native adult learners have difficulties in learning Malay, or under-achieving in developing their language competencies. Therefore, continued efforts are needed to assess learning by means of an informal approach (unplanned approaches), which gives way to exploring learners' strengths and weakness in Malay thus significantly accelerate adult learners' learning (Maria Araceli & Ruiz Primo, 2011). In fact, the implementation of an informal Assessment for learning (AFL) in Malay teaching and general andragogy knowledge and principles provide significant results just through an intensive course. Another reason is to acquire genuine responses from adult learners so that the process can be oriented using trainer's own discretion (informal way) in order to accelerate learners' skills competency and achievement. Therefore, the research objective centred to evaluate the effect of informal Assessment for learning in improving non-native adult learners' achievement in Malay. As a result, this study sought to answer the following specific research questions: To what extent non-native adult learners' achievement can be improved based on: a) Rich Questioning b) Peer Assessment c) Feedback and, d) Target Setting

2. Literature Review

The key feature towards designing assessment that supports learning is ''instructionally tractable'' evidence that provides room for improvement between the current and desired performance in learning and also offers information regarding instructional activities that leads towards better performance. Secondly, learners are actively engaged in activities that absolutely directed towards improving their own learning (William, 2007). Teachers also provide remedial or enrichment activities, acquiring peer support, or reflecting to feedback to improve learners' learning. Feedback cannot be evaluated without involving the instructional context in which it is used and thoughtful feedback given to students allows them to preserve a sense of well-being towards learning process. Generally, formative assessment involves three main processes exercised mainly by the teacher, students and their peers that led to identify learners' existing performance in their learning, directing them to achieve success, and finally make necessary improvements to achieve their desired goal (Wiliam and Thompson, 2008).

Tutor is able to identify errors in the learner's work immediately, and then provide clarification and further follow-up if necessary during private sessions (Guskey, 2010). Feedback

and correctives process have become part of a standard way of assessment (Bloom, 2001). Teachers are responsible to identify potential difficulties that hinder students' achievement and their learning goals using informal and formal strategies in order to advance their progression in learning (AFL, 2009). Therefore, teachers implement instructional practices effectively through formative assessment that occurs informally in everyday activities as well as formally during classroom sessions (Wiliam, 2005). Informal formative assessment is used to collect evidence of students' understanding in their learning sessions by trainers which involves student, teacher and peers interaction which is generally directed towards the discovery of novel information about students' understanding that has been observed through the context of such interactions. (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Informal formative assessment is based on everyday learning activities that provide evidence of students' learning either by oral responses, written, practical, non-verbal or explicit evidence (Eisenkraft, 2004). An informal formative assessment cycle is complete when the acquired information is used to form and implement new learning strategies instantly within the learning context in classroom. When informal formative assessment takes place, teachers constantly attempt to understand students' responses, actions, comments, and behaviours (Wiliam & Leahy, 2007).

The literature discussed relates that Assessment for learning (AFL) to be effective in accelerating young learners' achievement in schools. According to Knowles (1984), adults have control over their learning experience and highly motivated to learn thus often seek out new or different learning experiences, at will. Therefore, informal AFL is found to be appropriate towards accelerating non-native adult learners' achievement acquiring skills competency. Previous study reveals assessment for learning have not been used in teaching non-native adults especially in Malay course. This research study will be useful in providing many Malay language trainers to engage it as part of their teaching methodology in an informal way and again benefits non-native adult learners' goal to acquire Malay proficiency.

3. Methodology

The research design of the study will be discussed in this section including the instrument, research sample, methods, data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Design and Approach

An informal Assessment for learning is employed among non-native adults successfully in an intense period, qualitative approach has been gauged. An action research method has been

applied in which focused on the effectiveness of assessment for learning in improving non-native adult learners 'learning and estimate their achievement in a quantified way. Descriptive research method is used to maintain the objectivity in analyzing non-native adult learners' achievement by using rating scale strategy, Likert Scale (Black.T, 1999). This method is chosen due to the time constraint as most Malay courses are conducted in an intensive manner, smaller number of research participants and also the implementation process required an informal approach towards collecting the data.

The study focused on assessing non-native adult learners' achievement in Malay course, therefore AFL was conducted informally in a smaller group of multi-national non-native adults so that the study can observe their achievements in Malay and the effectiveness of AFL. The implemented process meant to determine non-native adult learners perform effectively towards their desired achievement. The study used the information obtained from the participants to develop items in the checklists of the data collection instruments which include observation, feedback and assessment by using 4 point Likert Scale rating. The purpose is to measure non-native adult learners' achievement using descriptive statistical analysis which is a quantitative method.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study comprised of non-native adults from the public who self-select to study Malay as a modern foreign language at the present higher education center. The study was carried from January 2014 until December 2017. A total of 30 non-native adults were involved and comprised of Beginners level. The research study was carried out for 22 cycles to collect information from multiple forms of data instrument.

3.3 Instruments

Data were collected from observation by recording non-native adult leaners' learning in class using trainer's log and also video recording. The information was used to develop 8 items in the observation checklist using 4 points rating: Secondly, the study used feedback which was recorded by using audio-recording and open interviews. The information later was used to develop 10 items in the feedback checklist using 4 point rating. Finally, the study used results obtained from continuous assessments to develop 8 items in the assessments checklist using 4 point rating. All the checklists were then used as pilot test to measure participants' achievement in Malay (Black. T, 1999).

Content validity in the checklists verified by an expert in research methodology and also a research consultant from University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu. The study was administered by the Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) evaluation model using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0). The researcher used an internal consistency measure called Cronbach's alpha. The value of 0.6 or higher is an acceptable measure to prove the instrument's reliability (Awang. Z & Mohamad. M, 2015). Cronbach's alpha is computed for each set items measuring the same factor to provide evidence of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha value above 0.6 or higher is considered acceptable for program evaluation (Awang. Z & Mohamad. M, 2015). The result of Cronbach alpha for CIPP evaluation is 0.885

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from the observation, feedback and assessments were analyzed using Likert scale rating for simple analysis to determine the frequency in descriptive statistics of non-native adult learners' achievement in Malay proficiency. The study also used the analyzed data to confirm the transferability of Assessment for learning among non-native adult learners at the present higher education center.

4. Results and Discussion

With the implementation of AFL in the teaching and learning process, non-native adult learners' achievement had advanced towards better results and language competency.

4.1 Non-native adult learners' achievement based on Rich Questioning

Referring to Table 1, results derived from observation scale before the implementation of AFL proved that 53.3% of non-native adults achieved minimum target and 46.7% have met the target. Feedback scale showed 56.7% achieved minimal target while 43.3% met the target. Meanwhile, assessment scale revealed that 16.7% were underachieving. Moreover, 46.6% attained minimal target while 36.7% have met the target. However, observation scale after the implementation of AFL revealed that 50% of non-native adults have exceeded in the achievement target and 50% have met the target. Feedback scale reported that 56.6% have exceeded and 36.7 have met the target, however 6.7% achieved minimal target. Assessment scale indicated that 73.3% have exceeded and 26.7% met the target.

Table 1: *Frequency Distribution of Rich Questioning before and after the Implementation*

	Before Implementation			After Implementation		
Achievement	Obs	Feed	Ass	Obs	Feed	Ass
Under target			16.7			
Minimum target	53.3	56.7	46.6		6.7	
Meeting target	46.7	43.3	36.7	50	36.7	26.7
Exceed target				50	56.6	73.3
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Rich questioning provides information about leaners' knowledge, understanding and skills that informs the trainer in planning and selecting teaching strategies to further improve their achievement level (Walsh, 2011). The nature of Malay acquisition as a social context regarded as a medium to improve learning process through making optimal use of the target language within the classroom (Kearsley. G, 2010). The use of various questioning strategies to develop interactions in Malay added emphasis the classroom discourse in learning a foreign language. Trainer's talk in Malay communication in classroom include modelling the language use, eliciting information, providing input and opportunities for output, as well as managing the course, the nature of interaction in Malay, thus organizing the learning environment. Trainers are practically being engaged in conversations that focus on looking at learners' needs, their learning difficulties and experiences (Langer et al., 2003) and then take into account planning and implementing assessment for learning strategies that are sensible, suitable and practical for learners (Davies, 2003). Use of sequence on display questions in Malay generate learners' output in simple exchanges as well as to develop the confidence in speaking among learners of mixed ability which is not only distinctive to foreign language but also used commonly in the first language acquisition process (Walsh, 2007). Conducting rich questioning in classes has given another prospect to test Assessment for learning model in the process to increase the teacher-student interaction in Malay and trainer practises referential questions and follow-up questions to develop authentic communication among learners (Kearsley. G, 2010). Once the flow of interaction becomes steady, trainer then varies the referential questions to promote more expressions, dialogues and experiential discussions in class. In fact, referential questions are more common in everyday conversations meanwhile in the classroom, referential questions are

used to generate "longer and more syntactically complex" responses (McNeil, 2012). Referential questions tender the possibility of negotiation of meaning, which is critical to help learners acquire language skills through working on the gaps between formal and informal expressions. Therefore, trainers should be mindful of the potential for authentic communication through use of referential questions. Trainers should engage adult learners in classroom discourse in which enormous use of rich questioning promotes opportunities for self-expression, facilitate and encourage clarification among learners (Walsh, 2007).

4.2 Non-Native Adult Learners' Achievement based on Peer Assessment

As shown in Table 2, results obtained before implementation from observation scale on Peer Assessment proved that 66.7% of non-native adults have met the targeted achievement. This followed by 33.3% achieved minimum target. Feedback scale indicated that 33.4% have met the target while 43.3% achieved minimal target. But, 23.3% still underachieving. On the Assessment scale, 30% are still underachieving and only 23.3% have met the target. Meanwhile, 46.7% obtained minimal achievement target. After the implementation, observation scale on Peer Assessment revealed that 53.3% of non-native adults have exceeded the achievement target. Meanwhile, 46.7% have met the target. Feedback scale indicates that 56.7% have met the target while 40% have exceeded target. Only 3.3% attained minimal target. Moreover, assessment scale proved that 76.7% have exceeded and 23.3% of them met the target.

Table 2: *Frequency Distribution of Peer Assessment before and after the Implementation*

	Before Implementation			After Implementation		
Achievement	Obs	Feed	Ass	Obs	Feed	Ass
Under target		23.3	30			
Minimum target	33.3	43.3	46.7		3.3	
Meeting target	66.7	33.4	23.3	46.7	56.7	23.3
Exceed target				53.3	40	76.7
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Peer assessment is a valuable learning tool in teaching Malay because it supports non-native adult learners to acquire language skills that are essential in their professional working life (Sluijsmans and Prins (2006). This also has led to a general improvement in adult learners' task performance in Malay. Peer assessments between non-native adult learners mainly focused on

listening and speaking skills, meanwhile writing and reading tasks either organised in or outside classroom. Effectual discussions and reflections among learners encourage them to assess each other's' contributions for making reliable judgments about peers' work either verbal or in writing. Furthermore, adult learners become assessors in their own achievements and, therefore, they will work collaboratively to support each other in class (Sambell & McDowell, 1998). Another part of the peer assessment involves trainer and learner collaboration which generally engaged in writing and verbal in Malay. Trainer and learner, in general discuss and determine their present achievement and later reflect onto possible ways to improve further (Brown, Rust, & Gibbs, 1994). This followed by adopting integrated approaches in series of coaching, demonstrations, drilling, and differentiations in the tasks involved by which trainer and adult learners will work collaboratively to improve learners' competency in Malay. The importance of peer assessment among trainers is that they can use the judgment of their peers to estimate the effectiveness of their performances in teaching Malay effectively. Being able to interpret the work of colleagues and peers is a necessary prerequisite for professional development and for improving one's own teaching approach thus stimulate this mutual influence at professional level (Verloop & Wubbels, 2000). At this point, Malay trainer able to create and produce an effective Malay coursein an informal way that guarantees desired achievement for non-native adult learners at higher education centre.

4.3 Non-Native Adult Learners' Achievement based on Feedback

As shown in Table 3, results obtained before implementation from observation scale on Feedback proved that 13.8% of non-native adults have met the targeted achievement. This followed by 32.8% achieved minimum target while 53.4% were underachieving. Feedback scale indicated that 29.3% have met the target while 55.2% achieved minimal target. But, 15.5% still found to be underachieving. Assessment scale showed that 24.1% are still underachieving and only 10.4% have met the target. Meanwhile, 65.5% have obtained minimal target. After the implementation, observation scale on Feedback revealed that 43.3% have exceeded the target. Meanwhile, 56.7% have met the target. Feedback scale indicates that 23.3% have met the target while 76.7% have exceeded the target. Moreover, assessment scale proved that 86.7% have exceeded the target and 13.3% met the target.

Table 3: *Frequency Distribution of Feedback before and after the implementation*

Before Implementation				After Implementation		
Achievement	Obs	Feed	Ass	Obs	Feed	Ass
Under target	53.4	15.5	24.1			
Minimum target	32.8	55.2	65.5			
Meeting target	13.8	29.3	10.4	56.7	23.3	13.3
Exceed target				43.3	76.7	86.7
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Feedback is a necessary precondition for a learner to act on a gap that were given a comment that enable them to act accordingly and these comments should be applicable too (Walker, 2009). Consequently, feedback that were provided informally in the Malay classes emphasis more on the quality to improve non-native adult learners' performance in Malay proficiency thus accelerate their learning as well. Much of the research on feedback has focused on the nature of written comments on learner assignments, although wider feedback practices that can help learners build self-assessment and self-regulation abilities in relation to their thinking, motivation and behaviour during learning (Nicol and Macfarlane, 2006). The ongoing dialogue from trainer to non-native adult learners determines the nature of comments provided verbally or in writing and can be diversified in many different ways like modelling work practice of another learner in class, demonstrating good samples, conform learners' work within mark scheme requisite and provide strategies that suits learners' learning style thus help them to improve their learning independently (Nicol and Macfarlane, 2006). Constant feedback make provision for other adults to adopt and apply some of the language styles, diction, language diversity, structure and such in refining and improving their language skills. In an informal AFL, it is crucial to acquire constructive feedback either from the trainer or from their respective peers in class. Importantly, trainer's feedback provides specific suggestions about how that improvement might be achieved (Walker, 2009). Peer feedback occurs when a learner uses established success criteria to tell another learner what they have achieved and the necessary advance for improvement. Again, feedback provides specific suggestions to help non-native adult learners achieve better results from the improvement (Walker, 2009). Prominently, trainers offer learners rich and focused information about their learning and ways to improve it by their

strong subject knowledge combining with effective feedback. Therefore, non-native adult learners become clear about their learning and able to monitor their progress and seek feedback instantly from their trainer and peers to further improve their learning in Malay language.

4.4 Non-Native Adult Learners' Achievement based on Target Setting

Referring to Table 4, based on the results derived from observation scale on learners' achievement before the implementation of AFL revealed that 32.8% of non-native adults only achieved minimum target whereas 13.8% met the target and 53.4% were still underachieving. Feedback scale showed 55.2% achieved minimal target while 29.3% met the target and 15.5% were underachieving. Meanwhile, assessment scale revealed that 24.1% were underachieving and 65.5% attained minimal target while 10.4% met the target. However, observation scale after the implementation of AFL revealed that 33.3% have exceeded the target and 63.3% have met target, but only 3.3% were underachieving. Feedback scale reports that 36.7% have exceeded the target, while 36.7% met the target, however 26.6% achieved minimal target. Meanwhile, assessment scale indicated that 40% have exceeded the target and 36.7% have met the target while 23.3% have achieved minimal target.

Table 4: *Frequency Distribution of Target Setting before and after the Implementation*

Before Implementation				After Implementation		
Achievement	Obs	Feed	Ass	Obs	Feed	Ass
Under target	53.4	15.5	24.1			
Minimum target	32.8	55.2	65.5	3.3	26.6	23.3
Meeting target	13.8	29.3	10.4	63.3	36.7	36.7
Exceed target				33.3	36.7	40
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Information gathered from the rich questioning, peer assessments and feedbacks will now pave the way to set target goals and further action plan that always carried out in a formal method and involve recording learners' prevailing performance and their desired target goal in the summative examination in a check-list or report book or log. Reviews on non-native adult learners' target setting through effectual discussions by looking into each completed assignments and tasks checked were carried out informally at learners' convenient time before initiate further plans (D. William, et.al. 2004) towards improving their Malay proficiency. Another method used

informally is the discussion over examination mark scheme. Non-native adult learners already have the background knowledge about their ability level and set their own targets towards better achievement in Malay. Mark scheme requisite was used as a tool to inspire and encourage non-native adult learners to apply and master the language competently (Ainol Madziah Zubairi, .et.al, 2007). Another aspect is through staggered and accelerated practices conducted in class reveals transparently the enhancement of the learners' ability in Malay. Such practices are planned and created to encourage learners' learning and to improve and hasten their language skills in short course (B.Cooper & B.Cowie, 2009). Such practices were staggered from easy to a more challenging task, differentiated instructions according to learners' ability level, volume of practices provided based of learners' pace and finally use variety of learning tools (M.Taras, 2007).

5. Implication or Recommendation

It was reported that AFL have been more successful and benefits many Malay language trainers and academicians. This would provide more support and critical views in the research in order to confirm the implementation of informal AFL in a modern foreign language for non-native adults' learning at higher education. It is recommended that higher educational institutions should adopt an informal AFL model into training Malay as modern foreign language and take measures to promote it to the stakeholders which comprise of non-native adults in Malaysia as well abroad. Informal AFL matches to non-native adult learners' needs and expectation in acquiring Malay language competency independently, confidently and effectively in an intensive program.

Informal AFL model adopted would be helpful for language trainers to make their teaching interesting, interactive and promoting self-regulated learning among non-native adult learners. Besides, trainers must include self-assessment learning among learners so that they can assess different views, collect feedback, reflecting on their own learnings in Malay. Trainers too must learn to be flexible in making necessary changes, adaptations and improvements towards a better teaching process. The implementation of AFL in an informal way using an action research method is proposed to demonstrate with great clarity that a method can be adopted in an easier, learner-centred and more interactive, thus improving non-native adult learners' achievement as well as in real life. However, the demonstration of informal AFL also paves channel towards

exploring other instructional areas in Malay in order to heighten the standards and learning process at further in the higher education.

6. Conclusion

The implementation of informal AFL in this research absolutely provides support for non-native adult learners to gain competencies in Malay through a friendlier, fun-orientated and easy way. Non-native adult learners will be able to communicate confidently and enthusiastically with native speakers comprising from a multi-lingual society in Malaysia thus conveniently use in their daily routines. Informal AFL promotes effective life-long interaction by experiencing and getting involved in outdoor activities. Informal AFL too introduces relevant techniques in accelerating learners' preparation towards skills competency efficiently and also emulates self-regulated learning by setting own targets for successful achievement in their learning.

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