ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING CRISES: AN ASSESSMENT FROM CHINESE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies in promoting English language learning from the perspective of Chinese university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The study had a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. A questionnaire was used to gather data from 1,601 EFL students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 34 participants. The results showed that Chinese university EFL students rarely saw their teachers performing AfL strategies in the classroom and that the AfL strategies were slightly important in promoting English language learning. There was a positive relationship between how students perceived

their teachers to perform AfL strategies and what these students perceived to be essential in promoting English language learning. This shows that students did not observe these strategies in practice, which may explain why they undervalued their importance.

Keywords: assessment for learning; English as a foreign language students; English language learning; higher education

Introduction

Assessment is crucial in monitoring student progress (Koda & Yamashita, 2018). It is also the framework or foundation for creating and developing instructional materials used to deliver lessons to learners. Additionally, Kane (2018) emphasised that educational assessments are meaningful and useful. An effective and efficient teaching and learning experience is reflected in the result of an assessment. Assessment permits the recognition of accomplishments and assists teachers and students in reflecting on and evaluating their performance and growth (Berry, 2008).

Assessment can be categorised into: Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of Learning (AoL) (Schellekens et al., 2021). AaL is a way of student learning from the feedback or result of their assessment. AfL is under formative assessment when it aims to enhance the learning process of the students and improve teaching strategies. AoL is usually under summative assessment because it measures student learning through graded activities. This paper focuses on AfL, particularly how it promotes English language learning in the tertiary level education in China.

The educational policy in China emphasised the importance of AfL integration in Chinese university EFL classrooms (Wu et al., 2021). In China, there is a growing recognition of the necessity of incorporating AfL practices in EFL classrooms to foster students' deeper learning abilities and critical thinking skills (Gan et al., 2017). Amoah and Yeboah (2021) found that the reason Chinese EFL students find English language learning difficult is mainly because of psychological factors like fear of being judged for their mistakes, shyness, low motivation and insufficient vocabulary. The introduction of AfL to EFL classrooms may address these problems because AfL can enhance students' interests, active participation, and responsibilities (Fan et al., 2016). Research on students' perspectives of AfL highlighted the importance of timely feedback, self-assessment, and confidence that emerge from students' active participation in the assessment process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

While China's educational policy has stressed the importance of AfL integration in Chinese university EFL classrooms, there has been a traditional inclination towards summative assessment, focusing on knowledge assessment and test preparation. In contrast, formative assessment, including AfL, is seen as responsible for assessment-related innovations and is recognised for its potential to foster students' deeper learning abilities and critical thinking skills. Despite the recognised benefits and policy emphasis on AfL, Black and Wiliam (1998) noted the need for more exploration into what happens between teachers and students inside the classroom.

This study examined how teachers implemented AfL strategies from the perspective of Chinese university EFL students. The research questions are:

(1) How often do Chinese university EFL students perceive their teachers to perform AfL strategies such as Communicating Learning and Criteria (CLaC), Questioning and Classroom Discussion (QaCD), Teacher Feedback (TeFe), and Peer-and Self-Assessment (PaSA) in their English classes?
(2) What do these Chinese EFL students perceive to be essential among the different AfL strategies in promoting English language learning?
(3) Is there a relationship between how often Chinese university EFL students perceived their teachers to perform AfL strategies and what these EFL students perceived to be essential in promoting English language learning?

Literature Review

Assessment of Learning, Assessment for Learning, and Assessment as Learning

Assessment gives students, teachers, parents, and administrators the real picture of how learning takes place inside the classrooms (Dial, 2016). Earl (2003) argues that assessment has many purposes.

AoL is the planned, structured, and systematic collection of data to understand students' comprehension, capabilities, and points for improvement (Berry, 2008). It is the type of assessment that checks student's understanding minute by minute (Britton, 2021). AoL is valuable, and Earl (2003) emphasises the contribution of AfL and AaL as part of a preferred future. As Earl and Katz (2026) said, AaL emphasises the active role of students as a bridge that shows the relationship between learning and assessment It is an avenue for students to assess themselves and gives feedback about their performance to help teachers make adjustments on the lessons (Yan & Boud, 2021). Thus, Lam (2018) considers AaL as a part of AfL through the process of self-reflection. Nonetheless, AaL tends to be more private in the assessment process focusing on the learner's self-realisation, while AfL tends to be public in giving assessment from multiple sources of feedback.

AfL, the focus of this paper, has gained popularity among countries like Canada, Australia, Israel, Ireland, Norway, and the United States because of its positive contribution to their educational system. Volante et al. (2024) state that AfL is not just an assessment method but it can be used as a method of teaching.

Student Assessment in China

According to Brown and Gao (2015), the standardised examinations usually conducted at the end of middle and senior high school are important in China. Because of large classroom population and the pressure to pass the high-stake examinations, China's educational system tends to emphasise strict classroom demonstration, student evaluation, specific curriculum focused on students' need, rote teaching and learning process to ensure accurate knowledge is handed down to students. In a bid to transcend an exclusively exam-based culture, the government of China implemented "*suzhi* education" during the 1990s with a view to promoting

students' all-around development. This development resulted in the formulation of the *suzhi* which can be literally translated as a person's holistic quality (Lou & Chan, 2023).

However, the implementation of *suzhi* assessment holistically has not been smooth. This has entailed various challenges, one of which is assessment malpractices. According to Chen (2023), assessment malpractices damage the validity of the grading process. First, self- and peer-assessments can be highly unreliable. Second, educators and schools sometimes inflate grades artificially just to protect their reputations. Though Chinese recent educational policy highlights AfL, there is still a firm tradition for summative AoL, especially for the high-stakes *Gaokao* (national college entrance examination) system (Chen, 2023).

Method of the Study

Research Design

This research endeavour made use of sequential explanatory mixed methods design to address the research questions. Particularly, the researchers started by collecting quantitative data which was followed by qualitative data collection (Subedi, 2016). The results of the quantitative phase served as the springboard in the qualitative phase to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the perceptions of EFL learners in China (Doyle et al., 2016; McKim, 2017).

Study Site and Participants

There were two groups of participants in the study. The questionnaire respondents were 1,601 EFL students (645 males and 956 females) from three universities in China where some of the researchers were working at the time of the study, were selected via convenience sampling.

The interview participants were 34 students divided into five focus groups with six to eight members each, an ideal number of members according to Del Rio-Roberts (2011). Five focus groups are enough to understand complex and conceptual issues and to achieve meaning saturation (Hennink et al., 2019). Following Frechette et al. (2020), the selection criteria for the purposeful sampling of the interview participants were:

(1) participated in the quantitative data collection;
(2) enrolled in general English or English major courses at the time of data gathering; and
(3) must be in the university for at least one semester.

Gender, age and years of study were not exclusion criteria.

Instrumentation

The first tool utilised was a questionnaire adapted from Wu (2020). It comprised a consent form and a 24-item questionnaire on AfL strategies of university teachers in

their English language classes. The questionnaire examined the use of four AfL strategies, namely, CLaC (5 items), QaCD (5 items), TeFe (6 items), and PaSA (8 items). The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale to elicit how frequent (always, often, rarely, and never) and how essential (extremely important, important, slightly important, and unimportant) the strategies in promoting English language learning were. The questionnaire underwent validation from an English language expert with a doctorate degree and was translated into Chinese with the help of two Chinese-English translators to ensure that the respondents would fully comprehend the content of the questionnaire. Afterwards, pilot testing was done with 64 university students in another Chinese university. These students were not included in the actual study. The Cronbach's Alpha of 0.996 showed the high reliability of the questionnaire.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview guide which was crafted by the researchers based on the highest and lowest results in the quantitative data. The researchers were able to compose 11 questions on the frequency of their teachers performing AfL strategies in their English language classes. There were 11 questions on what strategies the students perceived to be essential in promoting English language learning.

Data Gathering Procedure

The respondents in this study had been asked for their consent before the gathering of data. Furthermore, the researchers assured the respondents that ethical research practices will be observed in the conduct of the study and that the information gathered will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

First, consent letters were sent with the online questionnaire to the respondents using WeChat Form to Chinese universities. After three weeks, 1,601 respondents from three universities were collected. The questionnaire also provided an option where students could send their emails if they were interested in joining Focus Group Discussions to be conducted online. Fortunately, 34 participants responded to the invitations. After the pilot testing with six students as respondents, four other focus groups were created with six to eight members as suggested by Del Rio-Roberts (2011). After data transcription, the researchers sent the transcripts back to the interviewees in the focus group discussions for member validation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). However, there was no feedback from the students anymore, so the data analysis ensued.

Data Analysis

The researchers utilised descriptive statistics to determine how frequent and how essential the strategies in promoting English language learning were. Some steps from Sundler et al. (2019)'s thematic analysis were adopted to add depth to the quantitative findings. Through descriptive narrative and supporting quotes, the meanings underlying participants' experiences were brought to the surface and expressed in clear and insightful prose.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the frequencies, correlation results and interpretation of CLaC as part of AfL strategies in promoting English language learning. Overall, the results revealed that Chinese university EFL students rarely saw their teachers performing CLaC as part of AfL strategies in promoting English language learning. Specifically, Chinese university EFL students thought that their teacher rarely involved them in setting goals, rarely used examples to help them understand what constitutes great quality. They also rarely helped students understand success criteria by providing detailed descriptions. The students reported that their teachers rarely communicated goals of the lesson to them in easily understood ways. Their teachers are rarely defined the goals of a lesson or a series of lessons based on students' previous learning. Because Chinese university EFL students rarely saw CLaC-AfL as an AfL learning strategy applied in their class, they believe that it is slightly important. When asked why they answered "rarely", interviewee 8 said, "Teachers often skip detailed descriptions of lessons, finding it impractical to involve every student in goal-setting."

Table 1

Communicating Learning and Criteria - AfL Strategies (CLaC-AfL)

CLaC-AfL Strategies	Frequency	SD	Interpretation	Importance	SD	Interpretation	Correlation	Interpretation
1. My teacher uses examples to help me understand what constitutes great quality.	2.11	1.08	Rarely	2.09	1.11	Slightly Important	0.929	Positive
2. My teacher defines the goals of a lesson or a series of lessons based on my previous learning.	2.00	1.10	Rarely	2.06	1.13	Slightly Important	0.917	Positive
3. My teacher helps me understand success criteria by providing detailed descriptions.	2.06	1.08	Rarely	2.06	1.10	Slightly Important	0.929	Positive
4. My teacher involves me in setting goals.	2.25	1.07	Rarely	2.20	1.09	Slightly Important	0.891	Positive
5. My teacher communicates goals of the lesson to me in ways I understand.	2.04	1.09	Rarely	2.04	1.12	Slightly Important	0.932	Positive
Overall mean and correlation	2.09	1.08	Rarely	2.09	1.11	Slightly Important	0.920	Positive

**Significant at $p \leq 0.05$*

Also, Chinese university EFL students perceived that CLaC, were slightly important in promoting English language learning. The students added that several goal-setting and success-criteria practices were slightly important. These included involving them in setting goals and using examples to help them understand what constitutes high-quality work. They also considered defining the goals of a lesson or a series of lessons based on their previous learning to be slightly important. In addition, students regarded helping them understand success criteria through detailed descriptions as slightly important. Finally, they viewed communicating lesson goals in ways they could understand as slightly important. During the focus group discussions, Interviewees 1, 5, and 27 mentioned that "studying is more important" than communicating lesson goals and understanding success criteria, so they think it is "slightly important." Furthermore, Interviewees 10, 22, and 23 think that "The teacher can directly present the goals in PowerPoint Presentations or verbally express them" without explaining them in detail because communicating learning and criteria is a "waste of time" according to Interviewee 9.

As indicated in Table 1, Chinese university EFL students' perceptions of how frequently instructors perform CLaC as an AfL strategy positively correlated with their perceptions of essential English language learning practices, r = .920. Strong positive correlations were also observed when examining individual CLaC-AfL strategies, specifically Strategy 5 (r = .932), Strategy 3 (r = .929), Strategy 1 (r = .929), Strategy 2 (r = .917), and Strategy 4 (r = .891). This means that EFL students thought that CLaC as part of AfL strategies were slightly important because they rarely saw their teachers perform them.

Students did not see the pedagogical importance of presenting lesson objectives in the classroom because of several factors. First, limited time in the classroom. They wanted to immediately begin with the discussions because they thought that discussions should be the more substantial part of the class. Students shared that there were other ways in which teachers could present lesson objectives. Interviewee 13 stated that the teacher could just send the lesson objectives for the week via WeChat or QQ group to be reiterated briefly in class. But then, goals are important in the classroom because these are the only way a teacher can be convinced that he/she has effectively delivered the lessons in the class through the strategies he/she has chosen (Mattiev, 2022). Interviewee 30 said that goals help students "better understand what they are going to learn." Interviewee 9 believed that goals are like "backbones which serve as a guide for the teachers and students in the classrooms".

Table 2 presents the frequencies, correlation results and interpretation of QaCD as part of AfL strategies in promoting English language learning. The Chinese university EFL students thought that their teachers rarely performed QaCD as part of AfL strategies. To be specific, Chinese university EFL students perceived that their teachers rarely asked open-ended questions, preferring close-ended questions instead during lessons.

Teachers also rarely asked students to explain their answers often accepting simple one-word responses instead. Teachers also rarely encouraged students and

their peers to build on each other's answers; they rarely gave waiting time to encourage students to think before responding to questions and/or discussions, lastly they rarely used follow-up questions to further enrich the discussion during lessons.

The researchers have found out several reasons why students chose "rarely" when asked about the application of QaCD strategies. Some interviewees like Interviewees 78, and 9 said, that "Teachers usually ask only yes/no questions". On the other hand, Interviewee 5 said, The teachers rarely ask questions because there are about 130 students in our class".

Table 2

Questioning and Classroom Discussion - AfL Strategies (QaCD- AfL Strategies)

QaCD-AfL Strategies	Frequency	SD	Interpretation	Importance	SD	Interpretation	Correlation	Interpretation
1. My teacher asks me to explain my answer rather than merely give one-word answers.	2.11	1.09	Rarely	2.10	1.11	Slightly Important	.925	Positive
2. My teacher gives waiting time deliberately to encourage me to think before responding to questions and/or discussions.	2.09	1.10	Rarely	2.08	1.13	Slightly Important	0.926	Positive
3. My teacher uses follow-up questions to turn questioning into discussion during lessons.	2.09	1.10	Rarely	2.08	1.12	Slightly Important	0.925	Positive
4. My teacher asks open-ended questions more than close-ended questions during lessons.	2.12	1.08	Rarely	2.12	1.11	Slightly Important	0.918	Positive
5. My teacher encourages me and my peers to build on each other's answers.	2.11	1.09	Rarely	2.10	1.12	Slightly Important	0.921	Positive
Overall Mean and correlation	2.10	1.09	Rarely	2.10	1.12	Slightly Important	0.923	Positive

**Significant at $p \leq 0.05$*

Chinese university EFL students perceived that QaCD was slightly important in promoting English language learning. The students also mentioned several questioning practices as slightly important. These included being asked open-ended questions rather than closed-ended questions during lessons. They also regarded being encouraged to build on their peers' answers as slightly important. In addition,

students considered being asked to explain their answers instead of merely giving one-word responses to be slightly important. They likewise viewed the deliberate use of waiting time to encourage thinking before responding to questions or discussions as slightly important. Finally, they regarded the use of follow-up questions to turn questioning into discussion during lessons as slightly important. In spite of students' thinking that these strategies were slightly important, there were some who said that waiting time before answering the teacher's question is "very important". This is because they need time "to organise the language before answering questions. Furthermore, Interviewee 23 said, "I have to analyse the question, think about the way to solve the problem, and organise the language to express it, which requires a certain amount of time."

Table 2 reveals a strong, positive correlation between Chinese university EFL students' perception of their instructors' implementation of QaCD as an AfL strategy and their perception of what is essential for English language learning, $r = .923$, $p < .05$. At the item level, consistently high, positive correlations were observed between perceived frequency and importance across all specific strategies: Strategy 2 ($r = .926$, $p < .05$), Strategy 1 ($r = .925$, $p < .05$), Strategy 3 ($r = .925$, $p < .05$), Strategy 5 ($r = .921$, $p < .05$), and Strategy 4 ($r = .918$, $p < .05$).

Reflecting the positive correlation in the data, because students perceived classroom questioning as "rare", they correspondingly rated its overall value as only "slightly important". Interviewee 4 thought that this is because "there would be no more time for discussions if a teacher asks a question in class and waits for students to answer for more than 3 minutes". This shows that students prefer the teacher to conduct lectures rather than ask questions in between discussion. They prefer a traditional classroom format where teachers do most of the talking while learners passively listen. However, for Shanmugavelu et al. (2020), asking questions in class is the most effective way to involve students. It helps the teacher assess what students already know about the lesson, and it gives students an opportunity to share their thoughts. Thus, a classroom with a proper balance of a teacher doing lecture while asking students questions during the discussion is more ideal.

Table 3 presents the frequencies, correlation results and interpretation of TeFe as part of AfL strategies in promoting English language learning. In general, Chinese university EFL students thought that their teachers rarely performed TeFe as part of AfL strategies in promoting English language learning. In particular, Chinese university EFL students perceived that their teachers rarely gave students opportunities to discuss feedback, rarely guided them how to revise their work according to the teachers' feedback, rarely specified their strengths, rarely specified areas for remediation, rarely specified how to achieve their learning goals, and rarely provided immediate feedback during lessons.

According to Interviewees 1, 2, and 16, they answered "rarely" because they do not consider "good" or "excellent" as immediate feedback. On top of that, Interviewees 2 and 20 said that they wanted to have "specific" comments, while Interviewee 4 said "They wanted the teacher to evaluate the content and offer some constructive suggestions for them to make progress". Most of the time, according to Interviewee 2, students get "collective feedback." Interviewee 5 thought that the

reason teachers “rarely” give individual feedback is “Teachers' teaching tasks are very heavy, and students' curriculum arrangements are very tense”.

Table 3

Teacher Feedback - AfL Strategies (TeFe- AfL Strategies)

TeFe - AfL Strategies	Frequency	SD	Interpretation	Importance	SD	Interpretation	Correlation	Interpretation
1. The feedback my teacher gives me specifies areas for remediation.	2.11	1.08	Rarely	2.10	1.12	Slightly Important	0.905	Positive
2. The feedback my teacher gives me specifies how to achieve my learning goals.	2.11	1.08	Rarely	2.09	1.11	Slightly Important	0.914	Positive
3. The feedback my teacher gives me specifies my strengths.	2.17	1.06	Rarely	2.10	1.09	Slightly Important	0.888	Positive
4. My teacher gives me opportunities to discuss with him/her about his/her feedback.	2.18	1.07	Rarely	2.14	1.09	Slightly Important	0.891	Positive
5. My teacher guides me how to revise my work according to his/her feedback.	2.18	1.07	Rarely	2.13	1.09	Slightly Important	0.889	Positive
6. My teacher provides immediate feedback to me during lessons.	2.09	1.09	Rarely	2.09	1.11	Slightly Important	0.923	Positive
Overall Mean and correlation	2.14	1.08	Rarely	2.11	1.10	Slightly Important	0.902	Positive

*Significant at $p \leq 0.05$

To Chinese university EFL students, TeFe was slightly important in promoting English language learning. Also, the students pinpointed several practices as slightly important. These included being given opportunities to discuss feedback with teachers. They also considered guidance on revising their work according to teachers’ feedback to be slightly important. In addition, students regarded the specification of areas requiring remediation as slightly important. They likewise viewed the identification of their strengths as slightly important. Furthermore, students considered the specification of how to achieve their learning goals to be slightly important. Finally, they regarded the provision of immediate feedback during lessons as slightly important.

The interviews revealed several reasons why respondents consider teacher feedback as slightly important in class. Interviewee 2 believed that feedback must be

given in private to the concerned students. According to him, “the teacher needs to consider some people's emotions, and negative feedback should not be given in public like in the classroom.” There is also limited time in the classroom which is why Interviewees 1, 3, and 15 felt like the teachers’ feedback may not be the most important thing to do in class. They explained that teachers would often tell the class that students can just look for their teacher after class or contact them via QQ if they have questions about their performance. On the contrary, students do not usually do so because either students believe that their teachers are busy or that the teachers’ opinions are already correct, that is why they would not like to further discuss their teachers’ feedback. Thus, Interviewee 5 seldom discussed the feedback he received from his teachers because he did not want to interrupt them.

Table 3 shows a significant, positive correlation between Chinese university EFL students’ perception of their instructors' implementation of TeFe as an AfL strategy and their perception of what is essential for English language learning, $r = .902$, $p < .05$. At the item level, consistently high, positive correlations were observed between perceived frequency and importance across all strategies: Strategy 6 ($r = .923$), Strategy 2 ($r = .914$), Strategy 1 ($r = .905$), Strategy 4 ($r = .891$), Strategy 5 ($r = .889$), and Strategy 3 ($r = .888$). This strong relationship aligns with the descriptive findings; because instructors rarely provided these Teacher Feedback strategies, students correspondingly perceived them as only “slightly important”. Although if expressed negatively, teachers’ comments may inhibit rather than encourage their language learning (Wang et al., 2018), students benefit most when they process such feedback constructively. Klimova (2015) asserted that feedback remains an essential classroom strategy because it will help improve the teaching and learning process of both the learners and educators.

Table 4 presents the frequencies, correlation results and interpretation of PaSA as part of AfL strategies in promoting English language learning. Overall, Chinese university EFL students felt that their teachers rarely used PaSA strategies (M=2.16). Across the individual items, students reported that their teachers rarely provided guidance to help them give feedback to peers or assess their own work. Students also observed that teachers rarely gave them opportunities to comment on their own work or on one another's. Furthermore, teachers also rarely taught students how to interpret peer feedback and they rarely fostered a safe atmosphere for giving and receiving feedback. Lastly, teachers rarely encouraged pair or group work to exchange feedback, or prompted reflection on what students had learned).

Interviewees 4 and 11 felt PaSA was rarely applied, and Interviewee 3 admitted to never having experienced it. During the focus group discussions, students attributed this mainly to large class sizes and limited contact hours. Interviewee 31 noted that these constraints stood in the way of implementation, while Interviewee 17 explained that teachers spent most of the time lecturing as students listened. Interviewee 4 had experienced PaSA, but only once or twice a semester.

Table 4

Peer- and Self- Assessment - AfL Strategies (PaSA- AfL Strategies)

PaSA - AfL Strategies	Frequency	SD	Interpretation	Importance	SD	Interpretation	Correlation	Interpretation
1. My teacher teaches me how to receive and interpret feedback received from my peers.	2.16	1.08	Rarely	2.15	1.10	Slightly Important	0.920	Positive
2. My teacher provides guidance to help me give feedback to my peers.	2.18	1.08	Rarely	2.15	1.09	Slightly Important	0.907	Positive
3. My teacher provides guidance to help me assess my own work.	2.18	1.07	Rarely	2.17	1.09	Slightly Important	0.894	Positive
4. My teacher gives me opportunities to comment on my own work during lessons.	2.17	1.07	Rarely	2.15	1.09	Slightly Important	0.905	Positive
5. My teacher gives me and my peers opportunities to comment on one another's work.	2.17	1.07	Rarely	2.16	1.10	Slightly Important	0.908	Positive
6. My teacher encourages me to reflect on what I have learned during lessons	2.11	1.08	Rarely	2.10	1.10	Slightly Important	0.917	Positive
7. My teacher encourages me and my peers to work together in pairs or groups to facilitate exchange of peer feedback.	2.13	1.08	Rarely	2.13	1.09	Slightly Important	0.910	Positive
8. My teacher deliberately develops an atmosphere in which I feel safe and comfortable about giving feedback to and receiving feedback from my peers	2.14	1.09	Rarely	2.13	1.10	Slightly Important	0.909	Positive
Overall Mean and correlation	2.16	1.08	Rarely	2.14	1.10	Slightly Important	0.909	Positive

**Significant at $p \leq 0.05$*

Chinese university EFL students perceived that PaSA was slightly important in promoting English language learning. The students noted that several practices were slightly important. These included being provided with guidance to help them assess their own work. They also included opportunities for students and their peers to comment on one another's work. Students considered it slightly important to be

taught how to receive and interpret feedback from their peers. They also valued guidance on how to provide feedback to peers. In addition, students regarded opportunities to comment on their own work during lessons as slightly important. They also viewed working together in pairs or groups to facilitate the exchange of peer feedback as slightly important. Furthermore, students considered it slightly important to develop an atmosphere in which they felt safe and comfortable giving and receiving peer feedback. Finally, they regarded being encouraged to reflect on what they had learned during lessons as slightly important.

Students rated peer- and self-assessment as only "slightly important." This low valuation stems from several key challenges. First, “teachers do not give any guidance to help them assess themselves and their peers” according to Interviewee 1. Next, Interviewee 4 preferred the teachers to assess and give comments about their performance directly because they “can better understand what [their] shortcomings [are],” whereas Interviewee 4 saw it as a “difficult task” because “they may be more inclined to take care of themselves than other people’s feelings.” On one hand, Interviewees 22 and 23 expressed their discomfort in giving comments about their performance and that Interviewee G “does not like to judge myself [himself] in front of others”. On the other hand, Interviewee 10 explicated that receiving an evaluation from others “does not play much role in my [their] study’ because assessments among students are not necessarily objective and fair.” Finally, Interviewee 12 believe that “students who are not familiar with others may be shy about giving others honest and direct assessments.”

As shown in Table 4, the results indicate a significant, positive correlation between Chinese university EFL students’ perception of their instructors' implementation of PaSA as an AfL strategy and their perception of what is essential for English language learning, $r = .909$, $p < .05$. At the item level, consistently high, positive correlations were observed between perceived frequency and importance across all specific strategies: Strategy 1 ($r = .920$), Strategy 6 ($r = .920$), Strategy 8 ($r = .920$), Strategy 7 ($r = .920$), Strategy 5 ($r = .908$), Strategy 2 ($r = .907$), Strategy 4 ($r = .905$), and Strategy 3 ($r = .894$). This denotes that students rarely saw their teachers perform PaSA as part of AfL strategies. Interviewees 4 and 11 believed that peer and self-assessment strategies were rarely applied leading them to perceive these strategies as only slightly important in promoting English language learning. Albeit the results, Al-Rashidi et al. (2022) have found out that peer and self-assessment is an effective tool in teaching and learning writing and speaking skills in EFL classes.

The study found that Chinese university EFL students rarely experience AfL strategies in their classrooms and, consequently, perceive these practices as only slightly important for promoting English language learning. A significant positive correlation exists between the frequency with which these strategies are performed and their perceived value, suggesting that students undervalue AfL precisely because they lack exposure to it in practice.

Conclusion

The on AfL strategies in promoting English language learning showed that there are relationships between perceived frequency and perceived importance of AfL strategies from the perspectives of Chinese university EFL students.

The investigation yielded three main findings First, Chinese university EFL students reported that their teachers rarely performed any of the assessed AfL strategies (CLaC, QaCD, TeFe, and PaSA) in their classes. Second, these students perceived the AfL strategies as only slightly important in promoting English language learning. Third, there was a positive relationship between how often students perceived their teachers to perform AfL strategies and what they perceived to be essential.

The combination of low implementation frequency and low perceived importance suggests several crucial implications. Most significantly, the positive correlation implies that students may undervalue the importance of these strategies precisely because they rarely observed them being put into practice. Consequently, students may not be fully benefitting from potentially effective formative assessment practices. This situation is likely rooted in the traditional inclination towards summative assessment in China, which influences both the infrequent use of formative AfL by instructors and the students' lower valuation of these approaches. Ultimately, this indicates a need for interventions to bridge the gap between the potential of AfL and students' current experiences and perceptions to significantly enhance English language learning effectiveness in Chinese universities.

Since the study centred on students’ perceptions of teacher behaviour, one limitation is the lack of direct data from instructors or classroom observations to confirm the reported frequency of AfL use. To address these limitations, future research should incorporate more comprehensive data sources: (1) More surveys should be conducted across Chinese universities that involve both teachers and students to gain a clearer, multi-faceted picture of whether AfL strategies are actually observed in English language classes; and (2) A series of classroom observations could be implemented to provide direct evidence concerning what takes place during English language lessons. Based on the findings that AfL strategies are rarely performed and require pedagogical changes, two key areas for further research are recommended. Exploring institutional support for AfL implementation could be done. Other researchers might explore how university administrators support faculty members in their implementation of AfL strategies.

This research is significant because fostering the necessary pedagogical shift such as moving AfL from an additional strategy to a "primary method of teaching" requires substantial institutional backing, comprehensive professional development, and support mechanisms for instructors. Research could focus on interventions aimed at raising students' awareness of the value and practical application of AfL strategies on their learning. This is significant because students will continue to undervalue AfL if students do not understand how AfL contributes to their learning beyond mere grading. Active education on the benefits of timely feedback, self-assessment, and active participation is necessary to maximise the intended effects of AfL.

AfL strategies being infrequently used by teachers creates a perception deficit among Chinese university EFL students, leading them to undervalue these essential formative practices. Therefore, enhancing English language learning requires a concerted effort to increase the practical implementation of AfL strategies and simultaneously educate students on their pedagogical value.

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