

FROM ASSESSMENT TO FEEDBACK

Inez De Florio



APPLICATIONS
IN THE
SECOND/FOREIGN
LANGUAGE
CLASSROOM

FROM ASSESSMENT TO FEEDBACK

From Assessment to Feedback addresses the need for practical and enriching literature on assessment and feedback in language teaching and learning. De Florio documents research-based forms of assessment and feedback in a succinct and accessible way, as the basis for classroom-oriented procedures in foreign/second language teaching. The multiple TEFL examples lend themselves to direct use in language classrooms but can be easily adapted to other subject matters too. This book is divided into three parts – prerequisites, formative feedback, and summative feedback – promoting clear understanding. Each chapter ends with a “Review, Reflect, Practice” section to summarize the chapter’s content and facilitate the concrete application of these practice-oriented suggestions. Language teachers, other educational professionals, and teacher education students will benefit from this evidence-based research.

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From Assessment to Feedback

Applications in the Second/Foreign
Language Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

In this publication, feedback is presented in its many forms, with a special focus on language teaching and learning in the school classroom, especially in relation to teaching English as a second or foreign language. Despite this focus, the contents of the individual chapters can easily be transferred to other school subjects. The book's emphasis on school-based foreign-language teaching is also due to the fact that relevant practice-oriented presentations, such as those by Wiliam, Hattie, and their colleagues, are primarily focused on teaching mathematics and science. In contrast, the publications of the renowned scholars do focus to some extent on language teaching; however, the few examples with practical relevance relate to higher education and second/foreign language writing. Consequently, the subtitle of this book could be: *Applications in the Second/Foreign Language Classroom and Beyond*.

The book is aimed at teachers in training (undergraduates and graduates) who, with the help of their instructors, can learn about and try out the various feedback practices. In-service teachers who wish to give feedback greater prominence in their teaching may also benefit from the publication. The presentation is designed to allow students and in-service teachers to select and implement individual feedback strategies and techniques entirely on their own. Therefore, the individual teaching examples that are an important part of the following presentation are presented in a concrete context. They provide elaborated worksheets for the learner, usually preceded by brief explanations for the teacher. They are also available for download and can be adapted to the specific learning context.

When using the strategies and techniques presented (cf. Chapter 2), there are numerous aspects to consider:

- Most feedback recommendations contrast poor classroom instruction with independent learning (cf. Chapters 3 and 4). They ignore the scientific evidence for the effectiveness of *direct instruction*, which is quite different from *didactic teaching* and can also be integrated into so-called open forms of instruction (cf. De Florio, 2016).
- There is often a misunderstanding underlying the approach to instruction: the desirable independent learning is not usually achieved by letting students work independently without preparation. In order to gradually approach the desired level of learner independence, it is necessary to explain to learners the reasons for independent learning and the procedures associated with it, as well as to practice the respective procedures with them.
- The unconditional demand for variety of methods is too broad a demand for two main reasons. First, the chosen “methods” in a teaching unit must be coordinated with each other. Second, the learning context, the needs and interests of the individual learners, and, last but not least, the personality of the teacher are decisive.
- The choice of a strategy as well as the associated teaching and learning techniques depend primarily on subject-specific goals and content. In scientific publications, the approach is sometimes described; however, subject-specific goals and content are rarely specified.
- The rightly propagated orientation toward real-life situations and real communication should also be transferred to the methodological approach in foreign-language teaching. While cooperative learning in the sense of think-pair-share can easily be transferred to real life, many “methods” are characterized by artificiality. Moreover, their implementation usually involves a great deal of effort.

The book is divided into three parts:

Part I Basic Concepts of Assessment and Feedback in the Foreign-Language Classroom

- 1 Feedback in Everyday Life and in Foreign-Language Education

- 2 Different Forms of Assessment and Feedback in Language Teaching and Learning
- 3 Evidence-Based or at Least Science-Oriented Research: Feedback Models
- 4 The Evolution of Education and Foreign Language Teaching as a Prerequisite of Feedback

Part II Assessment and Feedback in Its Different Manifestations

- 5 How to Implement Successful Feedback in Foreign-Language Education
- 6 Involving the Learners in Important Decisions
- 7 Feedback Is No One-Way Street: Teachers and Learners
- 8 Peer Feedback Needs to Be Learned
- 9 Self-Assessment: Taking Responsibility for One's Actions
- 10 Collegial Feedback Strengthens Language Teaching and Learning
- 11 What about Electronic Assessment and Feedback?
- 12 Remote and Hybrid Learning: the New Normal?

Part III Summative Assessment in Combination with Formative Feedback

- 13 From Bloom's Taxonomy to the SOLO-Taxonomy
- 14 How to Combine Summative Assessment with Formative Feedback
- 15 State Requirements for Assessment and Feedback in Foreign-Language Teaching
- 16 What Teachers Can and Should Do about Assessment and Feedback

Each of these parts as well as each individual chapter can be read separately and in the sequence that makes sense for the purposes of study or teaching. In virtually all of the chapters, the aim is to go beyond the linguistic and (inter)cultural goals

and to relate them to life. The learners act as themselves and, depending on their circumstances and personality, can transfer insights acquired in class, in whole or in part, to their (later) lives. In order to actually achieve all the intended goals for (most of) the learners, (almost) all proposals are based on cooperative learning in the sense of think-pair-share; partner and group work are consequently the norm. In addition, teachers are required to provide appropriate support in the sense of scaffolding.

When looking through the chapters and especially the teaching examples, one realizes that individual approaches and methods, such as cooperative learning, allow and require a whole range of approaches. This shows that “methods” are rarely found in pure form. Questions such as “What can I achieve with this method or with a special form of feedback?” or “Where can I use it?” are consequently difficult to answer without a concrete reference to teaching, quite apart from the fact that they do not sufficiently involve the learners.

Part I

Basic Concepts of Assessment and Feedback in the Foreign-Language Classroom

In Chapter 1, I argue that we should first consider everyday forms of feedback, which differ from language to language, before we turn to pedagogically and didactically oriented feedback in the classroom. Then, in Chapter 2, the relevant terminology used throughout this book is presented. Evaluation and assessment as well as different forms of feedback are explained and related to second-/foreign-language learning. This leads to an overview of the most important scientific studies that determined the emergence of the feedback models created by Dylan Wiliam and John Hattie and their respective coauthors (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I briefly trace developments in pedagogy and didactics that have favored the implementation of feedback and continue to shape it in the foreign-language classroom.

1 FEEDBACK IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND IN FOREIGN-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

1.1 Feedback in Everyday Life

At some point in our lives, we all feel the need to get feedback from friends and acquaintances. This is especially true when we are not satisfied with the results of our efforts and cannot quite explain what went wrong or what we should have done to better achieve our goals. **We depend on feedback in our everyday life** – be it our private or professional life.

In everyday communication, the term **“feedback” stands for verbal or (more rarely) written feedback from a trusted person or a superior on our performance, but also on our behavior and our personality** (for scientific terminology, see Chapter 2).

In general, we have certain ideas about how feedback in the private or professional sphere should be designed so that it helps us to progress. After all, we, ourselves, give feedback to others – whether asked for or not. In order for a friend’s feedback to help us move forward, it must not be too abrupt. Statements like “Too bad, and you’ve made such an effort” do not get us anywhere. **Only more detailed explanations of our performance and/or our behavior are useful (if they are indeed useful at all).** Only in this way can we find out how to continue and, above all, what we can improve – next time. **Brief evaluations of our actions** like the following **do not help us to move forward:**

- Really bad luck!
- Unfortunately, that didn’t go well.
- Actually, you did everything right.

One way to learn more is to engage in conversation with our counterpart. The best thing is to ask for advice.

- What should I have done? Could I have handled the matter differently?
- What would you have done in my place?
- What advice would you give me in this situation?

If even then it remains noncommittal talk, the interlocutor is unable or unwilling to formulate meaningful feedback.

A positive example will help us to understand “everyday” feedback better. A thoroughly qualified young man only ever receives rejections on his applications. He is not even invited to an interview. Finally, he asks a former fellow student, with whom he has been friends for a long time, for advice. The friend takes his time. He inquires about the circumstances and finally asks to see the applications. His assumption is that potential employers sort out applications that do not correspond to certain conventions. Finally, he refers the “applicant” to a website where he can find many useful tips. Above all, **helpful feedback comes about when the feedback giver discusses individual procedures with the person seeking advice** and can finally refer them to further sources.

It goes without saying that contrary opinions should not clash harshly in such feedback conversations. Rather, it will often be the case that the discussion partners try to avoid or at least clarify misunderstandings.

- Did I understand you correctly? You have ...
- How did you come to do it in this way?
- What did you expect from this approach?

The same applies to the professional sphere. A boss or a higher-ranking colleague with appropriate leadership qualities will not just abruptly evaluate the performance(s) of subordinates, but will first acknowledge the positive aspects of their actions. Only then will he carefully address what, for example, a subordinate could have done better – what may have been lacking. If bosses or other supervisors were to do otherwise, it would be detrimental to the employees’ work performance and motivation.

1.2 Feedback in Foreign-Language Education

What happens or should happen in the foreign-language classroom is quite similar. But it depends on the perspective.

TEFL Example: Résumé-Writing Conventions

In most countries, the writing of an application follows specific conventions. Applicants should be familiar with them; otherwise, their application may not be considered for formal reasons.

TEFL Example 1.1 How to Write a Résumé

Read the following dialogue:

Jonas has been studying computer science at the University of California–Berkeley for two semesters. Now he wants to work at an IT start-up during the next semester break. For the application, he needs a résumé, among other documents. He suspects that not only linguistic conventions, but also other peculiarities have to be taken into account when writing it. He therefore turns to a fellow American student with whom he is good friends.

Jonas: Hello, Bernie, how are you doing?

Bernie: Fine. And you?

Jonas: Me too. But I have sort of a problem.

Bernie: Oh! May I help you?

Jonas: Yes, please. As I told you, I want to work in a start-up during the next semester break.

Bernie: And what is the problem?

Jonas: I have to enclose a curriculum vitae with my application. I think there are some rules I should stick to.

Bernie: You are perfectly right. We call it a résumé. Let me think for a moment.

Jonas: It isn't that difficult, I hope.

Bernie: No, but let me have a look at the Internet. Sometimes they have useful tools.

[He enters "curriculum vitae" and "résumé" into a search engine. After some minutes he has found what he was looking for] Have a look: This is an overview of the most important conventions you should follow and there are also annotations in German.

Jonas: That's very helpful. Let me take the URL. On the basis of this overview, I can write my résumé without too many problems. May I show my final version to you?

Bernie: Sure. I was about to suggest that.

Jonas: Thanks!

(see De Florio-Hansen, 2022)

You may expect something different when it comes to feedback in the foreign-language classroom. Let us have a look at what happens in most cases. In a short introduction, the teacher explains the different ways of writing a résumé in the English-speaking world, especially when applying for a job in the United States, in order to give the learners an orientation. The students then write up résumés in tandems or groups of four and compare their drafts with the results of other groups. After a correction process, selected students present their new versions. The teacher tries to correct violations of language correctness in an appropriate procedure (corrective feedback; see Chapter 7). **Depending on the learning context, she seeks discussion with individual learners and gets them to reconsider and further improve their formulations, if useful, after an exchange with their tandem partners.**

This simple combination of instruction and feedback in the foreign-language classroom should be preceded, wherever possible, by an example through which learners can familiarize themselves with the procedure in (some kind of) everyday world communication. Foreign-language skills (i.e. in their advanced form, Intercultural Discourse Competence), should **introduce learners to the knowledge and skills to be learned in a form that approximates communication in everyday life** before resorting to procedures that occur only in the classroom. In any case, the students should become more and more able to differentiate between real-life talk and classroom-determined discussions.

TEFL Example: Varieties of English

The following classroom activity gives advanced students (as well as the teacher) an opportunity to recall the different varieties of English and to consider which English should be the subject of the lesson: British English, American English, or International English?

TEFL Example 1.2 Englishes? Yes, Englishes!

Task 1

Read the dialogue between Lena, a fourteen-year-old German high-school student, and Ken-Shou, a Chinese exchange student, who attends the same chemistry courses at the Technical University of Berlin as Lena's elder brother Alex. Up to now, Ken-Shou, Alex, and Lena have always talked in German together because Ken-Shou came to Berlin mostly to improve his German. For some time, Lena has wanted to know if the Chinese student knows English too. Now she takes advantage of her brother's lateness to start a conversation about it with Ken-Shou.

- Lena: Hallo, Alex wird gleich da sein ...
- Ken-Shou: Fein.
- Lena: Was ich dich fragen wollte ... Sprichst Du außer Deutsch noch eine Fremdsprache?
- Ken-Shou: Oh yes, sure, I speak three Englishes.
- Lena: Three Englishes? What does that mean? Isn't English always English more or less?
- Ken-Shou: I don't think so. There is a variety of Englishes.
- Lena: Please, explain.
- Ken-Shou: I speak American English. Several years ago, I attended an American high school near LA.
- Lena: Oh, that's very interesting, because me, too, I spent a year in California.
- Ken-Shou: And exactly where?
- Lena: In Monterey ...
- Ken-Shou: I've been there, a very nice place. So, you speak American English, too.
- Lena: Yes, I learned a lot there. But what about your other Englishes?
- Ken-Shou: I often use International English.
- Lena: You mean, you use English with people from all over the world?

- Ken-Shou: Yes, but International English is a special form we use when we communicate with our teachers or lecturers in China.
- Lena: In China, perhaps ...
- Ken-Shou: No, no, it's the same variety that is used in the English version of *Spiegel* online.
- Lena: You mean the German newspaper?
- Ken-Shou: Yes, for many years, they have published an English version available on the Internet. Have a look at it!
- Lena: I never thought that someone from so far away would tell me something about German magazines. And the third variety as you call it?
- Ken-Shou: Naturally, I speak Singlish, that's sort of a dialect, a slang if you want, we use it in private conversation, especially among young people.
- Lena: Is that something like Denglish?
- Ken-Shou: Not really, Germans who don't really know English often translate word by word, for example backshop instead of bakery. Singlish is based on British English, but it is mixed up with Asian dialects and it has its own grammar.
- Lena: Oh, I understand ...
- Alex: Hi, what's up? I heard you talking in English.
- Lena: Oh, yes. Why didn't you tell me that Ken-Shou speaks English too?
- Alex: Because I wanted to help him to improve his German and not to improve your English.
- Ken-Shou: Don't worry, Lena and I, we've had an interesting conversation.
- Lena: There was no time left to improve my English. But I learned from Ken-Shou that I speak three Englishes.
- Alex: Three Englishes? What do you mean?
- Lena: I speak British English, American English, and International English.

Alex: You mean you speak English?

Ken-Shou: No, she is right. She speaks three Englishes.

Work together in a team of four students and summarize the conversation between Ken-Shou, Lena, and Alex in five sentences at most. Try to explain to a person who never heard about English varieties what Ken-Shou means when he talks about Englishes. Write down one version and present it in class.

Task 2

Try to find out at least two main differences between British and American English. Have a look at spelling, but also at vocabulary (e.g. nouns), and verb forms (visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_American_and_British_English [last accessed May 2022]; on your right you will see the box “Comparison of American and British English,” with several links you can view).

British English:

American English:

.....

Task 3

Select a passage from the textbook you use in class. Compare the chosen passage to a descriptive text in *Spiegel* online (www.spiegel.de/international/europe or www.spiegel.de/international/europe/archiv.html [last accessed May 2022]).

Do you notice any differences between the variety in your textbook (probably British English) and the International English used in the English version of the German magazine? Work together with your tandem partner and make notes to present in plenary. In whole-class interaction your teacher will help you to find the main differences.

(adapted from De Florio-Hansen, 2022)

Foreign-language teaching, like school teaching in general, has undergone significant changes in recent decades (see Chapter 4 for more detail). It has moved away from its one-sided orientation toward Latin and the dominance of fine arts literature toward the objective of real-life communication with native speakers of the respective foreign language, or communicative exchange with speakers of English as an international language or as a *lingua franca*.

However, the detachment from the all-dominant goal of (near-)nativeness must not be misunderstood as meaning that violations of grammatical rules or the wrong choice of words do not matter (see Chapter 4). In any case, linguistic correctness is no longer the sole goal of foreign-language teaching; rather, successful communication in the respective second and foreign language is in the foreground.

This is true at least for the Western world, even if native speakers of English can communicate more easily in many countries than Italians, for example. Since scientific studies have shown that speakers of at least two languages clearly benefit from bilingualism or multilingualism in the cognitive as well as the social and emotional spheres, foreign-language instruction has also become more popular in the United States.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that foreign-language teaching, including feedback in the teaching and learning of second and foreign languages, is by no means of equal importance everywhere. In some Asian countries in particular, feedback in the foreign-language classroom still does not have the desired status.

In China, for example, there is often a lack of direct contact with native English speakers; therefore, suggestions for feedback often refer to written performance records. Even where feedback is practiced in the classroom itself, the expectation that the teacher will dominate instruction more than in many Western countries stands in the way of dialogic feedback practice.

Feedback plays a highly subordinate role **in Japan** for other reasons. Although English was taught and learned in Japan as early as the 1600s, and even today all students who graduate

from high school have received English instruction from native English speakers, English proficiency is poor. This is due in part to the fact that Japanese differs significantly from English in terms of grammar, syntax, and pronunciation. Furthermore, cultural differences lead to communication styles that are quite different even from those of other Asian speech communities. In addition, Japan can be described as a shame society. Consequently, the worry of making mistakes discourages children and young people from participating adequately in English classes. Above all, however, there is a great concern in Japan, not least among school supervisors, that the exclusivity of the Japanese language and above all Japanese identity could be damaged by knowledge of English as well as knowledge of foreign languages in general. It goes without saying that feedback in countries like Japan, more than in other learning contexts, has to be designed quite differently than in a Western European country, for example.

The two examples – China and even more so Japan – show that **feedback in everyday communication as well as in the teaching and learning of foreign languages can vary considerably from country to country and from language community to language community.** Teaching methods as well as learning strategies and techniques are highly diverse, teaching and learning materials consequently differ, and last but not least, the learning context varies from learning group to learning group.

Despite these varieties, this publication focuses on oral and written feedback in the foreign-language classroom, respectively, with due attention to grading as a form of feedback. In the vast majority of countries, English and the other commonly learned foreign languages, such as Spanish, French, and German, are taught and learned in the context of public schools. Nevertheless, the procedures presented in the next chapters can be transferred to other learning contexts. The success of a feedback measure depends on so many factors that the same procedure can work differently in the same learning group depending on the teaching context. Therefore, most of the suggestions in the following chapters should be taken as proposals that teachers and learners have to adapt to their contexts.

Review, Reflect, Practice

1. Why is it better to ask for advice than for feedback? Think of everyday communication and of classroom procedures.
2. Imagine you want to know what someone you are speaking to means: What can you do? What can you ask him or her?
3. Why does it improve learning and motivation when the teachers first acknowledge positive aspects of students' performance?
4. Make a short list of the varieties of English you have heard of or read about.
5. What is a lingua franca? Is there a language that is used in your country or speech community as lingua franca?
6. In what way may speakers of more than one language take advantage of their bi- or multilingualism (besides communication)?
7. Take the example of Japan and explain why feedback is not of the same importance in Asian foreign-language classrooms as in Western countries.

2 DIFFERENT FORMS OF ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

2.1 From Everyday Communication to Foreign-Language Teaching in Schools

The explanations about feedback in everyday life given in Chapter 1 can be summarized as follows:

Feedback plays a prominent role in everyday communication: Its main purpose is to avoid or clarify misunderstandings in conversations. Feedback is when interlocutors let their communication partners know how they perceived their remarks. Through the feedback, they give him the opportunity to confirm or correct what they have said.

Although feedback procedures vary to a certain extent in everyday life, they are all referred to as feedback. **Educational feedback, on the other hand, is given different terms depending on the teaching context, the addressee, and above all its different functions.** In many cases, learners are the recipients of feedback, whether it is the teacher commenting on the performance of an individual student or small group, or learners trying to support each other in so-called peer feedback. In the context of newer teaching concepts that focus on independent learning, self-evaluation is becoming increasingly important. It by no means refers only to the feedback that students give themselves. Teachers, too, are challenged to continually rethink their instructional practices, as well as the

curricular specifications and learning theories they use to plan and deliver their lessons, and, if necessary, make appropriate changes.

Ever since there have been public schools, students receive feedback on their performance in the different subject areas. This feedback has always consisted of evaluation and grading, regardless of whether the school system works with numbers or letters. As we will see in Chapter 15, attempts to do without grades have not been successful.

Therefore, it does not make sense to foster a negative attitude toward grading among learners. Students generally want to know – beyond the various forms of feedback – the grade they have achieved, not least to be able to compare themselves with other learners. This does not have to result in competitive behavior with negative connotations; it can also be an incentive. Furthermore, it prepares students for later life. For example, in college and especially at work, they will have to make sure they do not fall behind the performance of other applicants/colleagues. When thinking about teaching in (public) schools, most of us know that teachers do not only grade tasks and activities, but also the students' behavior and motivation. But feedback means much more than giving a mark accompanied by a short comment. In recent decades assessment and feedback have gained momentum, both in teaching in general and the learning of second/foreign languages.

2.2 The Development of Feedback in the Context of Language Learning

Feedback in the school context has developed significantly over time. Initially, teachers limited their comments to their students' respective grades orally or in writing without taking other aspects of learning into account. Based on numerous scientific studies (see Chapter 3), feedback has been extended more and more: Teachers used to give relevant comments to the whole learning group. Due to the change in teaching perspectives

toward student activation and action orientation (see Chapter 4), the different prerequisites and personalities of the students came more and more to the fore. It was recognized that a broad-brush form of feedback was not sufficient if it was to reach individual learners. The need for differentiation led to forms of feedback that eventually resulted in conversations between the teacher and individual learners. In this context, the feedback that students give to their teacher plays a role that should not be underestimated (see Chapter 7).

Thus, newer feedback arrangements in the classroom consist of teacher-learner dialogues in which both parties should gain insights into teaching and learning processes. The results of these forms of assessment are further deepened and enhanced by peer feedback and self-assessment (see Part II and III). To be successful – that is, to improve further learning – the students have to be introduced to and trained in applying the respective forms of feedback. In the foreign-language classroom, it is often convenient to use the learners' native language. Only advanced students are able to follow feedback and give the respective explanations in English or another foreign language.

Above all, teachers and other educators do not only have to broaden their knowledge of the respective terminology, but integrate the related processes into their classroom practice. What is true for the teaching profession, is also true for learners, if to a lesser extent. Teachers and students should be appropriately trained to guarantee the feedback procedures in the school context are understood and applied properly, as the term feedback is used in multiple teaching and learning contexts where it may have different meanings.

So, what does feedback mean when it comes to teaching and learning? For a long time, feedback, also known as corrective feedback, referred only to the correction of mistakes and above all, as mentioned earlier, to the grades teachers assign to their students based on evidence of oral and/or written performance. Student achievement may be based on oral tests, reports, and presentations as well as written class tests, exams, and final papers. In general, feedback is the information a learner

receives about his or her performance, but it is not the assessment itself.

In the context of teaching and learning, the term feedback is often generically used in the sense of evaluating and measuring students' achievement as well as transmitting the results to the learners. Having a closer look at what happens in classrooms or in other fields such as business, we have to state that **feedback refers only to the form in which the results of formative or summative assessment are communicated** (De Florio-Hansen, 2018, p. 276).

Helen Timperley, who elaborated, together with John Hattie, the well-known feedback model (see Chapter 3), explains the connection between feedback and formative assessment

More recently, feedback has become integrated into formative assessment processes ... so some forms of feedback could more accurately be seen as new instruction. In these situations, feedback takes the form of extending students' understandings and fill gaps between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood. Whichever way it is thought about, it is most powerful when it addresses faulty interpretations, not a lack of understanding. Feedback must have something on which to build. (Timperley, 2013, p. 402)

2.3 Assessment in the Context of Language Learning

How does assessment differ from feedback? Before a teacher or a student can give feedback, they need to classify and assess performance or learning behavior. Feedback is therefore based on evaluation or assessment. The term "evaluation" refers to assessment in a broad sense. At the beginning of the 1970s, Benjamin Bloom published, together with his team, the *Handbook of Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning*, pursuing the goal of fundamentally improving school teaching and learning (Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971).

Instead of the term “evaluation,” in recent years “assessment” has been used in the context of school teaching. This “involves obtaining evidence to inform inferences about a person’s language-related knowledge, skills or abilities” (Green, 2021, p. 5). Assessment is not just about tests. Rather, it is a systematic process of using empirical data related to (all) aspects of language teaching and learning to refine curricular specifications and improve student learning. Assessment serves to determine how well the learning of the students matches with expectations, and what can be done to achieve goals. Improvement depends, to a large extent, on assumptions about the nature of the human mind, the origin of knowledge, and learning processes. In the following chapters, the most important aspects of these presuppositions, which apply not only to foreign-language teaching but to all learning, will be gradually explored.

Summative assessment assesses learning. It refers to the sum of learning at a certain point of time and is therefore paraphrased as **assessment of learning**. **Formative assessment** aims at promoting student learning. As it should give hints for improving, it is often called **assessment for learning**. (Since learning can also occur in the context of performance assessments, the term **assessment as learning** could be added.)

All assessment can be summative, because you can always grade student learning. Only some forms of assessment are formative (e.g. formative tests). They are informal, they are not graded, and they can take a variety of forms. Here are two examples: You could invite learners to draw a concept map of the constellation of main characters in a short story. Or you could ask them to write down two sentences to identify the essential point of a lesson or a teaching unit.

The basic differences between the two main forms of assessment are as follows:

	Summative assessment	Formative assessment
When	At the end of the learning activity	During a learning activity
Goal	To make a decision	To improve learning
Feedback	Final judgement	Return to material
Frame of reference	Sometimes normative (comparing each student against all others); sometimes criterion	Always criterion (evaluating students according to the same criteria)

(adapted from R. Prigent, 1994)

As the term “assessment” is used to refer to all interventions that teachers (and learners) go back to in order to promote learning, it makes sense to differentiate at least between the following categories:

1. Besides from summative and formative assessment, teachers often go back to diagnostic assessment to find out what students know and can do with regard to (new) learning content (see Section 6.1.1).
2. Assessment can be criterion-referenced or norm-referenced (the last term is often criticized because “norm” may be misleading in this case). A criterion-referenced test is based on an external (objective) norm (e.g. the driving test). A test is norm-referenced when it compares the students within a learning group; in most cases it is the teacher who administers these (oral or written) tests (see Chapter 7).

2.4 The Importance of Grading

It is certainly true that grades should not be overrated, but not including them in feedback measures is highly questionable. Most academics do not reject marks. Nor could they, because

grades ultimately determine admission to higher education and/or certain professions.

Thus, **summative assessment** is about demonstrating **that a specified end goal has been achieved**. This type of assessment is primarily for the institution of school and for society, because summative procedures enable decisions of an institutional nature to be made, for example, about the acquisition of degrees. Therefore, students cannot dismiss grades as unimportant. Rather, teachers should make it clear to them that grades provide information about their performance and, consequently, are important for their further learning if basic aspects are taken into account.

It is striking that researchers and educationalists overwhelmingly emphasize the importance of assessment and grading. “Both are valuable, both need to be based on good information, and both can provide valuable feedback,” state Hattie and Clarke (2018, p. 8). Despite this, in their book they limit themselves to a single page on the aspects of grading in summative assessment (p. 135). The account by Wiliam and his co-author is more detailed, but focuses on formative aspects (e.g. written and/or oral comments without grading) in the case of tests and other evidence of performance (see Wiliam & Leahy, 2015, pp. 126 ff.).

The reasons for this reluctance are mainly to be found in the fact that most **experts** who propagate formative assessment **believe that assessment and evaluation in the form of grades provide no clues for further learning**. Moreover, they are convinced that grading unnecessarily puts learners in competition with each other and thus impairs motivation. This is only partially true. With or without grades, learners will always compare themselves, to a certain extent, with classmates and other peers. It is therefore all the more important for teachers to help their students by providing oral or written feedback to help them interpret their grades appropriately and be motivated for further work.

The few scientific studies that exist at all on summative assessment refer to higher education, as in the case with Jonathan D. Kibble's (2017) article. Through Kibble's evidence-based research, summative assessment is shown to be quite effective in the field of medical studies; it exhibits numerous "educational benefits," but needs to be examined in terms of quality criteria as well as feasibility and costs incurred. This is certainly truer for medical schools, which often have several hundred students, than for an essentially manageable school-based learning group. Kibble's suggestions are nevertheless valid for school teaching as well as the foreign-language classroom. The author recommends **backward design** and assessment procedures determined to optimally measure the respective goals, content, and methods. A criteria grid identifies the areas to be assessed and their relationship to learning outcomes. **An appropriate number of items ensures the validity of the test and the reliability of the assessment.** In addition, Kibble advocates collegial agreements and, above all, giving clear directions to learners and providing them with sufficient practice material.

One of the few to discuss summative assessment in conjunction with formative feedback in a school context is Susan M. Brookhart (2017). In a brief section about formative and summative performance feedback, she addresses the question of which variation is appropriate. She believes that it is from summative performance feedback (after grades have been given) that opportunities for further learning arise. High-performing students will themselves find ways to use the feedback information provided by grading. Lower-performing learners, on the other hand, will rely on the teacher for help. **All students can benefit from summative performance feedback if the teacher gives them opportunities to act on it** (Brookhart, 2017, *passim*).

Nottingham and Nottingham (2017) point out several times that grades are not part of the formative feedback process, but nonetheless they add:

Grading can help your students, but only if they

- understand the criteria used to determine the grade,
- can identify the next steps they could take to improve their performance,
- understand the grading system well enough to know what level they need to be at to achieve their long-term goals (of, for example, an A grade in the end-of-year exams). (p. 6)

In dealing with summative and formative feedback, **grades** and other summative assessments must **not be treated casually or even given negative connotations**. Rather, students need to be told how a grade is arrived at and what they need to pay attention to in order to achieve better results.

2.5 Different Forms of Feedback

To communicate the results of summative assessment and the considerations derived from formative assessment, various forms of feedback come into play. In analogy to assessment, we can distinguish summative feedback from various procedures of formative feedback. Summative feedback gives an account of the learning achieved so far. Every school examination is summative: it assesses whether students have achieved the learning objectives, but does not examine how learning has taken place or why it has not taken place.

Summative feedback is based on standards, whether they are created by the teacher on the basis of the curriculum or imposed from outside (e.g. in order to compare the learning results of students all over a country so as to grant access to various professions or university studies).

In addition, researchers and teachers are interested in gaining insight into how oral feedback affects the learning processes of individual students during the course of instruction. It was only with the advent of digital technologies that it became

possible to study these types of feedback on a larger scale and use them to “form” individual learners. The so-called formative feedback became increasingly important; it is this feedback form that is now almost exclusively dealt with in the respective literature (see Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Formative feedback is mostly tailored to single learners or a small group of students, seldom to the whole class. It serves to enhance the learning of individual students through appropriate stimuli and strengthen their motivation. It is based on constructive criticism without explicit assessment.

As mentioned before, an equally important aspect of formative feedback is often neglected: the feedback effect on teaching measures. Teachers can get hints from the feedback they receive directly or indirectly from their learners on how their teaching is perceived and used by the students. This gives them an opportunity to rethink their approach to teaching and, if necessary, to modify it (see Part II).

Complementing relevant research, including research with a practical teaching focus (e.g. Black and Wiliam (1998); Hattie and Timperley (2007)), this publication incorporates the concept and content of summative assessment and the corresponding feedback from the outset, as this is the field in which every teacher – regardless of their stance on formative feedback – has extensive experience. Therefore, it would not make sense to initially exclude the summative aspects of assessment and feedback. For many teachers, assessment and grading are central to their feedback practice. Moreover, successful formative feedback does not change the importance of summative feedback.

2.6 The Four Steps of the Assessment Cycle

To conclude this brief overview of the relevant terminology, the following figure shows the well-known Classroom Assessment Cycle:

(1) Clearly define
and plan the learning
outcomes

(4) Adjust or improve following the results of the assessment plan

**ASSESSMENT
CYCLE**

(2) Assess the learning outcomes

(3) Analyze the results of
the outcomes assessment

(Missouri State University, n.d.)

By way of explanation, experts from Missouri State University provided the following comments on the cycle:

Step 1: Clearly Define and Identify the Learning Outcomes

Each program should formulate between 3 and 5 learning outcomes that describe what students should be able to do (abilities), to know (knowledge), and appreciate (values and attitudes) following completion of the program. . . .

Step 2: Select Appropriate Assessment Measures and Assess the Learning Outcomes

Multiple ways of assessing the learning outcomes are usually selected and used. Although direct and indirect measures of learning can be used, it is usually recommended to focus on direct measures of learning. Levels of student performance for each outcome is often described and assessed with the use of rubrics. . . .

Step 3: Analyze the Results of the Outcomes Assessed

It is important to analyze and report the results of the assessments in a meaningful way.

Step 4: Adjust or Improve Programs Following the Results of the Learning Outcomes Assessed

Assessment results are worthless if they are not used. This step is a critical step of the assessment process. The assessment process has failed if the results do not lead to adjustments or improvements in programs. . . .

(Missouri State University, n.d.)