Exploring the Role of Formative Assessment in Fostering Learner Autonomy: A Qualitative Study of Secondary English Classrooms in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how formative assessment contributes to the development of learner autonomy in secondary-level English language learners in Punjab, Pakistan. Traditional assessment techniques frequently fall short of fostering the growth of self-directed learners. The research examines how formative evaluation techniques, such as feedback, peer evaluation, and self-assessment, help learners develop accountability, metacognitive awareness, and motivation. The data was obtained by interviewing English language instructors and students from public high schools in three districts using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and student versions of the Autonomous Learner Model Inventory (ALMI). Thematic analysis of the data revealed that formative assessment promotes autonomy by promoting thoughtful thinking, goal-setting, and self-regulation. Additionally, the results reveal that systemic issues like an excessive curriculum, an exam-oriented culture, and inadequate teacher preparation prevent the complete implementation of formative evaluation, even though teachers are aware of its potential. The study comes to conclusion that successful formative assessment integration necessitates a change in assessment paradigm, focused policy support, and continuous professional development. Revisions to curriculum frameworks to highlight formative methodology, training teachers in autonomy-oriented assessment methods, and the integration of reflective activities into classroom schedules are all suggestions. This study contributes to both the assessment and autonomy literature and gives educators and policymakers in Pakistan a useful framework for improving learner-centered approach in English language instruction.

Keywords: formative assessment, learner autonomy, qualitative research, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Promoting learner autonomy has become a cornerstone of the development of independent, reflective, and lifelong learners in the changing environment of 21st-century education (Benson, 2011; Little, 2007). The ability of students to take control of their learning by establishing goals, choosing strategies, tracking progress, and analyzing results is known as learner autonomy (Holoec,1981). The ability of learners to act autonomously is no longer seen as an optional characteristic but as a crucial educational goal (Tassinari, 2012) as worldwide education systems transition to more student-centered paradigms. When viewed from this perspective, formative assessment becomes clear to be a teaching method that promotes self-directed learning and increases student independence rather than just an assessment instrument.

Ongoing procedures that offer feedback to enhance teaching and learning are referred to as formative assessment, often known as assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Formative assessment in contrast to summative assessment, which evaluates learning outcomes at the conclusion of an instructional period, emphasizes he learning process itself and helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as make educated choices about their learning pathways (Sadler, 1989; Andrade & Cizek, 2010). In order to learn independently, students must participate in metacognitive processes that include self-assessment, peer feedback, portfolios, and discussions with their instructors (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). As a result, learner autonomy and formative assessment are fundamentally connected, with the latter serving as the framework for the former's growth and development.

In the Pakistan, especially in secondary schools of Punjab, educational methods are heavily geared toward exams, with an emphasis on rote learning and summative assessment (Ahmed, 2012; Rehman et al., 2020). Students have little opportunity to consider their learning or acquire the abilities they need to be independent under the existing assessment system (Asher, Shahzadi, ul Nisa, & Nasim, 2025). In spite of national educational guidelines promoting more student-centred methods (Government of Pakistan, 2017), classroom realities frequently adhere to outdated, teacher-centred models (Asher, Farid, & Shahzadi, 2025). A rigid assessment system has little opportunity to consider their learning or acquire the abilities they need to be independent under the existing assessment system. In spite of national educational guidelines promoting more student-centred methods (Government of Pakistan, 2017), classroom realities frequently adhere to outdated, teacher-centred models. A rigid assessment system that undermines learner agency has a particularly detrimental impact on English language courses, which should ideally promote critical thinking communication, and independent learning (Rahman, 2004). Furthermore, instructors are crucial in putting into practice formative assessment techniques that encourage independence. . (However, whether and how these behaviours are implemented depend heavily on their beliefs, education, and situational challenges (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). As expressed by many Pakistani educators, limitations on time, lack of formative assessment training, and potential resistance to change from an institution also are barriers to implementing the behaviour (Afzal & Harun, 2019).) Therefore, the local educational environment has not yet fully realized the potential of formative evaluation to foster learner independence.

By exploring how secondary English teachers in Punjab view and use formative assessment, and how these strategies affect the growth of student autonomy, this study attempts to fill this gap(Asher, Farid, & Shahzadi, 2025). This study seeks to provide nuanced insights into the circumstances, difficulties, and opportunities of integrating assessment for learning into the framework of autonomous language learning by qualitatively examining these dynamics. It is anticipated that the results would influence teacher training, curriculum development, and educational policy, fostering a more learner-centred and autonomy-supportive atmosphere in Pakistan's secondary education system (Asher, Shahzadi, ul Nisa, & Nasim, 2025).

In the last three decades, the notion of learner independence has become a major topic in educational discussions. Learner autonomy, which Holec (1981) originally defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning," includes talents such as goal-setting, resource management, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Little (1991) also noted that autonomy entails both a cognitive and emotional dedication to learning, which is frequently fostered in helpful settings.

Learner autonomy is frequently linked to constructivist learning theories, notably Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which contends that students acquire more advanced cognitive abilities via social interaction. This supports the notion that autonomy is cultivated in socially and pedagogically supportive environments rather than in isolation (Benson, 2013). This

entails providing learners with opportunities to negotiate meaning, think about their performance, and make wise decisions in language education (Tassinari, 2012). In European language education policies, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), autonomy has been widely promoted, and it is becoming more and more seen as an educational goal in Asia, including Pakistan (Shamim & Kuchah, 2016). Nevertheless, learner autonomy remains a complicated and culturally specific concept, with execution difficulties that differ depending on the environment (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

The term "assessment for learning" is frequently used to describe formative assessment, which entails utilizing assessment data to offer feedback and modify instruction in order to enhance student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Formative assessment is continuous, diagnostic, and intrinsically integrated into the teaching-learning process, as opposed to summative assessment, which assesses learning at the conclusion of instruction.

Andrade and Cizek (2010) argue that successful formative assessment includes well-defined learning objectives, standards for success, constructive feedback, and opportunities for peer and self-assessment. These components are intended to both notify the teacher about the students' progress and give them the agency to take ownership of their own learning, thereby bridging the gap to independence.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) identified seven principles of effective feedback practice, highlighting the significance of formative assessment in assisting students in developing self-regulation. These include fostering positive motivational views, and defining standards, and supporting self-evaluation. By combining self-regulated learning models with formative assessment, Panadero et al. (2018) built upon this by claiming that formative practices naturally foster autonomy through metacognitive engagement.

The assertion that formative assessment and learner autonomy are mutually reinforcing is supported by an expanding body of evidence. Self-assessment and peer evaluation are two examples of formative evaluation strategies that foster students' metacognitive awareness and sense of ownership over their learning (Tan, 2007). Learners are more inclined to participate in goal-setting, strategy utilization, and self-monitoring when they are actively involved in the assessment procedure (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). However, studies also demonstrate that formative evaluation needs to be planned carefully in order to foster independence. It is not enough to simply offer feedback; students must be taught how to analyze and respond to it (Shirran, 2022). Students might turn into passive recipients instead of proactive participants in the learning process without this kind of training.

The implementation of formative evaluation and the development of learner autonomy encounter different cultural and systematic obstacles in South Asian educational systems, such as Pakistan. Pakistani classrooms are typically focused on the teacher, with a focus on rote learning and summative assessment (Rehman et al., 2020). This high-stakes testing environment, which is necessary for fostering independence, discourages both risk-taking and critical thinking (Ahmed, 2012). Numerous studies have observed that Pakistani instructors are only somewhat aware of and practice formative assessment. For instance, Afzal and Harun (2019) discovered that secondary English teachers predominantly used summative methods because they lacked training and institutional backing. In a similar way, Khan and Malik (2021) discovered that teachers' misunderstandings regarding assessment frequently resulted in a methodical approach that lacked formative or reflective components.

However, there is increasing acknowledgment that assessment paradigms must be changed. Although the National Education Policy 2017 promotes learner-centred methods, actual implementation is still inconsistent because of problems with infrastructure, curriculum, and professional development (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Teacher beliefs play a vital role in influencing instructional methods, such as providing autonomy and conducting assessments. According to Borg (2015), teachers frequently decide how much learner autonomy they may have in the classroom based on their views of students' skills. Teachers are less likely to use formative approaches that need learner participation if they see students as helpless or reliant. A major obstacle is also the absence of professional development in formative assessment. Most English teachers in Pakistan have little exposure to formative assessment techniques during their pre-service and in-service training, according to Hussain and Ahmed's (2023) recent research. The emphasis of professional development programs is sometimes on content delivery rather than on reflective teaching and learning methods. Nonetheless, intervention research indicates that focused training can enhance teacher's assessment literacy and autonomy-supportive behaviour. For example, in Lahore secondary schools, Shamsi and Khalid (2022) held seminars and noticed notable changes in the way teachers employed questioning, feedback, and student self-evaluation.

Research Objectives
The Objectives of this are to:
1. explore English teachers' understanding of formative assessment and learner autonomy.
2. Examine the types of formative assessment strategies used in secondary English classrooms.
3. Investigate how these strategies contribute to or hinder the development of learner autonomy.
4. Understand the institutional and cultural factors that affect the integration of formative assessment to promote autonomy.

Research Gaps

The synergy between formative assessment and learner autonomy has been examined in international studies (e.g., Andrade & Brookhart, 2016; Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2914), but the evidence in Pakistani settings is still scarce.

The majority of local research either addresses the conceptual comprehension of autonomy or common assessment methods, but not their interaction in the classroom. In addition, very little is known about the specific context of language teaching in Punjab and how English teachers there negotiate these practices. Because of its inherent focus on interaction, communication, and reflection, language acquisition provides a rich environment for fostering autonomy through formative methods (Benson, 2011; Little, 2007). However, there is little empirical study on this interaction.

In order to address this gap, this study examines the opinions and behaviors of secondary English teachers in Punjab with regard to formative assessment and learner autonomy. The study will qualitatively investigate how these teachers perceive, apply, and experience the connection between formative assessment and self-directed learning in actual classrooms.

Research Questions
Question No 1. How do secondary English teachers in Punjab perceive the role of formative assessment in fostering learner autonomy?
Question No. 2. What formative assessment practices are employed in secondary English classrooms in Punjab to promote learner autonomy?

Question No.3. How do students respond to formative assessment practices in terms of developing autonomy in their English language learning?

Question No.4. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing formative assessment to support learner autonomy in English classrooms in Punjab?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design, to examine formative assessment and learner autonomy in English secondary classrooms in Punjab, Pakistan. The interpretivist paradigm is suitable for developing a rich understanding of complex social phenomena from the perspective of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research takes a multiple case study approach to examination (Yin, 2018), which gives the researcher opportunity to examine the teachers and learners of English in their school experience, beliefs, and practices.

Participants and Sampling

The sample will consist of 10 English secondary level educators, and 30 learners (three learners from each educator). Participants will be selected using purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to select information-rich cases that are evident and significant with respect to the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). The sample will include public schools in both urban and rural contexts to account for contextual diversity, within the oversight of the Punjab Education Department.

Inclusion Criteria for Teachers and Students

A minimum of five years of experience instructing English at the secondary level and their readiness to take part in interviews and classroom observations. Students are signed up for English courses taught by participating instructors and they are happy to take part in focus group conversations.

Data Collection Techniques

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Each instructor undergoes a semi-structured interview to learn about their understanding, ideas, and methods pertaining to formative assessment and learner autonomy. To ensure consistency while allowing for the flexibility to explore new concepts, an interview guide is created (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

2. **Classroom Observations**

The English class of each instructor is watched twice, with an emphasis on the application of formative assessment methods like questioning, feedback, peer assessment, and self-assessment. An observation checklist modified from Black and Wiliam's (1998) framework is used.

3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

To collect student views on formative assessment and its impact on their autonomy, three focus groups (10 students each) are held. FGDs foster participant interaction and contribute to the development of valuable insights into common experiences (Morgan, 1997).

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), is used to analyses the data. Familiarization with data through repeated reading. Generating initial codes to identify features of interest. Searching for themes among codes. Reviewing themes to refine patterns.
Defining and naming themes to interpret their significance. Writing the report, integrating data with relevant literature. NVivo software will be used to effectively manage, code, and analyses qualitative data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation
    1. **Introduction to Data Analysis**
According to Braun and Clarke (2006), data analysis in qualitative research involves finding patterns, themes, and meanings in the data gathered in order to understand the experiences of
participants. Thematic analysis is used in this study to analyses qualitative data collected from secondary-level students through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The data is
examined to investigate the link between formative assessment techniques and learner
autonomy growth in English language courses.
    2. **Overview of the Coding Process**
The interviews and focus group conversations were recorded word for word, and translations were offered as necessary. The transcripts were read multiple times to become completely immersed in the data. NVivo 12 was used to code and arrange the data. The initial codes were created using recurrent words, significant comments, and responses that addressed that study questions. The codes
were subsequently organized into broader themes and subthemes related to formative assessment and learner autonomy.

- Emerging Themes and Interpretation
- The data analysis revealed four overarching themes:
- Feedback as a Catalyst for Self-Regulation
- Peer and Self-Assessment as Tools for Reflection
- Goal Setting and Ownership of Learning
- Challenges in Autonomy Development

Theme 1. Feedback as a Catalyst for Self-Regulation
The importance of timely and helpful teacher feedback was a recurring theme in the student interviews. Numerous students highlighted that teachers'feedback on assignments and class activities helped them identify and fix their errors on their own.

> "I try not to make the same mistakes in the assignment when my teacher highlights them and explains them to me." (Student 5)

Both written and verbal feedback were well received by the students. Interestingly, those who said they received formative feedback as opposed to just numbers had greater self-monitoring abilities. These pupils made improvements by revisiting their work, asking for peer work, using dictionaries, and occasionally asking.This is consistent with Sadler's (1989) hypothesis that effective feedback bridges the gap between actual and intended performance. In addition, this context supported Black and Wiliam's (2009) claim that formative feedback improves learning by fostering reflection and participation.

Theme 2. Reflective Tools Peer and Self-Assessment

The beneficial effects of self-assessment and peer assessment activities were another recurring theme. According to students, tasks involved exchanging notebooks with classmates or comparing their answers to their own. Although they weren't common, these events encouraged critical thought and helped pupils spot typical mistakes.

> "Sometimes we review one another's work. I pick up new vocabulary from other people's writing, and when they point out my errors, I make an effort to correct them. (Student 11)

The effectiveness of these strategies, however, was contingent on teacher direction. Students reported higher levels of confidence and usefulness in classrooms where instructors demonstrated the assessment procedure and offered rubrics or criteria. When the activity was hurried or ambiguous, it caused confusion or perhaps humiliation. Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) believed that self-assessment, when supported by scaffolding, helps with metacognitive awareness, and these results corroborate this. Peer assessment likewise promotes reflective practices and collaborative learning (Topping, 2009).

Theme 3. Establishing Goals and Taking Ownership of Learning

Numerous pupils expressed an interest in setting personal goals, particularly for speaking and writing. Some recommended writing stories outside of class or keeping notebooks to record new vocabulary. Others mentioned that they could practice their English by using YouTube videos, mobile applications, or role plays at home.

> "I've decided to learn five new words every day. I jot them down in my diary and use them in sentences."
> (Student 8)

When not under direct supervision, such actions demonstrate a high degree of learner autonomy. Several of these students interestingly attributed their motivation to prior feedback or support from their teachers. Little (2007) states the notion of learner autonomy as the ability to manage one's own learning, which frequently develops through ongoing classroom support. He mentions that it is consistent with these practices. This also aligns with Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulated learning model, which emphasizes self-evaluation, strategic planning, and goal setting as essential steps.

Theme 4. Challenges in Autonomy Development

Students recognized a number of obstacles to fostering autonomy in spite of their good experiences. Common issues included time limitations, exam-centred instruction, a lack of digital resources, and a dread of making errors.

> "Our instructor follows the book. We only get ready for the written exam; there is no opportunity to practice speaking." (Student 3)

Overcrowded classrooms and inflexible curricula restricted chances for formative practices in some government schools. Students also observed that not every instructor gave helpful feedback. Some simply indicated right or wrong without providing any reasoning. Moreover, social and cultural variables such as a significant power gap between instructor and students prevented students from starting their own learning or challenging the teacher. This mirrors the conclusions of Reinders and Balcikanli (2011),

who observed that in in conventional classroom settings, learner independence necessitates both instructor conviction and system-level support.

Cross-Case Comparison

There were minor differences when comparing replies from urban and rural schools. Due to greater access to digital resources and English exposure, urban pupils may have displayed more cases of independent behaviour. Although they were equally driven, rural pupils had few options and frequently depended only on the teacher's guidance. Both groups, however, expressed a wish to be more involved in their learning and appreciated feedback.

Interpretation of Research Questions

Research Question 1. How do secondary English teachers in Punjab perceive the role of formative assessment in fostering learner autonomy?

The data indicated that formative assessment is generally understood by secondary English teachers in Punjab as a continuous process that facilitates rather than just assesses learning. The majority of respondents agreed that formative assessment methods, such ongoing feedback, self-assessment, and peer review, are essential for fostering student ownership of their education. According to teachers, these methods enhance students' capacities to assess their progress, establish educational objectives, and keep track of their own performance.

This is consistent with Black and Wiliam's (2009) discovery that formative assessment promotes self-regulated learning.But teachers said they had little actual experience putting formative evaluation approaches into practice, notwithstanding their theoretical understanding. Systemic issues such as test-focused instruction, rigid syllabi, and inadequate professional training are thought to be the cause of this gap.

Many instructors stated that they frequently divert their attention preparing students for high-stakes board exams, leaving little opportunity for reflective or student-centred approaches. Similar limitations have been observed in other developing contexts (Heritage, 2010).Additionally, although some instructors tried to use informal formative approaches like asking reflective questions or giving verbal feedback, these approaches were frequently unstructured and lacked follow-up. The analysis implies that teachers are aware of formative assessment's capacity to promote autonomy, but they are limited by situational variables, pointing to a need for focused teacher training and institutional assistance.

Research Question 2 What formative assessment practices are employed in secondary English classrooms in Punjab to promote learner autonomy?

The qualitative data showed that although some instructors conceptually grasp formative assessment, they still apply it in a limited, irregular, and sporadic manner in their classrooms. Teacher-led informal feedback, oral questioning, and peer feedback during group activities were the most frequently used formative assessment methods.

These procedures, though, weren't methodically recorded or planned. Teachers frequently employed questioning method to assess comprehension, but they seldom utilized students' answer to inform future teaching.

This diminished the possible effect of formative techniques on learner autonomy.

Reflective peer editing, and student self-assessments were reported by a few teachers, but these practices were more frequently seen in better-equipped or urban schools. On the other hand, schools with huge class sizes and poor facilities struggled to put formative strategies into practice that necessitated individualized attention or customized feedback.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) assertion that successful formative assessment necessitates organized feedback loops and student participation is reflected in these results. Students conveyed gratitude for constructive feedback despite these constraints, implying that even small initiatives in formative assessment promote motivation and self-awareness. In line with the promotion of metacognitive skills and autonomy (Sadler, 1989), some teachers also used learner portfolios to monitor student progress. These cases, however, were the exception rather than the rule. The analysis finds that although areas of effective practice can be found, formative assessment is typically underused and not strategically integrated. Teacher training programs should explicitly concentrate on practical execution to improve learner autonomy via formative assessment, and school leadership must promote a change from summative-driven assessment cultures to learning-driven ones.

Research Question 3. How do students respond to formative assessment practices in terms of developing autonomy in their English language learning?

The frequency, quality, and type of feedback students received influenced how they responded to formative assessment methods. Those who frequently participated in reflective exercises, peer assessment, or received practical feedback from educators displayed greater degrees of self-monitoring, responsibility, and engagement. Numerous students expressed gratitude for setting their own learning objectives, evaluating their own work, participating in class discussions, noting that these activities helped them feel more engaged in their learning. These results are consistent with Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which identifies autonomy, competency, and relatedness as the primary factors behind motivation.

When they got personalized feedback instead of general corrections, students also noted a rise in motivation. For example, students reported feeling more empowered to improve when teachers gave feedback on writing techniques in addition to grammatical problems. As noted by Andrade and Cizek (2010), this type of formative feedback promotes learners' metacognitive strategy development. Nevertheless, a large number of students reported that they seldom encountered practices that promote such autonomy. Numerous people characterized classrooms as "exam-focused," emphasizing rote learning and primarily summative assessments. Formative assessment was frequently misinterpreted or underappreciated in these contexts. Some students even showed signs of anxiety during peer assessment because they were afraid of being judged, highlighting the necessity for trust-building and instructor assistance.The interpretation stresses that the effects of formative assessment are highly dependent on how it is put into practice, even though it has the potential to promote learner autonomy. Students react favorably when they are actively participating in their learning and assessment procedures. For formative assessment to be truly effective, instructors must foster a conducive atmosphere and encourage shared accountability among students and teachers.

Research Question 4. What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing formative assessment to support learner autonomy in English classrooms in Punjab?

The data demonstrate that there are numerous interrelated systemic, institutional, and educational obstacles to using formative assessment for learner autonomy in secondary English classrooms. The exam-oriented educational system, which emphasizes summative outcomes over learning

processes, was one of the most often mentioned challenges by both students and educators. Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that this approach dissuades risk-taking, contemplation, and student-led investigation, all of which are essential for fostering independent learning.

Another significant obstacle was large class sizes, which sometimes exceeded 50 students per classroom. In such environments, teachers said they found it challenging to give customized feedback or conduct peer evaluations. This restriction restricts the efficacy of formative approaches such as individualized input, reflective journaling, or conferencing. Professional development deficiencies were repeatedly mentioned. Numerous instructors stated that they had never been formally taught in autonomy-supportive teaching or formative assessment. Prior research conducted in similar circumstances supports this discovery (Heritage, 2010).

Despite these difficulties, there were a lot of possibilities. Urban and private schools demonstrated an increasing willingness to formative assessment, backed by school administration and more adaptable curricula. In addition, many instructors showed an eagerness to come up with new ideas and try out casual methods like oral feedback and learning logs, even in the absence of institutional backing. These community-based programs indicate a base that can be expanded upon for professional development courses.

Additionally, the possibility for scalable impact is highlighted by pupils' favorable reaction to formative assessment, even in modest amounts. The adoption of formative assessment might be greatly increased with the introduction of curricular revisions, training, and institutional support.

The analysis ends that although there are significant obstacles, the prospects for teacher's empowerment and institutional change are equally encouraging. In order to effect long-lasting change, strategic policy changes, capacity-building workshops, and assessment literacy initiatives are necessary.

DISCUSSION

According to the study, when used carefully, formative assessment, especially through feedback and peer/self-assessment, promotes learner autonomy. However, persistent development is frequently hampered by conventional assessment methods and institutional barriers. Although many pupils show promise for independence, this independence cannot thrive without consistent teacher assistance, classroom methods, and systemic reforms. As Boud and Molloy (2013) argued, these results highlight the relationship between assessment and learner development and advocate for a pedagogy of assessment for learning as opposed to assessment of learning. The goal of this research was to determine how formative assessment might help students develop their independence in English classes at the secondary level in Punjab, Pakistan. The research offers significant insights into the impact of formative assessment methods on students' attitudes, perceptions, and independent learning behaviours by using qualitative data obtained from teachers, students, and focused groups through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

The results showed that when done correctly, formative assessment plays a vital role in fostering learner independence. In particular, formative strategies such as constructive teacher feedback, self-evaluation, peer assessment, and reflective tasks helped students accept greater accountability for their education. These methods are consistent with the tenets of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the significance of guided instruction and scaffolding in facilitating self-regulated learning. When feedback on their English learning was clear, timely, and specific, students expressed higher levels of confidence, motivation, and engagement. Students showed a transition from

passive reception to active involvement in classrooms where instructors motivated them to assess their own performance and establish their own learning objectives. By promoting reflective thought and metacognitive awareness, these settings encouraged autonomy.

But the study also revealed inconsistencies in the use of formative assessment. Particularly in underfunded rural schools, evaluation was restricted to cursory inspections with little feedback. The emphasis on high-stakes testing frequently overshadowed formative goals, which diminished opportunities for independent study (Asher, Farid, & Shahzadi, 2025).

The usage of formative strategies was also hampered by time restrictions and the teacher's workload. In conclusion, promoting learner autonomy through formative assessment involves more than just employing particular approaches; it also involves fostering a classroom environment that values student voice, promotes reflection, and empowers students. To make this shift, there must be policy adjustments, professional development for teachers, and ongoing assessment of assessment practices to make sure they are in line with the overall objectives of student-centred education in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how formative assessment could assist students in developing their independence in English classes in the secondary education system of Punjab, Pakistan. The study provides an important contribution to the understanding of formative assessment techniques that was obtained from teachers, students, and focus groups through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews which indicated the impact of formative assessment practices on students indicating student's attitudes, perceptions, and independent learning behaviours. The study provided evidence that formative assessment has a significant role in enhancing learner independence when done correctly. Importantly formative assessment techniques such as constructive teacher comments, self-evaluation, peer assessment, and reflective tasks caused students to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. These techniques follow the principles of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory and his emphasis on the value of effective guided teaching and support in promoting self-regulated learning.

When students received explicit, immediate, and specific feedback about their English learning, they reported increased confidence, motivation, and engagement. Students began to shift from being passive recipients of knowledge to being active participants in a learning environment in which they were encouraged to self-evaluate their performance and set personalized learning goals. By providing opportunities for reflective thinking and metacognitive awareness, these environments initiated student-centered independence. However, the study also found that formative assessment was not always used consistently. Evaluation was limited to cursory inspections with minimal feedback, especially in rural schools with limited funding. High-stakes testing was usually prioritized over formative objectives, which reduced chances for independent study. Time constraints and the teacher's workload also made it difficult to use formative strategies.

The overall finding of this study is that, while formative assessment has significant capacity to support learner autonomy, effectiveness relies on intentional design, teacher readiness, and system support. Formative assessment is best to be integrated into delivery as an ongoing practice, rather than an external event. In the end, fostering learner autonomy via formative assessment, is not so much about performing discrete actions, but rather establishing classroom environments which validate student voice, promote reflective practices, and empower learners. A concept move to learner autonomy necessitates policy change, professional development for teachers and ongoing scrutiny of assessment practices to ensure alignment with student-centered learning objectives existing in Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings and conclusions of the study several recommendations are suggested for improving formative assessment implementation practices for the support of student independence in secondary English classrooms in Punjab, Pakistan. One recommendation is for participatory professional development for English teachers as formative assessment as a process of learning. Professional development could take the form of teacher workshops, in-service seminars, peer collaboration and mentoring to help teachers understand the nature of formative assessment and how to carry it out to promote learner autonomy. In addition to offering feedback, teachers need development in establishing a learning environment and experiences where learners are encouraged to take risks when learning and reflect on their learning processes.

Formative assessment should be implemented in national curriculum and school assessment policies, according to education policymakers. Formative assessment should be integrated into the national curriculum and school assessment policies, according to educational policymakers. Guidelines should be established for using assessment for learning methods like as student self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflective journals. Lowering the focus on high-stakes testing will make way for formative practices that foster independence and lifelong learning. Schools' ought to have the tools they need, such as rubrics, reflection sheets, and peer evaluation tools. For the purpose of ensuring consistent use of formative techniques, these resources must be available to both students and instructors. District education offices and NGOs can help bridge gaps in training and resources, particularly in underserved or rural locations. The idea of independence should be introduced to students gradually. This can be achieved be achieved through cooperative goal-setting, learner diaries, and classroom debates. Teachers should in still ownership and accountability by encouraging students to monitor their own progress and demonstrating reflective practices.

Education ministries and schools should create methods for tracking the use of formative assessment strategies and their effects on student independence. School-based evaluations and action research may reveal areas for development and ideal techniques. By implementing these suggestions, stakeholders in the education industry can help foster a more student-centred, reflective, and independent learning environment in secondary English classrooms throughout Punjab.

LIMITATIONS

While this qualitative study provides valuable insights into the interplay between formative assessment and learner autonomy in secondary English classrooms in Punjab, Pakistan, it is important to acknowledge its limitations to contextualize the findings and interpretations. The research was restricted geographically at first. Only three districts of Punjab provided data from chosen urban and rural schools. Although there were attempts to include a range of school environments, the outcomes may not fully reflect the varied experiences and practices throughout the province. The findings may have been impacted by regional.

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