Evaluation in order to encourage students into learning

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Abstract

The topic of this article is about the evaluation of foreign languages classes in a school environment. If there's a place when the evaluation is ubiquitous, that place is the educational institution where the evaluation is considered to be the central nerve of teaching and learning, which starts since the beginning of schooling. Therefore, every institution is obliged to evaluate its students in order to fulfill the objectives set from the Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports, as a report to the society, to justify its existence and to ensure the quality of teaching that it offers as an institution. We will discuss about a special evaluation, the one that helps students learn, an evaluation that is done during the teaching/learning process. This kind of evaluation does not create a hierarchy between the teacher and the students, and it does not only have the purpose to check the student, but also to help both student and teacher. So, to evaluate in order to help is a concept which has to be practiced by Albanian school teachers in order to make the student more responsible and more conscious for his abilities, and of course to make him be an active and more autonomous participant in the learning process.

Keywords: formative evaluation, learning, abilities, self-evaluation, dialog and help.

Introduction

The evaluation is becoming one of the major didactic concerns of foreign languages. The evaluation of knowledge, agility and phrase flexibility is a right of every individual who engages in the process of learning foreign languages. Banning evaluation from education, is like avoiding from one aspect its social function (society has the right to trust the diplomas that the educational institutions distribute) and from another aspect its pedagogic function.

If we take a look in our context, we see that the evaluation of the language skills is done in different methods from different teachers in different schools, making evaluation a heterogeneous process. Although, in the teaching strategy of foreign languages, we stress the application of the Common European Framework Reference principles, in practice the one that dominates is the traditional approach in developing the communication ability as well as in evaluating this ability and self evaluating.

Formative evaluation is crucial in identifying the student difficulties and problems and the gaps in the teaching process. It is also an indicator of the discrepancy between methods and strategies and the objectives of the teaching/learning project.

Formative evaluation has its own importance because it is a performance indicator of teacher's project and learning process. This type of evaluation enables us to adapt and specify methods and practices of teaching in order to achieve the best results. This kind of evaluation has to be at the same time fluent and impartial, in order to be more objective and transparent.

Self-evaluation is important in motivating the students to analyze in a critical way the level of their knowledge and their linguistic competences. It also enables the teachers to review and adjust the teaching methods.

Since in the teaching strategy is emphasized the curriculum development based on competence, it is also strictly required the adaptation of evaluation methodology based on the development of competencies.

The teacher proposes to its students such scenarios of evaluation which require them not only to show their knowledge, but also to use these scenarios as a means to reason, by helping the students learning new things. Knowledge serves and takes value when it's used properly in order to solve problems, take decisions and act in the right direction. In this situation, the student is very close to the competence issues and their acquisition in operational situations.

The difference in evaluation between yesterday and today is that for a long time the evaluation was focused on knowledge, while today, the evaluation process and methodology are focused on what the student knows and how this knowledge can be applied. In order to show the competence, the student is placed in evaluation situations where it is required to practice knowledge.

When the evaluation is focused in the student's competences, the latter has to face different situations which require necessary capacities and many sources of knowledge to be overcome, in the context of developing the competence.

In both cases the evaluation cannot avoid confronting situations, which have nothing in common with classical exams that measure knowledge. Actually, in the teaching profession, the evaluation of students is one of the most important competencies that must be owned from the teacher, who evaluate the progress of learning and the degree of acquisition of knowledge achieved by students.

In this framework, it seems reasonable for us to give some explanations related to the different types of evaluation, which are not easily distinguished by teachers in the early stages.

A diversity of theoretical definitions about evaluation

Many authors have written many books about the subject of evaluation. The chosen methodology to propose acceptable definitions by everyone is something that changes from one author to the other. Some start from theoretical postulates, while others propose definitions taken from concrete data and observable facts. De Vecchi (2004) for example, is part of the second category of authors. In his book[1] he talks about the concept of evaluation and explains that its meaning is not clear for many of us, including teachers and lecturers. While asking teachers to give some synonyms of the word "evaluation", he observes a diversity of propositions, even contradictions about its meaning. The author, is faced with these divergences and gives his own explanation by saying "*evaluation is very close to our values*". In other words, every one of us has an idea about what evaluation is and what form should it take. This idea and approach is emphasized also by Charles Hadji (1989). Actually, the author asks about the meaning of "what is to evaluate?" Instantly some different verbs are shown

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[1]De Vecchi G. (2004), Aidrer *les élèves à apprendre*, Paris.

as answers, verbs that determine the act of evaluation. His reflection points out three keywords through which he will make his propositions in order to specify the meaning of the concept "evaluate" while making the differences among the three dimensions below:

·   **Verify** *the presence of something expected (knowledge or competence);*
·   **Determine** *(an individual or a production related with a level or an objective);*
·   **Judge** *(the value of…)".*

After the submission of these 3 verbs he defines evaluation as "*an act by which we formulate a value judgment on a given object through the confrontation of two series of data related to each other.*" The data which are compared are on one hand an expected product and on the other hand information from the obtained real product.

Two types of evaluation: "traditional" and formative

In his text *The evaluation of the students,* Perrenoud (1998) sets two main logics for the evaluation of the students. The author firstly defines "traditional evaluation" always related to a norm or a model student. The object of this evaluation is to create a hierarchy: "*the students are compared, then they are classified in relation to a norm of excellence*".

This evaluation allows us to take a decision or to certify a level. Talbot (2009) continues his analysis by specifying this type of evaluation as a summary or aggregate. This type of evaluation concludes "*a learning phase, in the form of a verification of what is learned, while sanctioning the performance*", so this type of evaluation is the synonym of control, since its objective is to verify and prove the student's knowledge at the end of a learning situation.

Perrenoud (1998) opposes to this logic with an evaluation that helps the learning process, An evaluation which is displayed recently with the purpose of regulating and adapting the teaching process in the form of a differentiated pedagogy and an inherent individualization. The purpose of evaluation for this author is "*to distinguish between learning and reasoning in every student, in order to help him advance.*" In this way, formative evaluation is disconnected from the other types of evaluation because the regulations that the teacher proposes are made during the teaching process only.

The author insists that a connection must be done between the formative evaluation and the differentiated pedagogy, which requires "*other methods of teaching, schedule arrangements, organization of the group-class, so radical changes to the school structure.*" According to Talbot (2009) "*formative evaluation is a set of procedures mostly formalized from the teachers, who have ambition to adjust its pedagogical and didactic function in the function of the progress or the difficulties of learning*". Perrenoud (1998) states that formative evaluation faces innumerable difficulties in both teacher's minds and their practices. In fact, in order to hope that this evaluation is applied, the global vision of the school must be changed and the principles of equality and its functions should be stated. The author also explains the deficiency of formative evaluation models proposed by teachers.

Nowadays, everyone knows that formative evaluation accompanied with a differentiated pedagogy is no longer a choice for the teacher. It's all about a professional

competence of the teacher from which it should be benefited. The Competency Framework defines the ability *to evaluate the students* and clearly states: "*the teacher uses the evaluation results to adapt his teaching in the students' progress".*

Without calling exactly its formative evaluation, it seems that it's this type of evaluation which is applied during the teaching/learning process. Furthermore, another competence from the Reference Framework for the teachers' competencies establishes that the teacher must consider the diversity of the students, "*she knows how to differentiate her teaching based on the different needs and capabilities of the students in order that every one of them makes progress.*" In this way, the implementation of formative evaluation is a must for the teachers. Perrenoud (1998) concludes his work by citing that: "the teacher becomes the creator of the learning situations, carrier of the meaning and regulation". However, the implementation of formative evaluation may require that the student takes part in his own evaluation. So, it is important to explain the concept of self-evaluation and to create the necessary conditions for its application in the class.

Self-evaluation during formative evaluation

De Vecchi (2004) says that an evaluation that helps the students is an evaluation with already known and meaningful objectives already known by everyone, by teachers and students. However, it is important to specify that the way the teacher formulates the meaning of these objectives, is not the same with the one that students understand. The author says that at the moment the student reckons these objectives "*he must also possess the success criteria and its realization. It is fundamental that the student is given the opportunity to have a clear and coherent image.*" In this way, the student will easily achieve the targeted objective and he will be able to evaluate himself.

However, De Vecchi (2004) explains that, "*the student doesn't always have the meaning of his action if he hasn't taken part in the creation and edition of the approach that makes this possible for him.*" Actually, it is difficult to express the knowledge when it is not yet absorbed and not yet mastered by students. According to Gerard (2009), the criteria is defined like "*a view that helps to evaluate the object and is related to a quality of this object.*" These criterions allow us to decide correctly on how the student will be evaluated. In order for the evaluation to be more effective, these criterions must fulfill some conditions. They must be:

- *appropriate,* meaning to make possible the evaluation earned by taking the right decision;

-*independent,* meaning the success or failure of a criteria must not necessarily bring the failure or success of another;

-*scored,* because not all criterion have the same importance;

- *few in number,* because a large number of criterions makes it more difficult for the student to take everything into consideration. According to Roegiers (2004) criteria is an "*element to which we refer in order to give an evaluation, a judgment, a principle, a character, a model, a value.*" The author shares his numerous interests for the criterions, which are also the best estimates for the evaluation because they limit abusive successes and failures. Criterions also allow us to have a better evaluation of the

advantages of the students' products and to easier identify struggling students.
Hence, we understand that the clarification of evaluation criterions is a very good
formative tool when correcting. Odile and Veslin (1992) show the importance and
values of this aspect. Only by designing and clarifying the criterion, the student is
aware and knows what is required for him to accomplish the task, what he still needs
to do and what he is not capable of doing. But, for the teacher, the criterions are not
enough; they must be accompanied with indicators too.

The role of indicators

During an evaluation, the evaluation criteria can be valid or not based on indicators.
In fact Joro (2000) says that *"criterion is an element of differentiation and concretization
using the indicators, traces. Indicators have perceptible indexes which are condensed by
criteria."*
In this way, an indicator shows the qualitative or quantitative side of a criterion. It
also establishes what information should be gathered in order to give a proper
judgment according to these criteria. According to a European site,[2] the qualitative indicator
*"used in a descriptive manner, helps to distinguish the source of mistake and reflects the presence
or absence of an element."* Meanwhile the quantitative element *"gives the accuracy of the
success of the criterion. It is expressed by a number, a percentage or another measure"*.
Hence, after these explanations we are now able to better understand the notion of
the evaluation criterion and that of indicators.

The principles of self-evaluation

According to Rey et al (2003) *"asking students to clarify, predict, dissent or self-evaluate, allows
them to improve their metacognition knowledge and also encourages lifelong learning."*
Doyon and Juneau (1996) have defined self-evaluation as *"a set of operations related to the
evaluation approach (scope, size, judgment, decision), sorted in time and organized in a way to make
the student more and more independent in his learning."* According to these two authors when
self-evaluation is repeated regularly, it becomes an effective mean of a learning because
*"the student becomes aware of his student image". This introspective view makes him have faith in
his capacities and recon his strong and weak points and use the right tools to get to his objectives."*
So, an important attention is dedicated to the students' faith in order to achieve success.
Only in a trustworthy and tranquil atmosphere, an optimal learning can be achieved.
According to De Vecchi (2010): *"self-evaluation consists in an encouraged learning by the
teacher, while giving the student enough freedom in order for him to critically reflect on
himself"*. The author says that the student's vision in this form of evaluation is only
his self-evaluation, but also explains that *"the practice of metacognition lets you know
yourself, measure progress and also the gaps which must be filled."*
To teach the student to self-evaluate means to make him reflect on his capacities on a certain
field. In this way he can understand how much progress he has made but without making

[2]EUROPAID.(2012). *Méthodes d'évaluations, Bases méthodologiques : Processus d'évaluation (comment ?) Références
de jugement.*
http://ec.europa.eu/europaid/evaluation/methodology/methods/mth_ind_fr.htm

him too over confident. So does he still have to lean on his reflection in order to have a more detailed information from the teacher who supports and helps him on this difficult exercise?

Feedback from the teacher after a formative evaluation

In a magazine of the Quebec council, on the subject of distance teaching, Rodet (2010) writes a chapter called *"Reaction, a learning tool?"*, *"The reaction is a process that starts automatically after a disturbance."* The reaction is always expected after something, it cannot exist alone. According to this author, reaction "comes *as an answer to a student's deed; proposes a commented assessment; expresses a judgment on values, that must be reasoned and explained; has the purpose to enable the student to extend his knowledge and show him how he must achieve it.*" So, the feedback is a teacher's action that must be done after an exercise finished by the student. But, the teacher's action must not be random. It must be in the student's service in order for him to distinguish what he has already learned and to also understand his gaps. Furthermore, the author makes a comparison between spoken and written feedback. The latter is only addressed to the student which saves for a long time the teacher's notes. This will help him see the evolution and make him understand his progress while having these notes as a benchmark. In order to be effective, the reaction must consist in a complete and consistent information. Below, we will discuss the basic principles of feedback given by the teacher, after a completed task by the student.

Feedback, basic principles

From the OCDE[3]OCDE (2010), Comment apprend-on?:
 La recherche au servi
ce de la pratique.
 researchers' point of view: "*feedback is not a simple information that is given to the student on his performance, but it must orientate the actions of the student in a productive way.*
We consequently understand that teacher's feedback has a big heuristic value in the student's learning process. Scallon (2000) talks about feedback when he says "*every student has his strong and weak points*", but this is not an individual thought, because this saying can also serve in giving explanations on certain elements of further learning progress. This kind of feedback comprising certain information on students' capacity and teachers' explanations is referred by the author as "*explanatory feedback.*" The information given by the teacher must in first place emphasize the student's successful achievements and not be limited to a list of failures or mistakes of the student. This information would be even more valuable if it enables the students to understand the remaining path needed to be overwhelmed straight to their progress.
According to De Vecchi (2010): "*To evaluate without devaluating and to evaluate the competences*", "*the evaluation firstly must inform the student*". It can anticipate a change in the behavior or a remedial work". In terms of the teachers' information, evaluations must be motivating for the student, encouraging him while guiding him on his future work through concrete propositions for a potential improvement. From what is

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[3]OCDE (2010), Comment apprend-on?: La recherche au service de la pratique.

mentioned above, it is important to emphasize the fact that the teacher must go beyond just noticing the student's difficulties, he must also help him understand and solve them. The teacher's comments and information must be clear and done in a certain way that they'll have a positive impact on the student and on the learning process.

Conclusions

After lots of reading on the evaluation field and all the problems this field includes, in my multiyear experience as a French language teacher, I considered the practice and the implementation of formative evaluation which has a very positive impact on the students, to be of special interest, setting them in a working position and making them more independent on the realization of activities during the learning process.
The student must be aware of what the teacher knows and would even better understand what is left to be learnt in the future. This attitude is an indicator of their involvement in the learning process, in the setting of objectives and in the knowledge building.
In order to achieve this objective, the teacher must set evaluation criteria designed by the students themselves, for which the whole class must agree after a discussion phase among them. After accomplishing an assignment, teacher's information and comments must be clear and supporting the students in order to have a positive impact and help them in their progress by enforcing their sense of responsibility in the realization of the learning objectives.

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