



FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON

<https://doi.org/10.83151/sdg9-jh66>

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Abstract

The acquisition of English grammar remains a major challenge among primary school learners in many multilingual educational contexts, including Cameroon. Despite curriculum reforms and efforts aimed at improving language instruction, learners continue to demonstrate weaknesses in grammatical competence. This study investigated the relationship between formative assessment practices and the acquisition of English grammar among pupils in selected primary schools in Yaoundé VI Sub-Division, Cameroon. Specifically, the study examined the influence of oral tests and written assessments administered during instructional sequences on learners' grammar acquisition. The study adopted a survey research design involving 19 Level Three teachers selected from six English-speaking primary schools. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.92 established through the test-retest method. Descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyse the data. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between oral tests and grammar acquisition ($r = .689, p < .01$). Similarly, written assessments demonstrated a strong positive relationship with grammar acquisition ($r = .829, p < .01$). The findings suggest that formative assessment practices enhance learners' mastery of grammatical structures by providing continuous feedback and opportunities for correction. The study concludes that effective formative assessment significantly contributes to improved English grammar acquisition among primary school learners. Recommendations are made for teachers, curriculum developers, school administrators, and policymakers regarding the integration of formative assessment into language instruction.

Keywords: formative assessment, English grammar, language acquisition, oral assessment, written assessment, primary education, Cameroon

Introduction

Assessment occupies a central position in educational practice because it provides evidence of learning, guides instructional decisions, and supports learner development. In contemporary education, assessment is increasingly viewed not merely as a tool for grading learners but as a process that enhances learning and informs teaching practices. Within language education, assessment serves as an essential mechanism for determining learners' mastery of linguistic knowledge and communicative competence.

Formative assessment refers to a continuous process of gathering information about learners' understanding during instruction for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Black and Wiliam (2018) define formative assessment as assessment activities that generate evidence used by teachers and learners to modify learning processes and improve achievement.

Unlike summative assessment, which evaluates learning at the end of instruction, formative assessment focuses on supporting learning while it is taking place. Teachers use formative assessment techniques such as questioning, classroom discussions, quizzes, peer assessment, self-assessment, and feedback to identify learning gaps and address them promptly.

Research demonstrates that formative assessment significantly improves learning outcomes when feedback is timely, specific, and actionable. According to Andrade and Brookhart (2020), formative assessment promotes learner engagement, self-regulation, and academic achievement.

English language instruction in Cameroon occupies a strategic place within the national educational system. As one of the country's two official languages, English serves not only as a medium of communication but also as an instrument for academic advancement and social mobility. Consequently, effective acquisition of English grammar is necessary for learners' academic success and future participation in national and global contexts.

Oral assessment involves verbal questioning, discussions, presentations, and interactive classroom activities used to evaluate learners' understanding. Oral assessments enable teachers to obtain immediate evidence of learning and provide instant feedback. In language education, oral assessment is particularly important because it allows learners to practice grammatical structures within authentic communication contexts. Through oral interaction, teachers can identify misconceptions and correct grammatical errors as they occur. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2016) argue that oral feedback facilitates deeper learning because learners receive immediate clarification and reinforcement. Studies have shown that oral formative assessment improves language fluency, confidence, and grammatical competence.

Grammar constitutes the structural framework of language. It enables learners to construct meaningful sentences, comprehend texts, and communicate effectively. According to Ellis (2015), grammar instruction remains fundamental because it provides learners with the linguistic structures required for language production and comprehension. However, reports from teachers and examination results continue to reveal weaknesses in pupils' grammatical competence.

Written assessments constitute another important component of formative assessment. These assessments include exercises, assignments, quizzes, worksheets, and short tests administered during instruction. Written assessments provide opportunities for repeated practice and reinforcement of grammatical concepts. Through written tasks, teachers can evaluate learners' mastery of specific grammatical structures and provide detailed corrective

feedback. Research by Hattie and Clarke (2019) indicates that written feedback significantly improves academic performance when learners are guided in using it to improve future performance.

One factor that may contribute to poor grammar acquisition is the limited use of formative assessment strategies in classrooms. Many teachers emphasize summative examinations that evaluate learning outcomes after instruction rather than formative assessments that provide ongoing feedback during learning. This practice deprives learners of opportunities to identify and correct misconceptions before they become entrenched. Formative assessment has gained considerable attention globally due to its potential to improve learning outcomes. It enables teachers to gather evidence of learning, provide feedback, and adjust instructional practices in response to learners' needs. Research consistently demonstrates that formative assessment significantly improves academic achievement across various disciplines (Wiliam, 2018).

Given the importance of formative assessment and the persistent challenges associated with grammar acquisition, this study examines the relationship between formative assessment practices and the acquisition of English grammar among primary school pupils in Yaoundé VI Sub-Division.

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of formative assessment in improving educational outcomes. Kingston and Nash (2015) conducted a meta-analysis and found that formative assessment positively affects student achievement across subjects. Yan and Pastore (2022) reported that formative assessment practices significantly improve language learning outcomes through enhanced learner engagement and feedback mechanisms. Similarly, Lee (2021) found that continuous classroom assessment improved grammar acquisition among elementary school learners.

In Africa, studies have demonstrated similar findings. Oduro and Boadu (2020) reported that formative assessment practices improved language achievement among primary school pupils in Ghana. Their findings emphasized the importance of feedback and corrective instruction in language learning. Despite these findings, limited studies have examined formative assessment and grammar acquisition within the Cameroonian primary school context, thereby justifying the present investigation.

This study is anchored on Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978). The theory posits that learning occurs through social interaction and guided participation. Learners construct knowledge through interactions with teachers and peers within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Formative assessment aligns closely with this theory because it involves continuous interaction, feedback, and scaffolding. Oral questioning, classroom discussions, and written feedback provide opportunities for teachers to support learners' progression from current levels of understanding toward higher levels of competence.

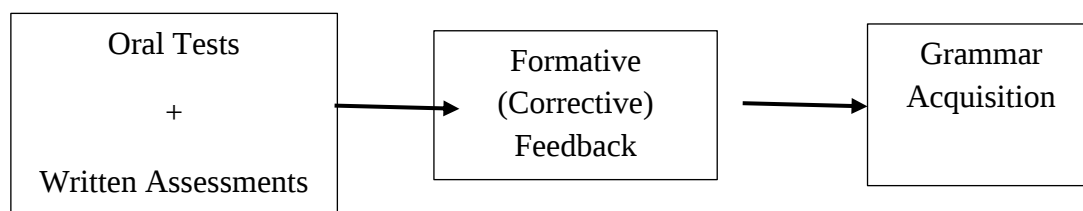


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Grammar Acquisition

The framework assumes that effective formative assessment enhances learners' understanding through feedback, practice, and instructional adjustment, ultimately improving grammar acquisition.

Statement of the Problem

Despite sustained efforts to improve English language instruction in Cameroon, many primary school pupils continue to exhibit difficulties in grammar usage. Learners frequently demonstrate weaknesses in sentence construction, verb tense usage, punctuation, agreement, and other grammatical structures. Such deficiencies often affect overall language performance and academic achievement. Classroom observations indicate that many teachers prioritize summative assessments such as terminal examinations and periodic tests while giving limited attention to formative assessment practices. As a result, learners may complete instructional sequences without receiving sufficient feedback necessary for correcting grammatical errors and strengthening language competence. The inadequate use of formative assessment may therefore contribute to learners' poor acquisition of English grammar. It is against this background that the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between formative assessment practices and the acquisition of English grammar among primary school learners in Yaoundé.

Research Question

What is the performance of primary school pupils in oral tests, written assessments, and the acquisition of English grammar administered after instructional sequences?

Research Hypotheses

H01

There is no statistically significant relationship between oral tests administered after instructional sequences and the acquisition of English grammar among primary school pupils.

H02

There is no statistically significant relationship between written assessments administered after instructional sequences and the acquisition of English grammar among primary school pupils.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design in which the questionnaire served as the main instrument in the collection of data for analysis. The target population of the study comprised all the teachers in the six selected English-speaking primary schools in Yaounde VI sub-division, making thirty-nine (39). The accessible population comprised all the teachers at level three of the selected schools under study (19). The sample size was maintained at nineteen as the accessible population was considered the sample. Thus, the sampling rate was 100 percent, representative.

A structured questionnaire addressed the respondents' demographic information, the first variable with five questions on it, the second variable also with five questions and the dependent variable with five questions. The Likert scale was used with four response options

tagged with numbers one to four to represent strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree, respectively, and the manner of response needed was achieved. To validate the questionnaire, the instrument was taken to some peers who reviewed the items and assured the face validity of the instrument. It was then administered to some five level three teachers in some selected nearby English-speaking primary schools in the Mbankomo sub-division and the results showed that the teachers had no difficulties in giving the desired responses to the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher, and the test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated, giving a coefficient of 0.92.

The data collection method involved the application for authorization from the Ministry of Basic Education through the divisional delegate to the inspectors and then the head teachers to enter into the primary schools. Once given, the authorization was presented to the heads of each school and the purpose of the research was explained to them. The direct administration technique was used, where the researchers gave the instrument directly to the respondent and waited for them to respond and then collected the completed questionnaire. The response rate was 100 percent, and the return rate was also 100 percent.

Results

Research Question

What is the performance of primary school pupils in oral tests, written assessments, and the acquisition of English grammar administered after instructional sequences?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Oral Tests and Acquisition of English Grammar

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Oral Test	19	8	34	20.32	7.183
Written Assessments	19	8	45	21.64	8.275
Acquisition of English Grammar	19	9	47	26.66	10.727

The results indicate a mean score of 20.32 (SD = 7.183) for oral tests and 26.66 (SD = 10.727) for grammar acquisition. Written assessments recorded a mean score of 21.64 (SD = 8.275), while grammar acquisition maintained a mean score of 26.66 (SD = 10.727).

The relatively high mean score suggests that teachers frequently utilized oral assessment practices. The standard deviation indicates moderate variability in responses, implying differences in the extent to which oral assessments were implemented across schools.

The mean score for grammar acquisition suggests that learners demonstrated moderate to high levels of grammatical competence. The findings indicate that written assessment practices were commonly used among teachers. The variability suggests differences in implementation across schools.

Hypothesis One:

There is no statistically significant relationship between oral tests administered after instructional sequences and the acquisition of English grammar among primary school pupils.

	Oral Test	Acquisition of English Grammar
Oral Test	1	.689**
Acquisition of English Grammar	.689**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between oral tests and grammar acquisition ($r = .689$, $p < .01$).

The correlation coefficient of .689 indicates a strong positive relationship between oral assessment practices and grammar acquisition. This suggests that increased use of oral formative assessments is associated with improved grammatical competence among learners. Because the significance value was below .01, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Two

There is no statistically significant relationship between written assessments administered after instructional sequences and the acquisition of English grammar among primary school pupils.

Table 3: Correlation between Written Assessments and Grammar Acquisition

	Written Assessments	Acquisition of English Grammar
Written Assessments	1	.829**
Acquisition of English Grammar	.829**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between written assessments and grammar acquisition ($r = .829$, $p < .01$). The coefficient of .829 indicates a very strong positive relationship. This suggests that written formative assessments contribute substantially to learners' mastery of English grammar. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that oral assessment significantly influences grammar acquisition. This supports Black and Wiliam (2018), who argue that formative assessment improves learning by providing continuous evidence that informs instructional adjustments. The findings further support Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes interaction as a catalyst for learning. Oral assessments promote dialogue between teachers and learners, enabling immediate feedback and correction.

The study also found that written assessments exert a stronger influence on grammar acquisition than oral assessments. This finding aligns with Hattie and Clarke (2019), who demonstrated that written feedback contributes significantly to improved learning outcomes.

The stronger correlation associated with written assessments may be explained by the opportunities they provide for repeated practice, reflection, and detailed feedback. Through written exercises, learners can identify specific grammatical errors and engage in corrective learning. These findings confirm previous empirical studies that emphasize the effectiveness of formative assessment in enhancing language learning outcomes.

Educational Implications

The findings suggest that formative assessment should be integrated into daily classroom instruction. Teacher training institutions should strengthen assessment literacy among educators.

Curriculum developers should also incorporate clear formative assessment guidelines within language curricula to promote consistent implementation.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

1. The sample size was relatively small (19 teachers), limiting generalizability.
2. The study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response bias.
3. Only selected schools in Yaoundé VI Sub-Division were included.
4. The study focused exclusively on English grammar and did not examine other language skills.
5. The correlational design does not establish causality.
6. Future studies should employ larger samples and mixed-method approaches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that formative assessment significantly influences the acquisition of English grammar among primary school learners. Both oral tests and written assessments demonstrated positive relationships with grammar acquisition, with written assessments showing a stronger association. These findings underscore the importance of integrating formative assessment into language instruction to enhance grammatical competence and overall academic achievement. The following are the recommendations based on the findings and conclusion:

1. Teachers should administer frequent oral assessments during instructional sequences.
2. Written formative assessments should be integrated systematically into grammar lessons.
3. Schools should organize professional development programs on formative assessment.
4. Curriculum developers should strengthen assessment guidelines.
5. Educational authorities should monitor the implementation of formative assessment practices.
6. Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of formative assessment.

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