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EFFECTS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES ON LEARNING OF ENGLISH IN PUBLIC SENIOR SCHOOLS IN KAKAMEGA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Formative assessment practices such as oral questioning and written assignments gauge students' language proficiency. They also improve students' learning outcomes. However, Kenya Certificates of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations performance in English has continually dipped from 2021 – 2025 in Kakamega County, Kenya. More so, there is little empirical evidence on formative assessment practices used in the classroom. The purpose of the study was to establish effects of formative assessment practices on learning English in public senior schools in Kakamega County. The research focused on: formative assessment practices and strategies employed to improve students' learning and challenges encountered during formative assessment practices and ways to overcome. The research was guided by Bruner's Constructivism Theory (1990) and adopted descriptive survey design. The study population was 153 principals, 251 teachers of English and 10,131 Grade 10 students. Simple random sampling method used to select 108 principals, 152 teachers and 370 students. Research instruments include: questionnaires and interview schedule. Findings of the study include: Formative assessment practices contribute to students learning, formative assessment strategies enhance acquisition of problem solving skills, increase learners' motivation, collaboration, participation, responses to questions and refine students' reasoning ability. Nonetheless, challenges encountered included time constraints for individual or group to provide meaningful and timely feedback, large class sizes delay constructive feedback, curriculum overload and lack of necessary training on implementation of formative assessment practices. The study recommended that teachers should: prepare formative assessment practices in order to address learners' challenges as they arise and attend in-service training on feedback improvement in the classrooms.

KEY WORDS: Effects, formative assessment practices, strategies, challenges, learning

1.0 Introduction

The research of Bongani (2024) observed that formative assessment activities prepared by teachers in order to address learner's challenges as they arise. A total of 15 grade 12 Accounting teachers were conveniently selected and interviewed. Interviews voice recorded, notes were handwritten then summarized and categorized in accordance with research questions. Moreover, Junsheng and Xin (2025) study confirmed that teachers' emotional support plays a mediating role in the relationship between formative assessment and students' academic performance. By reviewing literature, they explored how formative assessments indirectly influence student performance through the emotional climate created by teachers in the South Chinese Region. The study was analysed using a structural equation model

Based on Carney, Zhang, Charsha, Taylor and Hoshaw (2022) findings, formative assessment is a means to see improvements in students learning within a quicker time frame. The study targeted college faculty, professionals and administrators and the article summarized ways formative assessment employed to improve student learning. According to Seyed, Rahul, Indrajit and Ehsan (2022) study, the outcomes of one way ANOVA and Bonferroni tests revealed that both summative and formative assessments were effective but the formative one was more effective on academic motivation, test anxiety and self regulation skill. This research explored impacts of formative and summative assessments on academic motivation, attitude towards learning, test anxiety and self regulation skill of EFL students in Iran.

The study of Chemel (2019) identified that clarifying and sharing learning intentions, effective classroom discussions, questions and learning tasks, feedback that moves learners forward, self assessment and peer assessment improved learners' acquisition of problem solving skills. Chemel's study utilized pre – posttest control quasi - experimental mixed method intervention design. Data was collected using Student Mathematics test (SMAT), observation schedule and teachers focus group interviews. On the contrary, Widiastuti and Saukah (2017) findings showed English teachers were found not to take appropriate follow up actions due to their low understanding of formative assessment. The study investigated challenges and opportunities of formative assessment in EFL classes. In depth interviews was used to collect the required data. Three teachers and three students were involved as research participants.

On the other hand, the findings of Kazinyirako, Ntawiha, Buhigiro and Ndayambaje (2024) indicated that practices related to planning for formative assessment are rarely practiced in public secondary schools in Kicukiro District. Questionnaires, semi structured interview and lesson observation checklist were used as research instruments in collecting data from respondents. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations whereas thematic analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data. Importantly, formative assessment has substantial beneficial effect on learning outcomes (Chemel, 2019); nevertheless, its actual implementation in classrooms, particularly within the Competence Based Education (CBE) framework is often insufficient. Chemel's study focused on impact of the five key formative assessment strategies on learners' achievement in Mathematics instruction in secondary schools: a case of Nandi County, Kenya. This might not be different from Kakamega County whereby KCSE performance in English has dipped from 2021 – 2025. More so, there is little empirical evidence on formative assessment practices in learning of English. Specifically, the study: established effects of formative assessment practices on learning of English in public senior schools in Kakamega County, Kenya. The key question this study aimed to answer was, which effects do formative assessment practices have on learning of English in public senior schools in Kakamega County, Kenya?

2.0 Methodology

The research adopted descriptive survey design. The study population was 153 principals, 251 teachers of English and 10,131 Grade Ten students. Simple random sampling method used to select 108 principals, 152 teachers and 370 students. The questionnaire for head teachers, teachers of English and students was used to collect primary data. Interview schedule collected secondary data from teachers of English. Quantitative data was transcribed and organized into categories, sub-categories and themes based on the study objectives. Face validity of research instruments was established by judgement of three experts in the Department of Educational Communication, Technology and Curriculum Studies, Maseno University. Reliability of instruments was established through pilot study on 5 principals, 14 teachers of English and 30

students. The computed coefficients of reliability were 0.85, 0.85 and 0.80 for questionnaires of principals, teachers and students respectively. The small scale preliminary study evaluated feasibility and improved the study design prior to performance of a full scale research. Data was analysed through descriptive statistics included frequencies, means and percentages. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Teachers of English suggested formative assessment practices in learning of English. The results summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of Formative Assessment Practices

n=152 Teachers of English

S/NO	Formative Assessment Practices	Number of Teachers (<i>f</i>)	%
a)	Oral questions	87	57.2
b)	Observation	89	58.6
c)	Written assignments	85	55.9
d)	Group work	86	56.6
e)	Project work	76	50
f)	Daily assignments	83	54.6
g)	Low stakes quizzes	89	58.6
h)	Diagnostic questions	78	51.3
i)	Example problem pairs	79	52
j)	Comment - only marking	83	54.6
k)	Metacognition	49	32.2
l)	Open ended questions	61	40.1
m)	Concept map	57	37.5
n)	Rubric	89	58.6
o)	Homework tasks	85	55.9
p)	Doodle it	78	51.3
q)	Text rendering	77	50.7
r)	Show of hands	91	59.9
s)	Think pair share	90	59.2
t)	Question generation	67	44.1
u)	Constructive feedback	63	41.4

Formative assessment practices are well embraced amongst teachers except use of open ended questions (40.1%), metacognition (32.2%), concept map (37.5%), question generation (44.1%) and constructive feedback (41.4%) were used sparingly because they recorded below average usage in the curriculum.

Teachers noted that formative assessment practices improve learning outcomes include oral questions (57.2%), observation (58.6%), written assignments (55.9%), group work (56.6%), project work (50%), daily assignments (54.6%), low stakes quizzes (58.6%), diagnostic questions (51.3%), exemplar problem pairs (52%), comment – only marking (54.6%), rubric (58.6%), homework tasks (55.9%), doodle it (51.3%), text rendering (50.7%), show of hands (59.9%) and think pair share (59.2%).

Indeed, 63% teachers who were interviewed asserted that increasing number of different types of formative assessment practices contribute to student learning in the classroom. On the contrary, 50.3% respondents did not take appropriate follow up actions due to their low understanding of formative assessment practices. Further, 37% of interviewed teachers indicated that they obtained formative assessment practices from neighboring schools and vendors.

Notably, teachers of English revealed types of formative assessment strategies used in the classrooms. The results are in Table 2.

Table 2: Variety of Formative Assessment Strategies
n=152 Teachers of English

S/NO.	Formative Assessment Strategies	Number of Teachers (<i>f</i>)	%
1.	One minute essays	81	53.3
2.	One minute fluency	79	52
3.	One sentence summaries	78	51.3
4.	Answering open ended questions	55	36.1
5.	Peer assessments	83	54.6
6.	Solving problems	59	38.3
7.	Questions and learning tasks	79	52
8.	Quick writes	77	50.7
9.	Self assessments	76	50
10.	Sentence prompts	83	54.6
11.	Students composed questions	61	40.1
12.	Teaching a friend	81	53.3
13.	Use choral responses	63	41.4
14.	Monitoring Comprehension	67	44.1
15.	Question answering	81	53.3
16.	Note making	83	54.6
17.	Asking students to write summaries	60	39.5
18.	Taking short quizzes for immediate feedback	62	40.8

Formative assessment strategies which were embraced by teachers include: one minute essays (53.3%), one minute fluency (52%), one sentence summaries (51.3%), peer assessments (54.6%), teaching a friend (53.3%), questions and learning tasks (52%), quick writes (50.7%), self assessments (50%), sentence prompts (54.6%), question answering (53.3%) and note making (54.6%). Although, formative assessment strategies which were least embraced by tutors include students composing questions (40.1%), use of chorus answers (41.4%), monitoring comprehension (44.1%), asking students to write summaries (39.5%), taking short quizzes for immediate feedback (40.8%), answering open ended questions (36.1%) and solving problems (38.3%). Their usage was unsatisfactory in the classrooms.

Specifically, formative assessment strategies have a positive impact on students' achievement whereby enable them acquire problem solving skills. They also increase learners' motivation, collaboration, participation, responses to questions and generally refined students' reasoning ability.

Teachers who were interviewed insinuated that formative assessment strategy: ease teachers' workload, cause enjoyment amongst teachers and students during classroom use, raise learner's attitude and interest and improve students' critical thinking. However, teachers increase number of formative assessment strategies in order to achieve positive learning outcomes. Also, teachers did little to take appropriate follow up actions due to their low understanding of formative assessment strategies use in the classrooms.

Formative assessment information was used to assess how teacher's current instructional strategies are working with their students. If there are students who are struggling, teachers may need to work individually with a student, present information other ways, or adapt their current instructional strategy. Students, who appeared to master the outcome being formatively assessed,

need to be further assessed or have learning opportunities planned that challenge them and are designed at their level of understanding. Teachers are also able to identify misunderstandings students may have and adapt their instruction accordingly (Natalie, 2018).

Students identified common formative assessment strategies used in learning of English. The results are summed up in Table 3.

Table 3: Formative Assessment Strategies for Students

n=370 Students

S/NO	Formative Assessment Strategies	Number of Students (<i>f</i>)	%
1.	Asking questions	171	46.2
2.	Checklist	193	52.2
3.	Process exemplars	197	53.2
4.	Self – marking quizzes	191	51.6

Students appreciated use of checklists (52.2%), process exemplars (53.2%), and self – marking quizzes (51.6%) nevertheless, asking questions (43%) strategy was unsatisfactorily used. Importantly, learning strategies are linked to the instruction and focus on discovering what students know and need to know about the end goal or outcome. Students use formative assessment information to determine what they need to do to achieve the learning outcomes set. They are given to students individually, as partners, in small groups, or as a class.

Teachers should not rely on one type of assessment strategy. Individual strategies allow teachers to get a clear picture of each student and their understanding of the concept or skill being measured. Group strategies provide teachers with general information about student learning that can be used to plan instruction. The information provided by formative assessment strategies help students reflect on current learning goals or set new goals (Natalie, 2018).

Teachers of English revealed challenges encountered in formative assessment practices in the classrooms. The results are found in Table 4.

Table 4: Challenges faced in Formative Assessment Practices

n=152 Teachers of English

S/NO	Statement	Number of Teachers of English (<i>f</i>)	%
1.	Inadequate resources such as technology, stationery and electricity	83	54.6
2.	Inability to read and write by some students	61	40.1
3.	Poor concentration during assessment due to tiredness	59	38.8
4.	Copying directly from passages	57	37.5
5.	Heavy workload that delays constructive feedback	87	57.2
6.	Students omitting words when writing	53	34.9
7.	Time constraints for individual and group formative assessment practices	84	55.3
8.	Large class sizes that delay constructive feedback	89	58.6
9.	Inadequate teacher training on formative assessment practices	81	53.3
10.	Structural barriers such as curriculum overload	87	57.2
11.	Failure to provide meaningful and timely	77	50.6

feedback, turning formative assessment into just another grading exercise.

Overwhelming challenges which hampered formative assessment practices, include: inadequate resources such as technology, stationery and electricity (54.6%), heavy workload that delays feedback (57.2%), time constraints for individual and group formative assessment practices (55.3%), large class sizes that delay constructive feedback (58.6%), inadequate teacher training on formative assessment practices (53.3%), structural barriers such as curriculum overload (57.2%) and failure to provide meaningful and timely feedback, turning formative assessment into just another grading exercise (50.6%).

Challenges which least affected students in formative assessment practices include: inability to read and write by some students (40.1%), poor concentration during assessment due to fatigue (38.8%), copying directly from passages (37.5%), students omitting words when writing (34.9%).

Particularly, teachers who were interviewed expressed that formative assessment practices were seen as time consuming due to a lot of time required for planning, observing, recording and providing feedback (59%), large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention and detailed feedback to every student (57%), overloaded curricula and the pressure to convert extensive content into standardized tests limit the time and flexibility needed for formative assessment practices (56%), the focus on standardized testing discouraged them from making optimal instructional decisions and pressured them to rush through content rather than focusing on deep learning strategies (57%), repetitive or poorly designed formative assessments led to students boredom and lack of motivation (51%), students lacked necessary knowledge or skills to effectively participate in or engage with formative assessment strategies such as providing self assessment or peer feedback (57%), lack of necessary resources such as ICT infrastructure created inequities and acted as a barrier to effective implementation of formative assessment practices in the classroom (53%).

Teachers noted common mistakes that students make during classroom reading and writing activities. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Mistakes in Classroom Reading and Writing Activities

n=152 Teachers

S/NO	Statement	Number of Principals (<i>f</i>)	%
a.	Students omit word(s) when reading and writing	54	35.5
b.	Students substitute words when reading and writing	53	34.9
c.	Articulate poorly when reading English words	51	33.5
d.	Adding words when reading and writing a text	45	29.6
e.	Misspelling words during writing exercises	44	28.9
f.	Students have challenges in tackling summary comprehension and paraphrasing	51	33.5

The results expose student's inadequacies in reading and writing skills: students omit word(s) when reading and writing (35.5%), substitute words when reading and writing (34.9%), articulated poorly when reading English words (33.5%), added words when reading and writing a text (29.6%), misspelled words during writing exercises (28.9%) and challenges in tackling summary comprehension and paraphrasing (33.5%). To greater extent, reading and writing skills share aspects like vocabulary, grammar and critical thinking. A robust reading is an essential

instrument for writing enhancement. A wide vocabulary range embellished with synonyms particularly useful in tackling summary comprehension and paraphrasing. All the more, exposure to diverse texts and reading comprehensions directly improve student’s writing quality and vocabulary. Students need to continuously build word bank so as to keep improving ability to write clearly and effectively. Even more so, reading instructions improves reading comprehension, learning of writing skills - such as grammar and spelling lessons – reinforcing reading skills.

Students provided self assessment report based on six learning styles. The results are in Table 6.

Table 6: Student’s Self Assessment Report

n=370 Students

Statements	Number of students (<i>f</i>)	%
Teachers provide plenty of in-class student discussions	203	54.9
Teachers correct students’ errors regularly	197	53.2
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners by using group discussions	207	55.9
Teachers provide a variety of interesting reading materials	209	56.5
Teachers mark assignments regularly	206	55.7
Teachers talk throughout the lesson as learners listen	179	48.4
Teachers monitor in class student discussions	201	54.3

The results revealed majority of teachers embraced learner centred method: They provided plenty of in-class student discussions (54.9%), correct students’ errors regularly (53.2%), encouraged students to be independent learners by using group discussions (55.9%), provided a variety of interesting reading materials (56.5%), monitored in class student discussions (54.3%) and marked assignments regularly (55.7%). Contrarily, teachers talked throughout the lesson as learners listen (48.4%) which least involves learners in the classroom.

4.0 Conclusion

Formative assessment practices are adequately embraced amongst teachers. Though, open ended questions, Metacognition, concept map, question generation and constructive feedback were used sparingly because they recorded below average usage in the curriculum. Increasing the number of different types of formative assessment practices and strategies contribute to student learning. Formative assessment strategies increased learners’ motivation, collaboration, participation, responses to the questions, refine students’ reasoning ability, ease teachers’ workload, raise learners’ attitude and interest, improve students’ critical thinking and acquisition of problem solving skills. Nonetheless, challenges encountered during formative assessment practices include heavy workload delays constructive feedback, time constraints hinder individual and group formative assessment practices, large class sizes that delay constructive feedback, inadequate teacher training on formative assessment practices, structural barriers such as curriculum overload and failure to provide meaningful and timely feedback turning formative assessment into just another grading exercise.

4.1 Policy Recommendation

From the findings of the study, it is recommended that teachers should: prepare formative assessment practices in order to address learners’ challenges as they arise, embrace provision of feedback as part of learning, attend in-service training on formative assessment practices and increase the number of different types of formative assessment practices in learning process.

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