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**DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN AN EFL  
CLASSROOM**

**THESIS BY**

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## ÖZET

### İNGİLİZCE’NİN YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRETİLDİĞİ BİR SINIFTA ETKİLİ BİR ÖĞRENME ORTAMI YARATMAK

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Değerlendirme hem öğrenme hem de öğretme açısından, her zaman dil eğitiminin önemli bir parçası olmuştur. Özetleyici ve biçimlendirici değerlendirme İngilizce’nin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiği sınıflarda farklı amaçlara hizmet etmek için kullanılan başlıca değerlendirme yöntemleridir. Farklı amaçlar için kullanılmalarına rağmen, değerlendirmenin asıl amacı etkili öğrenme ve öğretmedir.

Hem özetleyici hem de biçimlendirici değerlendirme alanlarında; özetleyici ve biçimlendirici değerlendirmenin etkileri, öğretmen ve öğrencilerin değerlendirmeye bakış açıları, geribildirim kullanımı ve etkileri gibi farklı konularda çeşitli çalışmalar yapılmıştır. Ancak, hem özetleyici hem biçimlendirici değerlendirmenin her ikisi de Türkiye’de ki Hazırlık Okullarında kullanılmalarına rağmen, her ikisini de bir araç olarak kullanarak etkili bir öğrenme ortamı yaratma konusunda henüz bir çalışma yapılmamıştır. Bu sebeple, bu çalışmanın amacı öğrencilerin değerlendirme konusundaki genel tutum ve düşüncelerini araştırmak ve literatürde önerilen koşulları kullanarak etkili bir öğrenme ortamı yaratmaktır. Bunu yaparken de özetleyici ve biçimlendirici değerlendirmeyi bir araç olarak kullanmaktır.

Bu çalışmadaki katılımcılar Çağ Üniversitesi Hazırlık Okulu B13 sınıfı öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Çalışma 11 bayan 9 erkek olmak üzere 20 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır.

Yapılan çalışma nitel araştırma modellerinin kullanıldığı, eylem araştırması yönteminin uygulandığı bir vaka çalışmasıdır. Veriler toplanırken görüşmeler, öğrenci günlükleri ve araştırmacının gözlem ve notları kullanılmıştır.

Yapılan eylem alıřmasına bařlamadan nce, ğrencilerde motivasyon eksiklięi olduęu, stresli oldukları ve deęerlendirmeye karřı olumsuz tutum ve dūřüncede oldukları grlmüřtü. Yapılan alıřmanın yardımıyla ğrenciler, kendi eksik ve güçlü oldukları yanlarının farkına varmıřlar, motivasyonları artmıř ve deęerlendirmeye karřı olumlu tutum ve dūřünceler kazanmıřlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Deęerlendirme, Biimlendirici Deęerlendirme, zetleyici Deęerlendirme, Geribildirim, Motivasyon, Farkındalık, Etkili ğrenme Ortamı

## **ABSTRACT**

### **DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN AN EFL CLASSROOM**

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Assessment has always been a very crucial part of language education, for both teaching and learning. Summative and formative assessments are the two major kinds of assessment used in EFL classrooms and serve different purposes. Although they are used for different purposes, the main focus of assessment is effective teaching and effective learning.

There have been various studies on both summative and formative assessments such as; the affects of summative and formative assessment, students' and teachers' perceptions on assessment, using feedback, and the affects of feedback. Unfortunately, although both assessment forms are used in Preparatory Schools in Turkey; there have not been any studies on creating an effective learning environment using both formative and summative assessments as a tool at a Preparatory School of a university. Therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate general attitudes and feelings of the students on assessment and how to create an effective learning environment using the conditions that were suggested in the literature while using both summative and formative assessments as a tool.

The participants of this study were the students of Çağ University Preparatory School. The study was conducted with 20 students, 11 females and 9 males.

The study has been designed as a case study in which action research and qualitative research designs were used. Interviews, students' diaries, researcher's observations and notes were used as a tool to collect the data.

Before starting the action research, students were not motivated; they were stressed and had negative attitudes and feelings towards assessment. With the help of the conducted

study, they became aware of their weaknesses and strengths, motivated, and gained some positive attitudes towards assessment.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment, Feedback, Motivation, Awareness, Effective Learning Environment

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- EFL** : English as a Foreign Language
- AEQ** : Assessment Experience Questionnaire
- CEP** : The Center for Effective Learning Performance
- TESTA** : Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment

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# CHAPTER 1

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, all of which will be explained separately in order to give detailed information.

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Assessment is an indispensable part of teaching and learning and it is used for different functions in the field of education. Sturniolo-Baker and Loiacono (2012) point out two different functions of the assessment for the student, which are assessment of learning and assessment for learning. They also state that in assessment of learning, assessment serves as a tool not only for the students but also for the teacher to utilize their performance on a certain subject. However, in assessment for learning, assessment serves “as a learning tool in itself” (p. 1). In either way, both teachers and students need to understand the aim of different types of assessment during the teaching and learning. Otherwise, the assessment used in the class does not serve for teaching and learning and all the effort would be wasted.

There are various studies about conditions which affect assessment and support learning. Although these studies focus on the conditions that should be created in the class, they also give conditions that should be created with the students, decision makers and also with the parents. All these studies have taken those conditions from different aspects.

Stiggings (2005) states that “to use assessment productively to help achieve maximum student success, certain conditions need to be satisfied” (p. 328). Stiggings clarifies these conditions which are:

- Our achievement targets need to be clear,
- State standards need to be deconstructed into curriculum maps that are articulated within and across grade levels, and the resulting classroom-level achievement targets must be translated into student-and-family-friendly versions,
- Assessment and information management systems must be created to meet the needs of all instructional decision makers, including students,
- All assessments –especially those created by classroom teachers- must be accurate, producing dependable evidence of learning in all contexts at all times, and

- The timing and nature of student involvement in assessment, record-keeping and communication must be effectively managed by teachers.

As in the study of Stiggins (2005), not only students and teachers but also the parents, and decision makers should be involved in these conditions which should be created.

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) define the conditions to frame students' learning which Gibbs and Simpson (2006) then categorize these conditions under five main categories taking assessment and feedback into consideration. With a similar study Gibbs (2006) argues that assessment works best to support learning when a series of conditions are met (p. 23). According to Gibbs and Simpson (2004), "this study is not the first attempt to identify 'such conditions' but is the first attempt in the context of higher education" (p.11). The eleven conditions Gibbs (2006, pp. 29-30) categorizes to frame and support students learning are:

1- Quantity and distribution of student effort

- Assessed tasks capture sufficient study time and effort
- These tasks distribute student effort evenly across topics and weeks

2- Quality and level of student effort

- These tasks engage students in productive learning activity
- Assessment communicates clear and high expectations to students

3- Quantity and timing of feedback

- Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and in enough detail
- The feedback is provided quickly enough to be useful to students

4- Quality of feedback

- Feedback focuses on learning rather than on marks or students themselves
- Feedback is linked to the purpose of the assignment and criteria
- Feedback is understandable to students, given their sophistication

5- Students' response to feedback

- Feedback is received by students and attended to
- Feedback is acted upon by students to improve their work or their learning

Gibbs and Simpson (2003) developed a tool for teachers that they called "Assessment Experience Questionnaire" (AEQ) to identify how well the assessment on their course is supporting their students' learning, in order to be able to make principled changes to that assessment (p. 2)

The Center for Effective Learning Performance (CEP) (2006) suggests that each student has the ability to learn, but it is the teachers' responsibility to create an effective learning environment in the classroom both physically and emotionally. They also suggest some conditions to create an effective learning environment in the classroom:

1. Learners must be motivated in order to learn: Students are motivated in a positive way if they perceive the training is valuable for them.
2. Active participation is crucial for learning to occur: It's a common sense that people learn by doing, so learners must be actively participated in the learning environment. If sufficient time on the relevant practice is allowed, students will leave the class with not only the skills they need but also the confidence to apply those skills.
3. Immediate feedback facilitates learning: Immediate feedback is required after active participation, or practice to be successful. Appropriate feedback on where performance was lacking and what to do differently must be provided if performance does not meet standards, and immediate feedback prevents the learner from continuing to practice the skill incorrectly.
4. Individualization of instruction enhances the learning process: Instruction that considers the individual differences during training design (to the extent feasible) greatly enhances learning (In Performance Edge).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

At Çağ University Preparatory School, students need to acquire a grade of 60 out of 100 to pass Preparatory School and continue in the department where the education language of the courses is English. Even though 60 is enough for them to pass, the point is that they need to acquire English and use it productively in the department. For evaluating the students, each term we -as teachers- give seven quizzes and three monthly exams which play a role in their passing grade, and at the end of the academic year they take a final exam that consists of grammar, listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. The aim of the quizzes and monthly exams is to make the students realize their strengths and weaknesses on the topics that we cover in our course book lessons. However, most of the students are not aware of why they are taking these exams, and they only see them as exams that do not play a very important role on their passing grades. They think that only the final exam is very important and helps them to pass the class.



The major problem here is that the students are not aware of the importance of the quizzes and exams and that they can get feedback in order to see their weaknesses and strengths. Also they all need to realize that they can achieve success by getting regular assessment and feedback.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

Since the students at Çağ University Preparatory School mostly concentrate on the final exam only, they have a tendency to underestimate the importance of the regular quizzes, monthly exams and in-class discussions. After realizing that doing those quizzes and exams does not serve its aim, I -as their course book teacher- wanted to scrutinize their reasoning about the assessment they receive, and to create an effective learning environment in which they become aware of the importance of regular assessment and feedback. When we become fully aware of our current position on the assessment and feedback given and engaged in the class, then we can create the full conditions for the students. Thus, they might get the proper message and be aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it so that they can enhance their learning through assessment.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

There is a famous Chinese proverb which says “*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime*”. If we transfer that proverb to the learning context, we -as teachers- ought to make our students realize that the important thing is to see their own weak and strong points first to achieve their goals and success. We not only pave the way for them to be aware but also teach them how to overcome those weak points rather than making them only be obsessed with getting passing grades. This process might help them develop a culture of success that they can also use their experience when they study at their departments and transfer and use it in their whole educational life.

By teaching students how they can recognize their weaknesses and strengths by letting them experience more, although they cannot see their own strengths and weaknesses by themselves at the beginning, they can learn how to do it by themselves in the mean time with enough practice.

## **1.5. Research Questions**

The research question of the present study is as follows:

1. What do my students think about assessment?
2. How can I -as a course book teacher- develop an effective learning environment in my class at Çağ University Preparatory Class?

## **1.6. Limitations**

In Çağ University Preparatory School, each class has two course book teachers, one reading, listening and speaking teacher and one writing teacher. Only I as a researcher (one of the course book teachers) conducted the study in one of the Preparatory classes which is B13. One of the limitations of this study is that only the course book quizzes and monthly exams but not the reading, speaking, listening and writing quizzes and monthly exams was taken into consideration during the study.

The second limitation is that the research started with 26 participants but after a while 6 of them dropped out so I had to complete the study with 20 participants. The reason for the students' dropping out of the research was that they were frequently absent; as a result they exceeded the limit of the attendance.

The third limitation is that the study was conducted with only 20 participants which is a small group of students compared to the total number of the students in Preparatory School which was 450.

The last limitation of the study is that I could not control how the students keep the diaries I supplied for the study. Since it was voluntary work, I did not want to force them to keep the diaries regularly so some of them kept the diaries regularly but some of them not. Also, a few students sometimes used the diaries as a notebook in which they took notes in the lessons.

## **1.7. Operational Definitions**

The key terms of the current study are defined below:

1. *Assessment* is a process that focuses on student learning, a process that involves reviewing and reflecting on practice as academics have always done, but in a more planned and careful way. Assessment is the systematic collection, review and use of

information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

2. *Summative Assessment* is described according to Irons (2008) as any assessment activity which results in a mark or grade which is subsequently used as a judgment on student performance. Ultimately judgments using summative assessment marks will be used to determine the classification of award at the end of a course or programme.
3. *Formative Assessment* is described according to Irons (2008) as any task or activity which creates feedback (or feed forward) for students about their learning. Formative assessment does not carry a grade which is subsequently used in a summative assessment.
4. *Formative Feedback* is described by Irons (2008) as follows; it is any information, process or activity which affords or accelerates student learning based on comments relating to either formative assessment or summative assessment activities.
5. *Effective Learning Environment* is described by Gibbs (2006) based on some conditions and assessment regimes. According to Gibbs (2006) effective learning is not only the environment created in the classroom but also the students' own study environment in and outside of the classroom. He suggests that formative assessment and formative feedback are crucial and effective for creating an effective learning environment. Gibbs also states that the following items should be taken in to consideration for such an environment: 1) quantity and distribution of student effort 2) Quality and level of student effort 3) quantity and timing of feedback 4) quality of feedback 5) students response to feedback.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses firstly on the nature of assessment, its relationship to learning and its various purposes. Then, the two main types of assessments, summative and formative assessment, are defined in detail with their definitions, natures, purposes and their contribution to the students' learning.

#### 2.1. Assessment

In its most basic sense, assessment is “the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something, or the judgment or decision that is made” (Cambridge Dictionary), and in educational context, we can label anything done in the class as assessment. Black and William (1998) define assessment as all the activities “undertaken by teachers and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 2). In the light of this definition, assessment contains quizzes, exams, and students' performance including homework as well as the teacher's observation of the students' participation in the class. Students need to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses during the process of learning so that they can be aware of what they have learnt and what they need to improve.

Assessing the students is a long and time-consuming process; yet if it is done in the right conditions, it provides students much more than learning. Brown (2004-2005) states that assessment is very important since it is probably the most crucial thing that we can do to help our students learning and he continues “we may not like it, but students can and ignore our teaching; however, if they want to get a qualification, they have to participate in the assessment process we design and implement” (p. 81). Trotter (2006) suggests that “assessing the performance of students is considered to be the most important thing a teacher can do for their students and it can have profound effect on their learning” (p. 505).

O'Farrell (2009, p. 3) lists the reasons for assessment as:

- to determine that the intended learning outcomes of the course are being achieved,
- to provide feedback to students on their learning, enabling them to improve their performance,
- to motivate students to undertake appropriate work,

- to support and guide learning,
- to describe student attainment, informing decisions on progression and awards,
- to demonstrate that appropriate standards are being maintained, and
- to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching.

There is an undeniable relationship between assessment and learning. If we- as teachers- can interpret information properly, we can better understand what our students are learning. By using both summative and formative assessment we can clearly understand the students' strengths and weaknesses, we can check their learning process, and we can plan the next step to improve their learning. According to Gibbs (2006), "assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behavior and in many courses it has more impact on learning than teaching" (p. 23).

As Sturniolo-Baker and Loiacono (2012) state assessment can perform two different functions for the students: it can be a tool for the student (as well as the teacher) to evaluate their performance in a particular subject (assessment of learning) and it can be a learning tool in itself (assessment for learning) (p. 1 ).

Pellegrino, Chudowsky and Glaser (2001, pp. 37-42) suggest three broad purposes of assessment as:

- assessment to assist learning or formative assessment
- assessment of individual achievement or summative assessment
- assessment to evaluate programs.

Similar to Pellegrino et al., Black (1993) distinguishes the purposes of assessments into three broad categories;

- the certification of student achievement (normally through summative assessment)
- the accountability of educational institutions and the education system through the publication and the comparison of results (summative results) and
- the promotion of learning through the provision of helpful feedback (normally through formative assessment and formative feedback).

As Atkin, Black and Coffey (2001) suggest on Table 1 that it represents an overview which highlights the distinctions among the types, purposes, and locus of influence, as well as who takes on the primary roles and responsibilities with respect to the assessment (p. 20).

**Table 1. *Types, Purposes, and Roles and Responsibilities for Assessment***

Type	Purpose	Roles and responsibilities
Formative	Improve learning	Student and teacher
	Inform instruction	
Summative	Grading	Teachers and external tests
	Placement	
	Promotion	
	Accountability	External tests (and teacher)

Taken from “Classroom Assessment and the National Science education Standards,” by J. M. Atkin, P. Black, and J. Coffey, 2001, *Classroom Assessment and the National Science Education Standards*, p. 20 .

According to Black and William (1998), learning is driven by what the teachers and pupils do in classrooms and it is the teachers who have to manage complicated and demanding situations, channeling the personal, emotional and social pressures in order to help their students to learn now, and become better learners in the future (p. 1). Stiggings (2007, pp. 17-18) suggests that assessment for learning must continue throughout the learning process since it cannot happen just once a year or quarterly or weekly and he suggests that teachers must play some roles in classroom assessment to manage this which are:

- to become competent masters themselves of the standards their pupils are to master.
- to understand how those standards transform into the curriculum that forms the scaffolding that pupils will climb on their journey up to each standard.
- to make classroom-level achievement targets clear to pupils.
- to transform the classroom targets into high-quality classroom assessments that are capable of accurately reflecting pupil achievement of those targets.
- to use those assessments over time in collaboration with their pupils to inform key decisions and to help motivate pupils to keep learning. (pp. 17-18)

Stiggings (2001) suggests “the quality of any assessment depends first and foremost on the clarity and appropriateness of our definitions of the achievement target to be assessed” and he adds “we cannot assess academic achievement effectively if we do not know and

understand what that valued target is” (p. 19). As Stiggins (2001) mentions, teachers must know the performance criteria clearly first before they clarify the goals and achievement target to his/her students.

The crucial point here is how the teachers assess their students for effective learning. According to Brown (2004-2005) “to be valid, the assessment needs to focus as well on what is intended to be learned” (p. 82). The most traditional way is giving quizzes and exams and grading them; nonetheless, assessment is not only grading their performance through quizzes and exams since the most of it comes after the exams. When the students are assessed systematically for a period of time, then they become aware of filtering the information that is useful for them and what they should know about it. In this way, the teachers not only assess their students but also show them a path that they can follow for their lifelong learning.

Weurlander, Söderberg, Scheja, Hult, and Wernerson (2012) explain one of the purposes of assessment as “assessment sends a strong message to students about what counts as knowledge in a particular learning environment” and they add that the same assessment has different meanings for different students which means students’ perceptions of requirements of the assessment influence their approach to learning (p. 748).

William and Leahy (2007, p. 30) suggest that assessments serve different purposes and broadly, educational assessments serve three functions:

- to support learning (formative)
- to certify the achievements or potential of individuals (summative)
- to evaluate the quality of educational institutions, programs or curricula (evaluative)

As Trotter (2006, p. 507)) suggests there are various purposes of assessments and from these the main purposes of the tutorial file as a form of assessment have been identified as to:

- provide feedback to students to improve their learning
- give the teacher feedback on how effective and successful they are at promoting learning
- motivate students
- enable students to correct errors and remedy deficiencies
- consolidate student learning
- convey to students what we want them to learn.

Black (1999, p. 118) proposes that “the purposes of testing and assessment can be considered in two broad categories-the summative and the formative”. He continues and explains summative and formative assessment as;

Summative assessment serves to inform an overall judgment of achievement which may be reporting and review, perhaps on transfer between years in a school or on transfer between schools, perhaps for providing certificates at the end of schooling. Formative assessment is concerned with the short term collection and use of evidence for the guidance of learning, mainly in day to day classroom practice.

## **2.2. Summative Assessment**

Summative assessment is defined by Atkin, Black, and Coffey (2001) as “summative assessment refers to the cumulative assessments, usually occurring at the end of a unit or topic coverage, that intend to capture what a student has learned, or the quality of the learning, and judge performance against some standards” (p. 25).

Harlen and James (1997) define the purpose of summative assessment as: to describe learning achieved at a certain time for the purposes of reporting parents, other teachers, the pupils themselves and, in summary form, to other interested parties such as school governors or school boards. It has an important role in the overall educational progress of pupils but not day-to-day teaching as does formative assessment (p. 370).

In summative assessment, the students might only engage in assessment activities that have a summative purpose which is a danger. Irons (2008) states the potential reasons as:

- students are judged on/classified on summative marks;
- academics value summative assessment;
- external stakeholders like employers or parents value summative results;
- there is so much summative assessment that students do not have time for anything else (p. 41).

In a classroom environment, summative assessment itself is not enough to evaluate and understand the learning cycle. Both summative and formative assessments are important in their own ways and one completes the other.



### 2.3. Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is defined by Heritage (2007) as:

a systematic process to continuously gather evidence about learning. The data are used to identify a student's current level of learning and to adapt lessons to help the student reach the desired learning goal. In formative assessment, students are active participants with their teachers, sharing learning goals and understanding how their learning is progressing, what next steps they need to take, and how to take them (p. 141).

Another definition by William (2009, cited in William, 2010, p. 2) is:

assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence about student achievement elicited by the assessment is interpreted and used to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions that would have been taken in the absence of that evidence.

William (2010, p.3) figures out the aspects of formative assessment as in Figure 1:

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is	How to get there
Teacher	<b>Clarify and share learning intentions</b>	<b>Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning</b>	<b>Providing feedback that moves learners forward</b>
Peer		<b>Activating students as learning resources for one another</b>	
Learner		<b>Activating students as owners of their own learning</b>	

**Figure 1. The Aspects of Formative Assessment**

Taken from “Embedded Formative Assessment with Teacher Learning Communities” by D. William, 2010, *Learning forum L7 at the North of England Education Conference, January 2010*, p. 3.

According to Stiggings (2007) “both pupil and teacher must know where the learner is now, how that compares to ultimate learning success, and how to close the gap between the two” (p. 15). One way to close that gap is to make the students be aware of their own potentials. According to Black and William (1998) “what is needed is a culture of success, backed by a belief that all can achieve. Formative assessment can be a powerful weapon here if it is communicated in the right way” (p. 9). In the same vein, Stiggings (2007) also states that “all pupils must believe that they can succeed at learning if they try and they must have access to credible evidence of their own academic success” (p. 13). Shepard (2006) also proposes in the same way and suggests if teachers want to be effective in supporting student learning, they must constantly be checking student understanding. He also adds that teachers should inform their students about the importance of students themselves taking responsibility for reflecting on and monitoring their own learning progress (p. 627). When students realize their own progress in a positive way, the progress will be faster. According to Shepard (2006) “formative assessment, effectively implemented, can do as much or more to improve student achievement than any of the most powerful instructional interventions, intensive reading instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and the like” (p. 627). William & Leahy (2007) suggests that assessment is formative 1) for individuals if they can use the feedback to improve their learning; 2) for teachers if the outcomes from the assessment can be interpreted their properly, help them improve teaching specifically or generally; and 3) for schools and districts if the information generated can be interpreted appropriately to improve the quality of learning within the schools and districts (pp. 39-40). If an effective formative feedback is aimed to be given, it needs to make the students see what they can achieve when they try. However, most of the time students prefer engaging in summative assessment to formative assessment. Irons (2008, pp. 41-42) states that there are some reasons if students only focus on summative assessment; it potentially means that they will not engage in formative activities because they do not:

- appreciate the value of the formative activity as a learning opportunity;
- want to spend time on activities that they do not get a “reward” for;
- see the value or relevance of summative assessment activities and as a result believe there is even less value in formative assessment;
- see feedback as a positive signal;
- focus on their learning and skills development outside the specific summative expectations of a particular module;

- view their educational or professional development as part of their student experience.

Atkin, Black, and Coffey (2001, p. 26) suggest three key questions to help design and implement an effective and efficient classroom assessment system.

- Where are you trying to go?
- Where are you now?
- How can you get there?

They also suggest that although having posed these questions as a guide, it is important to know that there is not a single best model exists for using assessment as a tool and each teacher needs to develop a system that works for him or her (pp. 25-26). Answering the first question informs students about the goal that we are trying to reach and by answering the second question students can realize the gap between the goal and where they are now. The third question mentions what can be and needed to be done to reach the goal. As the first question indicates, it is very important to give clear instructions about the achievement which is aimed to be reached. Atkin, Black and Coffey (2001) also suggest that clarity about the overall goals is only a first step and given that goals are clear, the teacher has to help the students achieve greater clarity which usually entails identification of somewhat discrete stages that will help the students to understand what is required to move toward the goal (p. 32).

Formative assessment helps both pupils and the teachers in different ways. According to Crooks (1988, p. 443), formative assessment;

- reactivates or consolidates prerequisite skills or knowledge prior to introducing a new material,
- focuses attention on important aspects of the subject,
- encourages active learning strategies,
- gives pupils opportunities to practice skills and consolidate learning,
- provides knowledge of results and corrective feedback,
- helps pupils monitor their own progress and develop skills of self evaluation,
- guides the choice of further instructional or learning activities to increase mastery, and
- helps pupils feel a sense of accomplishment.

Davies, Arbuckle and Bonneau (2004, p.1) emphasize that assessment which directly supports learning has five key characteristics:

- Learners are involved so a shared language and understanding of learning with others,
- Learners self-assess and receive specific, descriptive feedback about the learning during the learning,
- Learners collect, organize and communicate evidence with learning with others,
- Instruction is adjusted in response to ongoing assessment information, and
- A safe learning environment invites risk taking, encourages learning from mistakes, enables focused goal setting, and supports thoughtful learning (p. 1)

Formative assessment needs to be involved in the class atmosphere if the goal is to make the assessment centered on learning. Tunstall and Gipps (1996) proposes that “formative assessment is that process of appraising, judging or evaluating students’ work or performance and using this to shape and improve their competence” (p. 389). The important point is not the teachers’ intention of what to focus on while assessing the students but the students’ engagement with the assessment.

Weurlander et al. (2012) suggest that formative assessment contributes to students’ learning in two different ways: (1) the learning process (how students learn) and (2) by affecting the learning outcome (what they learn) (p. 753). With the help of these two contributions to the students’ learning, teachers can also understand the way our students learn and the gap between our learning goals and what our students learn.

According to Heritage (2007, p. 141), the formative assessment process includes four essential elements which are:

- identifying the learning gap,
- feedback,
- student involvement, and
- learning progression.

Heritage (2007, pp. 141-142) suggests that teachers need to understand each of these elements clearly and explains them as:

Identifying the gap: As Sadler (1989) suggests the gap between the student’s current status in learning and the desired educational goals may vary from student to student and he adds the goal may be unattainable by a student if the goal is perceived by a student too large. However, it may provide a powerful stimulus for another highly motivated student.

Contrarily, if the gap perceived as too small, students may think it is not worth any additional effort. So, it is very important for teachers to know their students and take individual student characteristics into account (p. 130).

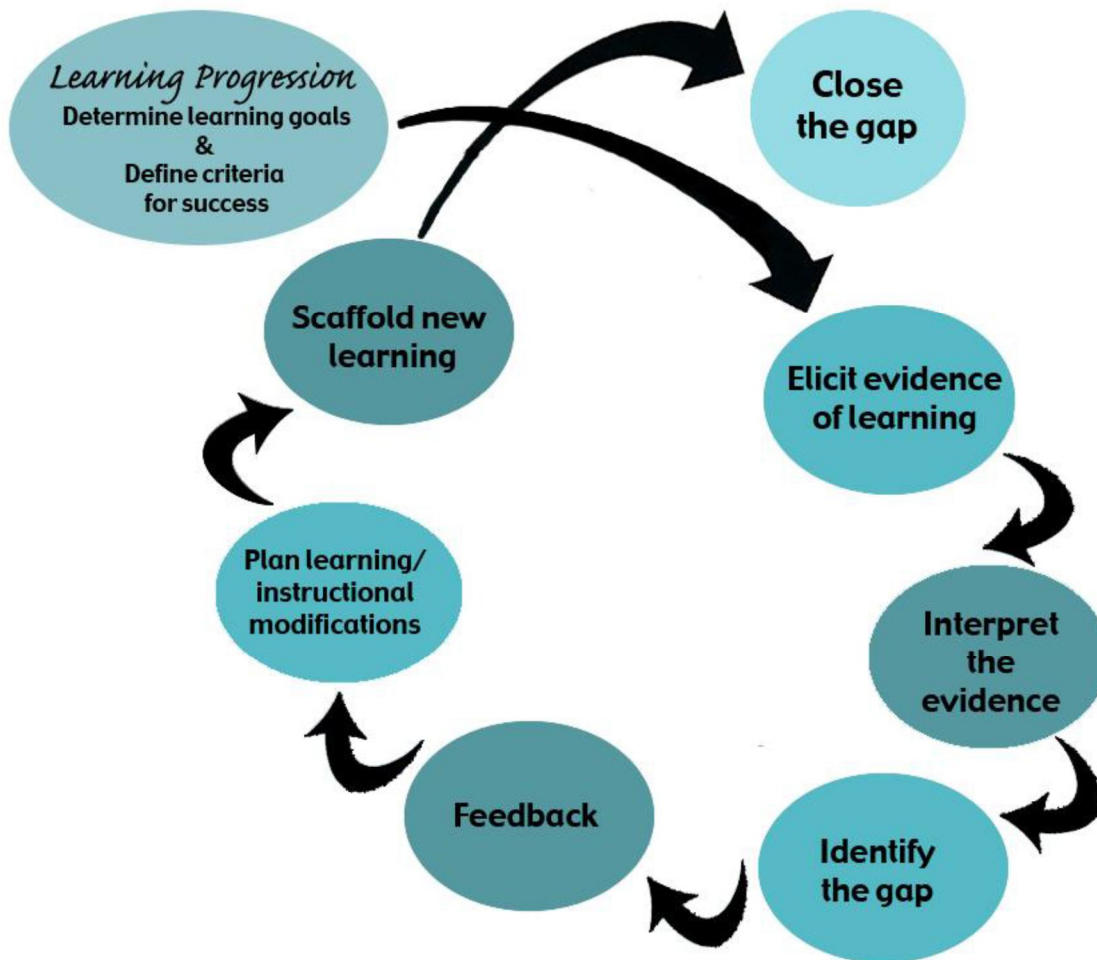
Feedback: Formative assessment provides feedback at different levels: (1) it provides feedback to the teacher about the students' current level of understanding, (2) it informs about the next step of learning and how it should be. It also guides students through their own next steps. Effective feedback from teachers provides clear, and descriptive information that shows the students where they are in a learning progression, how their learning is different from the learning goal, and how they can move forward. With the help of feedback, teachers also attempt to close the gap between the students' current learning and the desired goal by modifying instruction, giving further information about learning by assessing again and so on. Formative assessment and feedback are inseparable and learners must be able to use feedback to improve their learning.

Student involvement: teachers try to involve students learning through formative assessment but it depends on active involvement of the students in their own assessment. By involving formative assessment and feedback, students learn the skills of self and peer assessment and as Sadler (1989, cited in Heritage, 2007) suggests, they collaborate a shared understanding of their current learning status and what they need to do to get one step further in their learning. They also develop learning strategies and they are able to adapt their learning tactics to meet their own learning needs.

Learning Progression: Formative assessment must be linked to a learning progression. Learning progression provides sub goals out of a larger learning goal, and they provide the teacher with the whole Picture of what needs to be learned, and they help teachers locate students' current learning status on the continuum along which students are expected to progress.

McMillan (2007, p. 4) suggests three key ingredients to evaluate the efficacy of formative classroom assessment:

- The extent to which assessments are embedded within instructions;
- The extent to which additional instructional strategies are employed;
- The extent of student engagement and learning.



**Figure 2. Margaret Heritage’s Formative Assessment Model**

Taken from “Understanding Formative Assessment and Utilizing It to Improve Classroom Instruction” by M. Heritage, 2009, *Presentation at REL Midwest at Learning Point Associates’ Lessons Learned about Formative Assessment Use, Chicago, IL.*

In Heritage’s Formative Assessment Model, she explains the process of Formative Assessment. According to her model, first, the learning goals should be determined and criteria for success need to be defined and explained clearly by the teacher and shared with the students. The borders should be clear and the language must be in a way that the students can clearly understand. The second step is eliciting evidence of learning in which formative assessment must collect quality evidence of learning and then be applied. The formative assessment can be systematic, planned or spontaneous. Heritage also suggests that there is no single way of eliciting evidence. She suggests different ways; questioning, discussion (student/student or teacher/student), observation (watching and listening), tasks (representations, explanations, problem solving strategies, reading logs, oral presentation,

writing and performances), mid-lesson checks(white boards, ABCD cards, clickers), exit cards, notes to teacher, and curriculum-embedded assessments. The teacher should interpret the data s/he gathered from the students by formative assessment. Then different tasks should be given and applied to the students, and when s/he can interpret them regularly, s/he can have an idea about the students' current learning status, s/he can understand if there is a gap between the students' current status and the desired goal with a view to understanding if the students are on track to meeting or have met the success criteria. According to Heritage (2007), identifying the “gap” is the first of four core elements of formative assessment and she lists the other three as feedback, student involvement, and learning progressions (p. 142). The next step is feedback which, she suggests, informs teachers what the next steps in learning should be. Heritage (2007) suggests “feedback also is central to guiding students through their own next steps. Effective feedback from teachers provides clear, descriptive, criterion-based information that indicates to the students where they are in a learning progression (defined below), how their understanding differs from the desired learning goal, and how they can move forward” (p.142). And finally, “the teacher takes steps to close the gap between the students' current learning and the goal by modifying instruction, assessing again to give further information about learning, modifying instruction again, and so on” (p. 142).

#### **2.4. Formative Feedback**

One of the crucial ways of assessment is giving feedback, and in ESL classes, it is an essential tool to help the process of learning the language. Brown suggests (2004-05, p. 84) that

if assessment is to be integral to learning, feedback must be at the heart of the process. Even though it is time-consuming, significant energy must be devoted to helping students to understand not only where they have gone wrong, but also what they need to do to improve.

According to Black and William (1998) “feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils” (p. 9). Crooks (1988) also suggests several ways to enhance the effectiveness of feedback. First, feedback is most effective if it focuses

students' attention on their progress in mastering educational tasks. Second, feedback should take place while it is still clearly relevant which means it should be provided soon after a task is completed so that the student is given opportunities subsequently to demonstrate learning from the feedback and thirdly, feedback should be specific and related to need (p. 468-469). He adds that this information is considered as feedback only when it is used to alter the gap. Similarly, Irons (2008) states that "the most constructive, and effective, feedback is based on what it is that students want". He suggests that the best way to learn what they want is asking them since asking results in a dialogue with the students (p. 39). Ramaprasad (1983) explains feedback as "feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way" (p. 4). (cited in William & Leahy, p. 32) The other important feature of Ramaprasad's (1983) definition is that it draws attention to three key instructional processes:

- establishing where the learners are in their learning
- establishing where they are going
- establishing what needs to be done to get them there

Sadler (1989) also focuses on Ramaprasad's three key instructional processes and states that "the learner has to (a) possess a concept of the *standard* (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for, (b) compare the *actual* (or current) *level of performance* with the standard, and (c) engage in appropriate *action* which leads to some closure of the gap" (p. 121). What Ramaprasad (1983) and Sadler (1989) stated can be easily seen in Table 2:

**Table 2. Common Points between Sadler's and Ramaprasad's Instructions on Formative Assessment**

Ramaprasad (1983)	Sadler (1989)	Common Points
establishing where the learners are in their learning	the <i>actual</i> (or current) <i>level of performance</i>	Current Position
establishing where they are going	a concept of the <i>standard</i> (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for	Desired Goal
establishing what needs to be done to get them there	appropriate <i>action</i> which leads to some closure of the gap	Closing the Gap



Hattie & Timperley (2007) suggests in their study that feedback is one of the major impacts on learning. However the type of feedback and the way it is given can be effective in different ways (p. 81). In an effective language learning atmosphere, the role of the teacher and his/her reactions to the learners' errors is very important. Teachers should know how and where to give feedback for the students to be able to acquire the teaching goals. As Black and William state (1998), "teachers need to know about their pupils' progress and difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their work to meet their needs – needs which are often unpredictable and which vary from one pupil to another" (p. 2). As Hattie & Timperley mentions (2007) "it is the case that feedback is not only given by teachers, students, peers, and so on, but can also be sought by students, peers, and so on, and detected by learner without it being intentionally sought" (p. 82). Feedback is one of the crucial ways that teachers can have an idea about their pupils' process. Brown (2004-2005) suggests that although it is a tough task for academics, feedback needs to be detailed, comprehensive, meaningful to the individual and at the same time it must be fair, challenging and supportive (p.85).

Feedback is not something only about the teachers. As Sadler (1998) mentions it is very important how the students interpret the feedback and they should also be trained how to interpret, how to make connections between the feedback and characteristics of the work they produce, and how they can improve their work accordingly so we cannot assume that the students will know what to do with the feedback when they are given it (p. 78).

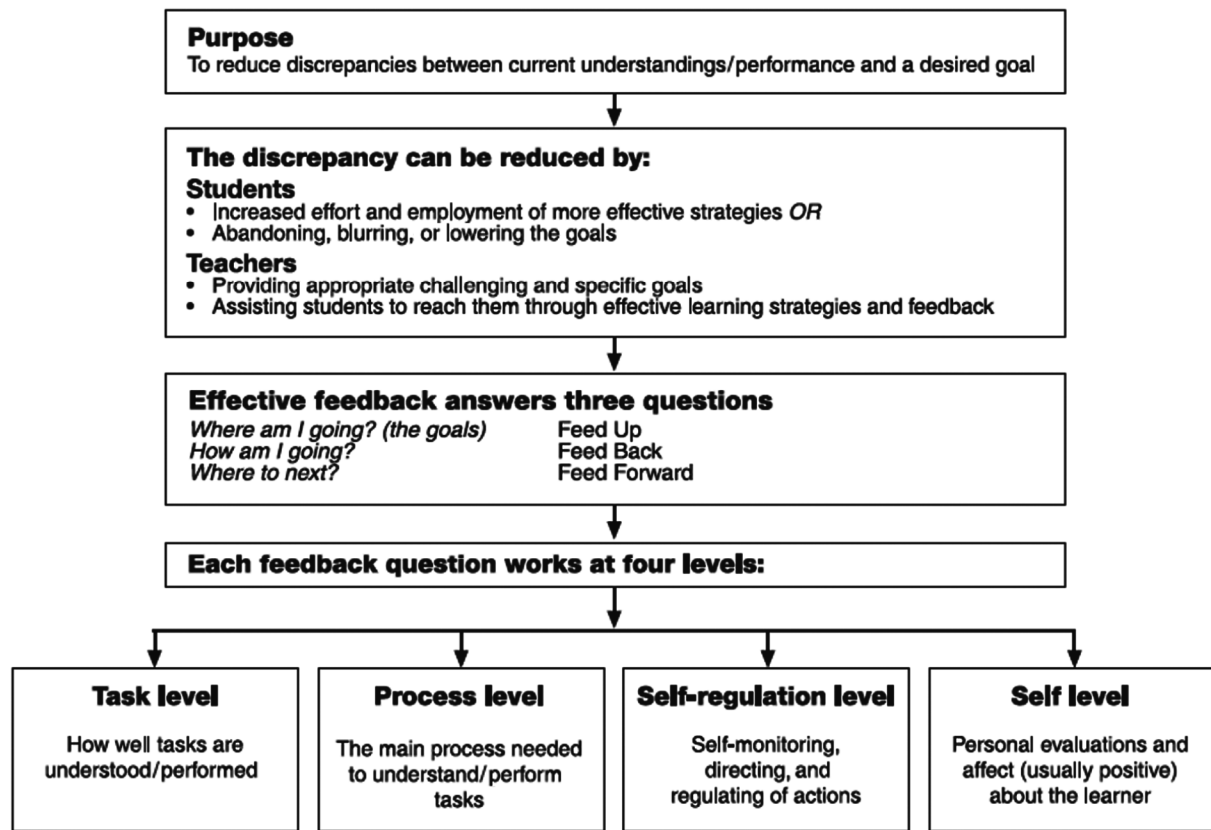
Sadler (1998) states that any formative assessment excluding self-assessment involves communication. He continues that the most common situation in giving feedback is from the teacher to the learner and the teacher needs to understand what makes for effective communication, and what the teacher does to provide feedback to a student, and what the teacher brings to assessment episodes to make that activity possible are the two things that needs to be looked at (p. 80).

Hattie & Timperley (2007, pp. 85-86) discusses that the power of feedback is influenced by the direction of the feedback relative to performance on a task and feedback is specifically more effective in some conditions:

- when feedback provides information on correct rather than incorrect responses
- when it builds on changes from previous trails

They add that the difficulty of goals and tasks also influence the effect of feedback and it has the most impact when the task complexity is low but the goals are specific and

challenging. They think that “the main purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings and performance and a goal” (p. 86).



**Figure 3. A model of Feedback to Enhance Learning**

Taken from “The Power of Feedback” by J. Hattie and H. Timperley, 2007, *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), p. 87.

According to Hattie & Timperley (2007), students and teachers may use some strategies to reduce the gap between the current and desired understanding, may be more or less effective in enhancing learning (p.86). As Figure 3 shows there are three major questions asked by a teacher and/or by a student which an effective feedback has to answer:

- Where am I going? (What are the goals?)
- How am I going? (What process is being made toward the goal?)
- Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?)

According to Hattie & Timperley (2007), “students can increase their effort, particularly when the effort leads to tackling more challenging tasks or appreciating higher quality experiences rather than just doing “more” “ (p. 86).

According to Irons (2008), in some conditions feedback can demotivate the students when:

- the students perceive the feedback to be unfair,
- feedback is not clear enough,
- the students do not understand the feedback,
- the feedback does not seem to relate to the work they have done,
- the students do not receive feedback in time,
- feedback is overly critical, or
- feedback is non-constructive (p. 38).

It is important to give effective feedback but as Brown (2004-5) mentions “any assessment strategy needs to be *efficient* in terms of staff time, cost-effective for the organizations concerned and should ensure that learners find the tasks they are set manageable, relevant and developmental” (p. 83). While assessing the students and giving formative feedback, the teachers need to be realistic and arrange the students’ and their time and effort accordingly.

Race (2005, cited in Trotter, 2006, p. 508) identifies good feedback as that providing not only grades and scores but also feedback discussion and written comments on assessed work. Trotter (2006, p. 517) suggests both questioning and considering how efficient the assessment method is and he suggests some criteria on how the assessment method should satisfy these criteria:

- should be practicable and realistic,
- the costs should not outweigh the benefits for both students and tutor,
- tutor should consider the students’ perceptions of the workload, and
- tutor should consider how the workload can be reduced without decreasing the perceived benefits to students.

## **2.5. The Relationship and Differences between Summative and Formative Assessment**

Benett (2011) explains the relationship clearly on Table 3:

By the same token, well-designed and implemented formative assessment should be able to suggest how instruction should be modified, as well as suggest impressionistically to the teacher what students know and can do. Thus, we should be

able to design assessment systems in which summative tests, besides fulfilling their primary purposes, routinely advance learning, and formative assessments routinely add to the teacher’s overall informal judgments of student achievement (p.8).

**Table 3. A More Nuanced View of the Relationship between Assessment Purpose and Assessment Type**

Type	Purpose	
	Assessment Of Learning	Assessment For Learning
Summative	X	x
Formative	x	X

Note: X = primary purpose; x = secondary purpose.

Taken from “Formative Assessment: A Critical Review” by R. E. Bennett, 2011, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policies and Practice*, 18(1), p. 8.

As Taras (2009) suggests both summative and formative assessment are processes and an assessment can be uniquely summative when the assessment stops at the judgment but it is not possible for assessment to be uniquely formative: summative assessment may be implicit and only the formative focus made explicit, or both can be explicit (p.58). Taras (2005) also suggests the distinction between summative and formative assessment that formative assessment focuses on the process of assessing and using feedback, while summative assessment tends to focus on the product (p. 472).

Sadler (1989) suggests “the primary distinction between formative and summative assessment relates to purpose and effect, not to timing” and he clarifies formative assessment as concerned with how judgments of the quality of students responses such as performances, pieces, or works can be used to shape and improve their learning, while summative assessment is concerned with summing up or summarizing the achievement status of a student, and is geared towards reporting at the end of a course of study especially for purposes of certification (p. 120). He also adds that “it is essentially passive and does not normally have immediate impact on learning, although it often influences on decisions which may have profound educational and personal consequences for the student” (p. 120).

O’Farrell (2009) explains the differences of the summative and formative assessments that;

Summative assessment is assessment that is used to signify competence or that contributes to a student's grade in a course, module, level or degree. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is assessment strictly used to provide feedback to the student on their learning. It provides the student with advice on how to maintain and improve their progress, but should not form part of their summative grade or mark (p. 5).

Wong Yu (2004) suggests that "assessment is conducted to serve different purposes: supporting of learning, reporting the achievements of individuals and satisfying demands for public accountability" and she distinguishes the purposes of formative and summative assessments as; formative assessment serves the first purpose. On the other hand summative assessment serves the latter (p. 142). At this point, the teacher should choose the best way of assessment for his/her purpose as Black (1998) suggests:

it is important to match the selection and use of assessment methods to the particular purpose which the assessment is meant to serve and a distinction has to be made at the outset between the purposes and the instruments and procedures that might be used (p. 24).

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the information about, the research design, the selection of the participants, the instruments, the data collection procedures used in this study, context of the study as well as the methods used for data analysis. The aim of the study is to create an effective learning environment in the class through feedback given during the lessons and after the quizzes.

#### 3.2. Context of the Study

The university where the research was conducted is located in Yenice, Mersin, Turkey. It's a fifteen year-old university and I have been teaching at this university for 5 years. The preparatory students have to complete the preparatory school successfully since their language of instruction in their department is English. After completing the preparatory school successfully, the students can study at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Art and Sciences and the departments in these faculties are; Law Program, Management, International Trade, Public Relations, International Finance, International Relations, International Logistics, Tourism and Hotel Management, English Language Teaching, Mathematics and Computer Science and Psychology.

The preparatory school had 433 students enrolled at the beginning of 2011-2012 Academic Year according to the documents provided by the Preparatory School Secretary. At the beginning of the Academic Year, the students take a proficiency test to see if their English is sufficient enough to study in the department. The students who can pass the proficiency test with a grade of 70% can directly start in their department without studying at preparatory school but the ones who are not successful at the proficiency test have to take the placement test to see the students' level and place them in classes according to their levels. There are three levels in preparatory school: beginner, elementary and pre-intermediate.

Class B13, which was the focus of this study, was a beginner level class at the beginning of the study. The beginner level students have 28 hours of lessons every week. It is divided up as 18 hours course book, 5 hours listening & speaking and 5 hours reading & writing. Students have 14 pop quizzes each term. 6 of them are course book quizzes, 4 of

them reading & writing and 4 of them listening & speaking. They have a monthly exam which makes 3 monthly exams each term and they only have one final exam at the end of the academic year in June. They also have a small grammar quiz every Monday with 20-22 fill in the blanks questions to remember and practice what they have learnt the previous week, which does not count on their grades. They are also given a vocabulary list at the beginning of each week related to the unit we would be working on the following week. At the end of every week, they have a small vocabulary quiz. They have monthly exams and final exams included course book, listening & speaking and reading & writing questions and topics but the pop quizzes only included the topics and questions of the related lessons. They needed to get a grade of 60% to pass the preparatory class and continue in their department. The grades of the students' quizzes and monthly exams' are calculated for both terms and contributes 40% of their average and added to 60% of their final grade. Table 4 shows the contributions of the exams and quizzes to pass the class in Preparatory School.

**Table 4. Contributions of the Quizzes and Exams to Be Successful in Preparatory School**

Type of Exam	Number of Exams		Percentage (%)		
	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	Total
<b>Pop Quizzes</b>	14	14	20%	+ 25%	= 45%
<b>Monthly Exams</b>	3	3	25%	+ 30%	= 55%
			Annual Total		= 100%

Note. Passing Grade: Final exam result must be a minimum of 50%

Annual Total Grade 40% + Final Exam Result 60% = Passing Grade.

### 3.3. Participants

The researcher focused on a specific problem that she observed in her class at Çağ University Preparatory School Class B13. There were 20 participants who had approximately the same level of English participated in the study and 11 of them were females and 9 of them were males. The students were at elementary proficiency level when the study started. Their level was decided according to the questions that they answered correctly in the replacement test that was done before the lessons started at the beginning of the academic year. After the students entered Çağ University, they have to take a proficiency test which means they can immediately start studying in the department without studying at preparatory school if their

English is good enough and they can answer 70 questions correctly out of 100 questions. If they cannot pass the proficiency test, they have to take the replacement test. In this test they will be replaced in one of the classes that consist of three different levels: beginner level, elementary level and pre-intermediate level. They need to answer at least 20 questions correctly out of 100 questions in the replacement test to be a student in a beginner level class, 20-40 questions to be an elementary level student, and 40-70 questions to be a pre-intermediate level student.

### **3.4. Research Design**

The case study design that was adopted in the study is defined according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) as “in which a single individual, group, or important example is studied extensively and varied data are collected and used to formulate interpretations applicable to the specific case (e.g., a particular school board) or to provide useful generalizations” (p. 13). As Bryman (2008) indicates, “the basic case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (p. 52) and the “case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question” (Stake, 1995, in Bryman, 2008, p. 52).

An action research was applied within this case study. Action research deals with the real problems going on in the classes. It gives teachers an opportunity to see what is going on in the class. Some researchers define action research in different ways. Jones (2006) defines action research as “learning by doing”, knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed from knowledge” (p. 88) and adds “the strength of action research is that it makes action possible” (p. 89). Burns (2010) states that “one of the main aims of action research is to identify a ‘problematic’ situation or issue that participants-who may include teachers, students, managers, administrators, or even parents-consider worth looking into deeply and systematically” (p. 2). Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) describes action research “is conducted by one or more individuals or groups for the purpose of solving a problem or obtaining information in order to inform local practice” (p. 567) and they include its advantages as:

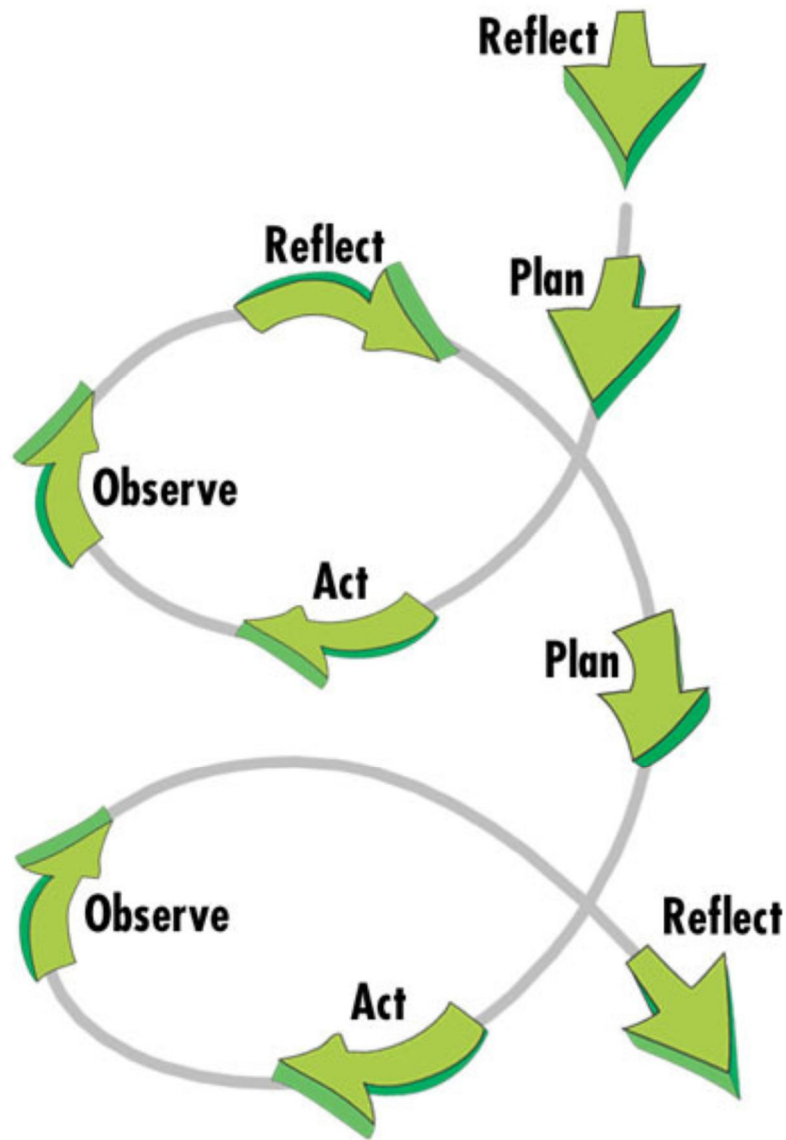
- It can be done by almost any professional in any type of school, at any grade level, to investigate just about any kind of problem,
- It can improve educational practice and helps teachers, counselors, and administrators not only become more competent professionals but it can also help them be better able to understand and apply the research findings of others,



- When teachers or other professionals design and carry out their own action research, they can develop more effective ways to practice their craft and more importantly such research can serve as a rich source of ideas about how to modify and perhaps enrich one's own strategies and techniques,
- It can help teachers identify problems and issues systematically and learning how to do it requires that individuals define a problem precisely (often operationally), identify and try out alternative ways to deal with the problem, evaluate these ways, and then share what they have learned with their peers.
- When action research is undertaken systematically, it can involve several individuals working together to solve a problem or issue of mutual concern. (pp. 573-574)

Also Rossouw (2009) suggests the advantages of action research “action research provides educators with a strategy to enhance their reflective teaching practice, thereby sharpening their understanding of instruction and improving their instructional and classroom management skills, thus promoting educational change” (p. 1).

The first person who defined action research was Kurt Lewin in 1946. He is usually considered as the father of action research and defined action research as a kind of research which is a process of spiral steps, which combines a circle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Lewin, 1951, cited in Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 8). The Lewin's cycle model can be seen clearly in Figure 4. He defined action research as a particular kind of research model using a process of spiral steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).



**Figure 4. Kurt Lewin's Spiral Model**

Taken from "Tracking Student Success: Using an Action Learning Approach to Better Understand the How, What, Where and Why" by J. Palermo, D. Marr and J. Oriel, 2012, *Journal of Institutional Research*, 17(1), p. 42.

*Planning* involves the determination of the question that needs to be answered and the strategy to be used in answering it. *Acting* pertains to trying out the strategy. *Observation* includes recording data on the results of the strategy, keeping records and a journal on thoughts and reactions to the entire experience. *Reflection* involves conclusions and then the original plan is revised so that a new cycle can begin. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, cited in Jones, 2006, p. 92)

As Jones (2006) suggests, “there are different types of research; a few varieties of action research are critical, practical, participatory, educational action, collaborative and teacher” (p. 90). Among these types of action research, teacher research was adopted in this study. According to Jones (2006), teacher research is a process which teachers investigate classroom issues of particular concern or introduce an intervention, collect information and report on their processes and results and adds that it is designed to help a teacher to find out what is happening in his or her classroom and to use that information to make wise decisions for the future (P. 90). In other words as Hubbard and Power (2003) indicate teacher-researchers are guided by the notion of understanding learning from the students’ perspectives.

Jones (2006, p. 19) also suggests some characteristics of action research:

- It is participative because the participants and teacher researchers are actively involved in the research process,
- It is qualitative because it deals with language more than numbers, and
- It is responsive because in order to achieve action, it must be responsive to emerging needs of situation.

### **3.5. Procedure**

After the first two quizzes applied in my class, I realized that the students had some difficulties. Most of the students were complaining that the exam questions were difficult, they could not do well in the exam and they did not know how to study or revise for the exam. They started complaining about studying and lessons in the middle of the first term but the level of complaints decreased towards the end of the term. After the quizzes that they had in the second term and getting lower grades than the first term, they were very stressed and were afraid of failing at preparatory class. While listening to those problems, I realized that I needed to do something to develop an effective learning environment by developing their awareness, reducing their stress and guiding them on how they could study and motivate themselves for learning English. Then I asked myself how I could create an effective learning environment in my class to make the students more aware and more successful in learning English and decided to do an action research that lasted 13 weeks.

Since some of the students had already completed a university degree in which the instruction language was in their native language and they had not been exposed to English 20

for hours a week, it was difficult for them to concentrate on another language that much. One of their main difficulties was that they couldn't concentrate on their lessons.

### **3.6. Data Collection Tools**

There are three types of data gathered in this study:

- 1- Students' diaries,
- 2- Focus group interviews , and
- 3- The researcher's observations and notes.

According to Mohr and MacLean (1987), the validity of teacher research is promoted by the frequency and consistency of observations, the reflections on and interpretations of data, a broad database from which to choose a specific focus, the careful scrutiny of other researchers and the variety of data that is collected.

#### **3.6.1. Students' Diaries**

After realizing the situation in my class, first I decided to obtain a small handy notebook for each student to write some specific information. When the notebooks were given to them, they were informed clearly what they needed to write in their notebooks. They were asked to write their strengths and weaknesses in their course book lessons every 2 or 3 weeks, their small tasks that I gave them regarding their weaknesses, the points that were not clear, or if they had some problems. These tasks were consisted of sentence making using the vocabulary, writing paragraphs using the vocabulary and answer the question type of small tasks.

#### **3.6.2. Focus Group Interviews**

There was 1 question in the preliminary focus group interview and 5 main questions and some sub questions regarding the main questions in the first and second focus group interviews. These questions were adapted from the Focus Group Questions in Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) Manual: A practical Guide to Improving Student Learning by Gibbs, Jessop and El-Hakim (2011) with the advise of Graham Gibbs. TESTA is a joint National Teaching Fellowship with four partner universities of similar character: Bath Spa, Chichester, Winchester and Worcester and it aims to improve the quality of student learning through addressing program-level assessment (TESTA). Most

of the focus group questions were to understand how and which assessments are used in the class, what students understand of assessment and feedback, and how well the assessment and feedback help students to learn in the class.

### **3.6.3. The Researcher's Observations and Notes**

I also had a notebook to write my observations in the class, the changes in the students that I realized, and some of their conversations with me about the lessons in or out of the class. I did not take notes every lesson or everyday but when I realized that they had some problems with the grammar or vocabulary, when they could correct something, when they are more or less eager than before or when we had conversations with them about the lessons in or out of the classroom.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

Data gathered from students' diaries, focus group interviews with the students, and the researcher's observations and notes were analyzed qualitatively, using coding content analysis. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) suggest that "content analysis is a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications" (p. 483). They add that all procedures that are called *content analysis* have certain characteristics in common depending on the purpose of the analysis and the type of the communication which is being analyzed vary in some respects and that all of them have to convert at some point (i.e., *code*) into *categories* and there are two ways that can be done:

1. The researcher decides the categories before any analysis begins and these categories that the researcher decides are based on previous knowledge, theory, and/or experience.
2. As the analysis continues, and the categories emerge, the researcher becomes very familiar with the descriptive information collected.

The researcher categorized the data while she was analyzing and coding it. The codes emerged while categorizing the data. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006, p. 494) also mention some advantages of content analysis:

- It is unobtrusive, so a researcher can monitor a situation without effecting it,
- It is extremely useful as a means of analyzing interview and observational data,

- The researcher can delve into records and documents to get some feel for the social life of an earlier time,
- The logistics of content analysis are often relatively simple and economical-with regard to both time and resources-as compared to other research methods, and
- Since the data are readily available and almost always can be returned to if necessary or desired, content analysis permits replication of a study by other researchers.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the findings will be explained in detail with some examples for each of the instruments used in this study.

#### 4.2. Context of the Study

In my class, almost all of the students were late comers, who were placed according to their grades at the university after all the students were replaced, so that they started 4 weeks later than the other students in other classes. That was one of the reasons that there was a lack of motivation and they were more stressed than the other students who started earlier. Some of the students in the focus group were placed after they had studied at vocational departments which means they studied for two years but they also had a chance to complete their Bachelor's Degree by continuing to study for 2 more years. Completing their Bachelor's Degree at Çağ University requires them to study at preparatory school because their instruction language is English at their departments. These students were approximately 2-3 years older than the other students. Most of the students have not been exposed to English for a long time.

I decided to do an action research in my class to overcome these problems and make the students more aware and more successful in learning English. I used some of Gibbs' 11 conditions under which assessment supports learning as a starting point.

#### 4.3. Students' Diaries

For this study, I gave each student a small notebook in which to write the tasks I gave them in the class and at home. The students were also to write the things they could easily do and the things they had difficulties in doing into their diaries once in every 2-3 weeks. Those difficulties may cover the problems they experienced both in the class and in the quizzes and the exams, and they especially focused on grammar points and vocabulary. Sometimes the students told me the points that they had difficulties with and the other times either I observed in the class or I checked their exams. Based on those problematic areas, I gave them some

mini tasks to be fulfilled in their diaries. At the end of the second week of my study, I wanted them to write about their weaknesses and strengths that they had realized during the time in the class. When I checked their diaries, I realized that one of the common problems the students experienced was making sentences on their own. Some of the students had difficulties in making sentences with the new words or phrases and the students reflected in their diaries that they were not good at making sentences with the vocabulary items in the course book.

Student 5: I cannot make sentences with the new words that we learned in our course book lessons.

Student 10: I cannot answer the questions in the exams regarding the new words. Normally I memorize the meanings of the new words before the exams and quizzes, but I cannot make sentences with these new words in the exams.

Student 14: I have difficulty in making my own sentences. It is very difficult for me to make a sentence when a word is given to me. I think I do not make sentences at home as you advised us. If I cannot make a good sentence, I do not even write it down on my exam or quiz paper.

All of these three students and some of the others had problems with making sentences. Normally, we were in the second term and they were supposed to make meaningful sentences with the words given on their own. However, I knew that most of them did not study and make and write their own sentences at home regularly, I decided to give them simple mini tasks that they could do at home. The tasks were voluntary and when I gave them the tasks the students brought them back to me to check voluntarily.

As a first step, I asked them to write sentences with the new words that they chose from the vocabulary list given to them at the beginning of that week. They were supposed to choose three words and make three separate sentences with each word. I also advised them that they could make similar sentences to the ones in their book, but not to write the same sentence if they had any difficulties while making the sentences. They brought their tasks back the next day and I checked their sentences. They made meaningful but short sentences at the beginning, and they only had couple of preposition mistakes which I corrected. The next day their task was making three more sentences with the new words chosen from the same list. They did it as well but again two of them made some article mistakes and one made a grammar mistake. After checking their sentences, I highlighted their mistakes and explained to them the grammar points with some examples. Then I wanted them to correct their own mistakes by themselves immediately. After doing the same task for two weeks, I increased the



number of new words up to 4 and then 5. The following week their task was to write a paragraph including 4 words that were chosen by me. They brought their short paragraphs the next day, one of them with a wrong usage of a word and the other two with some grammar and tense mistakes. I explain the meaning of the word to the student who used it wrongly and also gave an example sentence with that word and wanted him to correct his own sentence by himself. I just highlighted the students' grammar mistakes and wanted them to revise those grammar points, then correct their own mistakes in their diaries and bring them back to me the next week in our first lesson which was five days later. The sentence tasks went on in this way making sentences and writing paragraphs. Each time they wrote their sentences and paragraphs, they got better and when they saw themselves writing their own paragraphs better each time, they started to have more confidence. I usually spent time giving tasks and feedback on their tasks about one or two lessons out of nine lessons every week. I usually chose the last lessons.

Another student mentioned in her diary after one of the quizzes that she was not good at completing the sentences in the quizzes. She specifically told that she could not make sentences with "avoid" and "I mean". She also mentioned she wasn't very good at making the sentences on her own and that she could not remember the meanings of the new words. I gave the same task for that student as well. After clarifying and giving examples with "avoid" and "I mean", she was asked to make sentences with these words as well as some other words chosen from the vocabulary list.

When I checked the students' diaries after 4 weeks we started the action research, I was sure that most of the students did not know how to study and revise the new words and some of the grammar points. Most of the students in the class had not been exposed to English probably the last 7-8 years. Because of this reason, English was a new subject for them which they had no idea how they could overcome or improve. At that point, they needed a guide who would show them the path they could follow to improve their English.

A few students wrote in their notebook that they had difficulties regarding the highlighted expressions in their course book. The book we used had highlighted expressions and words in every unit such as "my aim is to..., it is no coincidence..." At least one example was given in the course book regarding those expressions. I also advised that student to try to make her own sentences using each highlighted expression in every unit. There were approximately 6-7 highlighted expressions in each unit. She started doing the sentences and brought them back to me every Wednesday which was the day that I had my first lesson with that class. At the beginning, she was not spending enough time to make sentences, and

making 3-4 sentences out of 6-7 highlighted expressions. Afterwards, she started making one sentence from each highlighted word. She was not good at the beginning since she was not eager enough to study at home and spend enough time regularly so that a couple of weeks later her sentences got better.

Once I realized one of the students, who was one of the most motivated and studied regularly every day, made a mistake which surprised me. He made a mistake while making a sentence using “want”. He was not using “to infinitive” when making the sentence with “want” and he did the same mistake a couple of times in the same lesson. I reflected my disappointment to the student and then at the end of the lesson I wanted him to write three things that he wants to do using “want to”. He brought his task the next day and of course they were all correct. A couple of weeks later the student mentioned that he could correct his mistake with a simple task which he could do in a few minutes. He also mentioned that the teacher’s reflection of her disappointment helped him never forget “want to” again. I realized also negative feedback worked on some students but as teachers we should never forget the characteristic differences between students. Negative feedback might work on one student while it may not work on another, so we need to know our students’ individual differences.

I also gave tasks to all of the students regarding the grammar points that we had studied in the lesson such as writing their own sentences which were true for them using Present Perfect Tense and Present Perfect Progressive Tense after teaching those tenses in the lesson. As usual, I checked their dairies in the last lesson, and instead of correcting their mistakes, I revised the grammar point and wanted them to correct their friends’ mistakes who sat next to them. This way they were also involved in peer assessment.

By writing their own strengths and weaknesses in their dairies, they became aware of not only their weaknesses but also their strengths which made them more confident and also more motivated. Following two sentences written by students illustrate this:

Student 13: I understood If Clause Type 1 and 2 very well, but I still have some difficulties using the new words and expressions. For example: win at all costs, bend the rules, amazing, invest etc.

Student 17: I think I understand “used to” and “would” because I am very good at making my own sentences using “used to” and “would”. On the other hand I cannot think of the correct answer when you gave blanks regarding those grammatical units.

I try to write some comments on their tasks such as “very good”, “perfect”, “well done”, “you can do better” or I draw a smiley face or a star after checking their dairies to

encourage and motivate them. Afterwards, when I did my last interview, I realized that those comments and drawings worked very well.

At the end of the action research I asked them to write their general feelings about the study. They were to write their thoughts about the study and tasks they had done and if and how those tasks had helped them to enhance their learning. The examples from the students' diaries clearly show that it certainly helped them to overcome most of their difficulties:

Student 1: This diary and the tasks I received from the teacher certainly benefitted me. By means of the tasks I received, I have learnt some of the expressions quicker and keep them in mind easily. Especially after making my own sentences with my own words regularly, I remember these new words in the exam easily. For example:

I was on the way to ...

I was in the middle of ...

I'm thinking of ... Suddenly, amazingly, quickly and so on.

One of the topics that I learned very well was "so that" and "such that" and "causative". And the student wrote 5 example sentences to show that she had learnt very well.

Student 7: With my teacher's efforts, now I feel good since I have learnt something at the end of the year. I found out I did not know how I was supposed to study the things we analyzed in the class and I realized I always followed a wrong way to study English.

Student 12: To be honest, I was afraid of you and your lessons at the beginning since I had prejudice about English. You pulled us into English with your approach to us and with this study. You were sometimes strict and sometimes add some fun to the lesson. You sometimes did this by force, sometimes you made us like English, but in both ways I believe the study worked a lot for us. With your effort, our English got a couple of steps further by the end of the academic year. I'd like to add that you helped me, who knew nothing in English, in my first job interview to be successful. Thanks a lot.

Student 9: We did this study only in the second term, but it improved my lessons a lot. Making sentences and writing paragraphs with the new words reinforced my understanding of the new words. By doing that study, my success has increased. You really took care of us very well, and each student one by one in this study. I wish this study had taken place in the first term as well. If you had applied that study in the first term, I'm sure we could have done better and been more successful. Thanks a lot to you.

Student 18: I believe I did well with the help of this study.

Student 4: I feel very relieved by the help of learning some things and being successful. I did not have a habit of studying regularly in the first term and did not do any study with the new

words in the first term. With the help of this study, I realized I followed a wrong way to study. We checked our quiz papers and saw the mistakes we did in the quizzes and exams after each of them which I believe was a very good way for us to see our mistakes and correct them. I believe it has a great contribution on our learning. Most of my friends in the class did not know how to make sentences on their own but with the mini tasks we received we all became successful in making sentences so that our speaking was improved as well. I believe you did your best to make us study and you were successful in helping some of my friends. I think all the teachers should use feedback more frequently in their classes. Thanks a lot for everything you did.

The students agreed that the study I applied in the class worked well and it worked for some students really well. All of them agreed that to be taken care of individually helped them learn better and learn some strategies of studying. Some of them also got into the habit of studying regularly.

After each quiz or monthly exam the students had, we analyzed the students' papers with them one by one. When I checked their exam papers, I spent one hour to analyze their papers and tell them where they were weak and how they could study. I told them to write the parts where they had the most mistakes in their notebooks and do these parts at home again after reviewing the grammar or vocabulary points related to these parts. They also wrote these parts in their notebooks and did them at home again to realize their mistakes.

#### **4.4. Interviews with the Students**

The students were interviewed in a comfortable environment where they could feel at ease. They were instructed that the whole interview would be recorded on my IC recorder and they all agreed. I also informed them that this interview was not an exam or something that would affect their passing grades; it was my study which would help them to enhance their learning.

I did 3 interviews; the first one was a preliminary focus group interview to see what they knew about assessment in general before starting my action research. The second one was the first focus group interview which was done after the second monthly exam in the second term which was the sixth week of the second term, and four weeks after I started my action research. The third one was the second focus group interview and was done on the fifteenth week which was 4 weeks before the final exam.

There was only one question asked in the preliminary focus group interview with the focus group. There were 5 main questions in the first focus group interview and 5 in the second focus group interview. Sub questions were asked accordingly. The focus group consisted of the students from my class B13 who voluntarily wanted to join the interview.

#### **4.4.1. Preliminary Focus Group Interview**

Before starting my action research circles, I wanted to see the current situation in the class. My aim was to investigate what the students knew about assessment. I had an interview with the focus group. Firstly, I needed to understand if they knew the meaning of assessment so I asked “What is assessment?” Some of the students thought that assessment means only exams and that they were assessed by the exams that they took in the course book lessons. Following are some examples of excerpts from the students’ interviews.

Student 1: When you say assessment, the first thing I remember is exams only.

Student 2: Assessment means having exams only.

Student 3: I think assessment is a good education and exams.

Student 4: It is evaluation, testing, controlling, and categorization.

Student 5: It is assessing myself by using the exams regarding the course.

Student 6: Assessment is the weekly test we have which helps us reinforce what we had learnt.

On the other hand some of the students thought assessment meant feedback, exercises, revision, and other types of formative assessment that were applied in the class, during the lessons. This can be understood from these excerpts from the students’ comments:

Student 7: It is discussing the positive and negative sides of a topic and improving the missing and necessary parts.

Student 8: I think, assessment is determining where we need improvement, and reinforcing the topics which we are good at.

Student 9: They are the feedback given after we study or do task.

Student 10: I think, it is being observed by the teacher, so that she can determine where we need improvement and give us tasks accordingly.

Although some of the students perceived assessment as summative and some of them formative, there was a group of students that knew the meaning of assessment correctly. They thought it was both summative and formative. However, they could not name assessment as summative or formative.

Student 11: It is assessing, how much of the information which was taught in the lesson was received and perceived by the students, by written, observation, or orally.

Student 12: It is something done to check if the student learnt the things about the topic or not.

Student 13: Assessment is reaching the expected level in a productive way, and it is a tactical system to control the expected productivity.

Student 14: Everything that is done on a topic.

Student 15: Giving examples, talking about it and playing games in the class. It is also reviewing the topic by having exams.

Student 16: I think assessment is making the students study and reviewing regularly and letting them participate in the lessons by using different methods.

One of the student's definitions was different from the other students. She defined assessment as a kind of effective learning environment.

Student 17: It is comprehension, studying regularly and effectively and at the same time having the qualification of comprehending new and helpful things. As a result of these things, assessment can be formed.

Some of the answers given showed that they needed some explanation and information on assessment. Some of them thought assessment only included exams and some thought it was both exams and everything that they did in the class. We had a discussion on what assessment was, what summative and formative assessments were and we especially discussed what feedback was.

They mostly focused on the quizzes and monthly exams but they thought they could use them as a passing grade only. Their main focus was passing preparatory class. Most of the students did not have any idea how to use the quizzes and exams as feedback to learn their weaknesses and strengths.

#### **4.4.2. First Focus Group Interview**

The first interview was done 4 weeks after the action research was applied. It was done the next day after they had the second monthly exam. The students were in a panic and they were very stressed since they thought they could not do well in the exam. Most of them expressed their concern that they had studied a lot for the exam but they could not do well. They were disappointed and they thought the questions in the exam were not the things that we had analyzed in the classroom. I tried to explain to them that the exam questions were very

similar to the questions we practiced in the class and in their course books and notebooks. I always tried to get their attention while we were studying a grammar point in the class if it was important or if it could be used as an exam question while studying them. We can see their stress and panic from some examples of excerpts taken from the students' interviews.

Student 1: There were not any grammar points in the grammar part. I revised for the exam for a week but I could not do anything in the exam.

Student 5: Yes, there was nothing about grammar.

Student 12: I think, we do not know how to study.

Student 6: I think, we have to be able to memorize to do well in the exam. The dialogues and expressions are about memorization.

At this point I explained to the students that it was not about memorization. If they tried to learn it and make their own sentences, they could remember better in the exam. A couple of students were also agreed that they generally did not know how to study for the exam.

The first question was "Tell me about how you are assessed-what assessment in Preparatory School consists of?" and to clarify the question I also asked a sub question. "Do you think assessment only consists of written exams and quizzes in Preparatory School?" I also reminded them to think of only course book lessons but not the skill lessons while answering the questions. The answers were various.

Student 11: I think the assessment system at Preparatory School is different. It consists of not only the written exams and quizzes but also other things. I mean your observations in and out of the classroom by oral exams. I also believe that it is objective.

Student 6: I think only written quizzes and exams are assessed.

I asked another sub question and asked especially student 11 to learn what she meant by saying "other things". "What do you mean by saying the assessment also includes other things?"

Student 11: In the written exams you only assessed the exam and gave points to the correct answers which is not good for the students who had anxiety problems in the exams. At this point when the student needs a couple of points, you assess our general behavior in and out of the class which I believe is fair.

Opposite to Student 11, another student expresses his opinion as:

Student 13: I believe the assessment here only checks if we reach the expected level grammatically. You only check our exam grades. We need to focus on daily speech more in the lesson.

Student 11: You may be right but here at Preparatory School we need to get the skills to use the language effectively to write and understand essays at our departments, and in Preparatory School, the schedule is arranged this way.

I deduced from the students' answers that most students tend to memorize the expressions and information instead of learning it and I realized they did not know how to study their lessons. That was one of the reasons that they could not even understand if there were grammar point in the questions, although the exam included grammar.

Student 12: I talked to my friend who studies at the department and he told me that he could not understand the essays and memorize everything to get a passing grade in the exam. I also do the same thing here at Preparatory school.

Student 9: I agree with him. I also just memorize the meanings of expressions and the grammatical rules when I revise for the exam but I still cannot get a good or passing grade.

One of the students mentioned feedback. She was one of the most hardworking and motivated students and she did not know anything in English before she started Preparatory School. She knew how to use the quizzes and exams as feedbacks and usually got the highest grades in the class.

Student 6: We are having revision tests every Monday. I think it is one of the best ways for us to see our weaknesses and focus on those subjects. I learnt a lot from of those small quizzes. I think it would be great to have a quiz every week instead of having them every 2-3 weeks.

Another issue was that they were generally taking the exam only as a passing grade. The exams and quizzes mean a grade for them only but nothing else. I asked another question to learn what feedback meant to them. "What do you think of feedback? Tell me about the feedback you receive".

Student 11: You tried to give feedback a lot on the tasks we did, after the exams etc. and I always try to take them into account. I think as a result of this I am usually successful in the exams and quizzes.

Student 9: You told us that rewrite questions are important and there might be questions in the exam, but there was no question about them.

As one of the students expressed and a couple of them agreed, they especially paid attention when I told something about the exam and mentioned the questions in the exam.

Then I reminded them that I tried to make them pay attention on specific points in the lesson such as making sentences on their own was important, modals were important. I wanted them to make sentences on their own regarding the grammar units and there were a lot



of questions regarding to those specific topics in the exam. Some of the students commented on my reminders.

Student 5: But you did not tell us that there would be questions about those topics.

Student 2: We cannot predict what is important or what is not in the exam.

Student 1: We use the exams only for passing the class and maybe that is why we do not listen to the feedback if you do not mention the exam.

As can be seen from their excerpts most of the students wanted to hear exactly which questions would be asked in the exam. Otherwise they did not pay attention to the lesson. They also could not predict by themselves what to pay attention to.

Some of the students were aware that they did not use the exams and quizzes as feedback to help them realize their weaknesses and strengths. I tried to explain that first they needed to take the exams as a tool that they could learn from their mistakes. I advised them to take the exams as a guide which showed them where and what to focus on and I explained to them that once they felt they could do or manage to learn something in English then they would be encouraged and become more eager to learn new things in English. Shortly I talked about the culture of success in general.

I asked “Why do I give you feedback do you think?” to get an idea if it serves in the correct way.

Student 3: I believe we only use it to pass the class.

Student 4: I usually listen to your feedback, but since I do not take notes, I forget them later.

After getting those replies I mentioned that I gave feedback to make them aware of their weaknesses and strengths so that they can have a strategy. I also added if they learn instead of memorizing, learning will bring success as well. Then I asked “Which one is more important? Passing the class or learning?” Then one of the students pointed out learning.

Student 2: Yes, I agree. Learning is important as well. I prefer failing the class if I do not learn English.

Another student mentioned the feedback I gave in the class and how it worked.

Student 11: I'd like to give an example for the feedback you gave us individually during the lesson. For example one of my friends was very silent and shy at the beginning and she never tended to answer the questions. When you wanted her to answer a question, you generally said “What do you think about that question? Come on. I know you can do it”. Your encouragement helped her overcome her shyness and she started trying to answer the questions and participating in the lesson more.

We continued the interview with another question: “Tell me about the way you are assessed and how it affects your studying- for example determining to some extent what you pay attention to, or how the feedback that I gave you in the class affects your studying”.

Student 7: The exams and quizzes affect me in a positive way because I feel I have to study since I am going to have an exam or a quiz. We have a quiz or an exam almost every week so it makes me study regularly every day.

Student 8: I use your feedback in the class to realize my weaknesses and I review those points according to your feedback. I believe the feedback you give us in the class works well.

Student 2: I listen to your feedbacks but I usually study for the exams just 3-4 days before without sleeping. I studied and revised for the exam a lot but I still could not do well in the exam.

As it is understood from the students’ answers, some of the students knew how to use the feedback and the feedback given in the class made them study regularly. On the other hand some of them listened to the feedbacks but they did not know how to use it and they did not study regularly.

Some of the students also mentioned my attitude towards them and in which way it worked.

Student 4: You always catch us when we do not listen to you or the lesson. You can always draw our attention when we concentrated on another thing. You never miss it. You warn us or ask a question.

Student 7: Yes, when I could not concentrate on the lesson you told me to listen or sit in the front so that I had to listen to the lesson.

Student 3: Even when you were angry with us, you always called us by our name. I liked it because I thought my teacher takes care of me individually. But sometimes teachers just talk in general, although they talk about only one person. If you talked generally even though you were talking about me, I would disregard it. You always consider the individual differences and behave accordingly.

Student 11: Once, you gave the worksheets as homework and wanted us to do it the next day. After answering the worksheets in the class, we would revise for the exam with you. The next day some of us did not do the worksheet and you got angry with us and you collected all the worksheets from us and tore all of them and threw them away. That was a lesson for us and the next day I found a copy of it and did answer all the questions. I was so ashamed.

Student 4: I agree with her. I did the same thing and answered the questions.

Student 13: I do not study because my grades are not enough to pass the class but since you try to encourage us a lot in the lesson and you put a lot of effort into making us study, I feel very responsible and when I attend your lesson I feel embarrassed because I did not study. But I still know that I will fail and that is because I do not study enough.

As can be seen from the students' excerpts from the interview, taking care of students individually and behaving towards them according to their individual differences helped them study and take care of their lessons. Sometimes negative feedback also worked on some students. Although some of them did not study, at least they felt responsible towards the lesson or teacher.

At the end of the first interview, initially, I gave general feedback on common mistakes, then I gave individual feedback on the students' monthly exam one by one. After the feedback most of them understood where they made mistakes while studying. It is also clear from their excerpts:

Student 3: I believe this type of exam helped us realize it is not enough to memorize the new words and grammar points to pass the class.

Student 4: I think, if we study regularly every day, we can learn and pass the class.

Student 5: The exams and quizzes have positive effects on us. I feel I have to study regularly.

Student 6: I only study for the exams a couple of days before. I do not study regularly.

After the feedback given and talking about the exam, the students also realized that they only memorize the grammar points and the new words for the exam and so they easily forgot them after the exam. That was one of the main problem about the way they study. They only focus on the exams but not learning, so they only memorize the things we did in the class. We talked in the class about why learning was more important than getting high grades in the exams. They finally agreed that learning was more important and they found out that they made some mistakes on their studying skills. They thought that studying was just reading. I tried to explain they had to make and write their own sentences, by themselves.

#### **4.4.3. Second Focus Group Interview**

The second interview with the focus group was done on the fifteenth week of the second term, 4 weeks before the monthly exam. The interview was recorded as well.

Before starting the interview, we talked about the exams in general, common mistakes and the points that they had questions about. I informed the students about some study skills and strategies at the beginning of the interview. I reminded them that they should study not only a week or couple of days before the exams but also revise the things they learnt or they had problems with, regularly. The focus group questions were asked to the students. The first question was “Can you tell me how you are assessed with examples?”

Student 11: We were assessed not only by exams but also with the feedback that we received from the teachers. Especially the last monthly exam and quiz seemed to be easier to me since we had probably learnt how to study and how to improve our studying. Maybe that is the reason they were easier for me and some of my friends. I also believe that most of our grades had got better in the last 2 exams and quizzes.

Student 9: At the beginning, I also thought everything was based on memorization, but for the last exams I thought they were not based on memorization but studying regularly. You and your feedback have had a big influence on us.

Student11: Listening to your advice and taking the feedback into consideration, you have made us more successful.

Student 10: I think we did not take the feedback into consideration but I believe you did not give the feedback regularly in the first term before that study. Your attitude towards us has also changed in a positive way. Maybe the reason for our increased grades and success in the last exams is we have learnt how to learn.

As can be understood from their answers, they became more aware of studying regularly brought success for them. Also they understood that feedback is very effective to improve their weaknesses.

I asked another question: “What made you learn how to learn?”

Student 10: Your approach towards us. You gave us those notebooks and took care of us individually considering the individual differences. Every student’s weakness was different and you never forgot that. Even in your free time at school, you studied with your students individually. You gave individual tasks.

Student 11: I always took notes when you told me my weakness or when you said something is important. Before the exams, I took those notes into consideration. Then it became automatic. Sometimes I did not take notes but I remember what you told me while revising for the exam.

Student 4: I wish we could have started doing that application at the beginning of the academic year.

As the students mentioned, working with the students individually made them take my advice and feedback into serious consideration. Although it is time consuming to study with each student, it is worth spending at least couple of hours every week.

Some students also mentioned the strategies and advice that I had given them on how they needed to study. At the beginning of the first term, most of the students were a little bit out of the lesson. They did not know how to study, or they lost their motivation to study. With the help of systematic feedback given during the study, some of them were influenced in a positive way and they got the habit of studying regularly. We can understand this from their interview excerpts.

Student 10: At the beginning we did the tasks without being aware of what or why we were doing them, but later we understood why we were doing them and we did them eagerly. Then, we enjoyed doing the tasks you gave since we were doing them consciously and we could do them easily.

Student 8: Some of our classmates just opened the book to study but since they did not know how to study, they just quit and put the book away and did not study. The way you told us how and what to study, showed such friends a way over their difficulties, and some of them started studying, I guess. I also had some difficulties at the beginning of the tasks, but then I thought of them and then did them and succeeded.

Student 10: You advised us on how to study. At the same time, you helped us find our own way of studying. You taught us how to learn or do something rather than just telling us the way to do it. I think this is very important.

Student 16: I think we were more careless in the first term. I think the worksheets that you gave after the monthly exams and individual tasks worked a lot.

Most students also felt more confident and motivated, and they were talking about learning rather than passing or failing the class although they were very close to the final exam after the study applied in the class as understood from the excerpts:

Student 16: I think we did not pay attention in the lessons a lot in the first term because we were late comers. We did not know any words at the beginning, but now we can speak and we have learnt a lot of things.

Student 2: I know I have learnt lots of things and I learnt how to study which is a good thing for me in the department as well.

I asked another question: "Can you tell me about the way you are assessed and how it affects your studying- for example feedback, exams etc."

Student 14: Individual tasks and studies were very helpful. They especially helped me study more regularly than before.

Student 12: I think we should have started doing them before because they were very effective on our learning.

Student 4: Feedbacks and tasks were very helpful. In a very short time we came a long way and learnt a lot of things. We also became more aware of what we were doing and learning.

Student 10: If we could come a long way in a very short time, then it must be very helpful for us.

As some students mentioned, they think the study was very helpful for them and they became more aware of what they were doing and why they were doing it. Before the study, they were not eager to do the exercises or worksheets, or even very easy, small homework tasks. It was probably because they were not engaged with them, or they were not able to make a connection with learning or practicing. With the help of the study, they could make a connection between what they learnt and how the feedback and exercises worked. While doing the study, they realized doing small tasks worked a lot and they continued doing them and studying regularly.

I asked another question on the exams: “Can you tell me about how you come to understand what you are supposed to be doing and how you know what is likely to get good marks or to pass or fail?”

Student 12: You gave our exam papers after you checked them and we analyzed them with you. You were doing the same thing in the first term but you were usually giving general feedback or talking about general mistakes. In the second term, you first talked about general mistakes and weaknesses, then you gave feedback individually right after the exams or quizzes. If you hadn't showed us our mistakes one by one, we would have just checked our grades and probably made the same mistakes again and again, and we would have done this in every exam which would have made us get worse. However, discussing each mistake one by one helped us learn the correct answer from our mistakes.

Student 11: Personally, I was not listening to the general comments and mistakes about the exams or quizzes that you gave in the first term. However, I paid more attention when you started doing it individually in the second term. After the exams, we usually discussed the exam questions with our friends. We told each other if we had done them correctly or not, but after analyzing our mistakes with you after the exams, we realized that

the answers we thought were correct were normally wrong. So, it was a really good way for us to see our mistakes after the exams.

As it can be understood from their answers to the questions, almost all students liked it when the teacher took care of them individually. When general feedback or advice is given, they usually tend not to listen or apply.

I asked another question: “Do you think you overcame the stress you had in the first term about the exams?”

Student 10: I am more anxious about the exams. I am sure I know more now, but my grades are in the middle, so I sometimes think of failing which makes me stressed.

Student 4: I overcame the stress I had because I know what and how to study. I can also guess the type questions which could be asked in the exams.

Student 8: I also overcame the stress because I can generally guess the type of questions and what is important or not in the exam. Also, learning and knowing that I learnt something increases my confidence.

Student 11: I read a couple of pages from a book in my department. I noticed that I understood it and it really made me very happy to see that I had learnt English. The exam is not important for me because I know I have learnt.

Although a couple of students could not overcome the stress they had in the first term, most of the students were confident which helped them overcome their stress. Knowing that they learnt something and at the same time enjoying it made them relieved and confident. They could also guess the type of questions that they would see in the exams and final exam. I also took care of the stressed students individually during the study. I tried to explain why they did not need to get stressed. Two of the students also mentioned that:

Student 11: You not only took good care of our lessons, feedback etc. but also took care of the students who were under stress, and that helped us a lot to overcome our stress. Knowing that we could be understood really made us relieved and we also got closer to you.

Student 9: You could see our individual problems, and you understood us very well. You supported us. Your attitude towards us was very understanding.

#### **4.5. The Researcher’s Observations and Notes**

During the study, I took some notes regarding the students’ attitudes towards the feedback and some other tasks that we did in the class. I did not take notes regularly, but when I saw negative or positive attitudes of the students.

After I explained that I would do a study in their class, the students were happy that I chose them for my study. As I mentioned before, first I explained to them why I was going to do that study and what kinds of benefits they would get. At the beginning almost all of them started doing their homework and the tasks that I gave them. I especially realized a couple of students, who had no concentration or motivation, started being more eager to listen to the lesson or do their tasks.

There was a student, who never listened to the lesson and always concentrated on something else and always sat in the back of the class. They then started sitting on one of the front seats in the class and took notes without me giving any warning. He realized that that study would be a chance for him to catch up on the lesson. It continued for 2 weeks for him to follow the lesson with his friends, but then he gave up and dropped out since he had attendance problem. He failed because he exceeded the attendance limit.

There was another student similar to the one I mentioned and she also concentrated on the lesson for a couple of weeks, took notes and started making sentences and participating the lesson. She had the same problem and she also dropped out since she exceeded the attendance limit.

Two of the students, who had never asked about the correct answer of a question, came to my room right after the exam to ask the correct answer of couple of questions. Those students were generally complaining about the exams, and never checked their answers even though I gave their exam papers after the exam, before I conducted my study.

There were especially 4 students especially who had difficulties with making their own sentences, they usually came and wanted me to check their tasks every day even if I did not have a lesson with their class. At the beginning of the study, after giving the tasks although I had to reminded some of them to bring their tasks to me, a couple of days later they started bringing their sentences to me to check voluntarily.

One of the very silent students, who was very unconfident and had difficulties in making sentences and answering the questions during the lesson, started making her own sentences and participating in the lesson more. She used to worry a lot about the exams, especially the final exam. She was so unconfident and worried that she used to ask me if she could pass or fail almost every week. At the end of the study, she mentioned that she was not worried about the exam since she knew that she learnt a lot in the lessons.

I prepared a pre-exam worksheet for the students. I revised the subjects that they were responsible for in the exam with some examples and then gave the worksheet to the students, and asked them to do it for the next day. Most of them did the worksheet at home. After doing



the worksheet together, one of the students mentioned that I was more eager than them to teach, that is why they became more eager to learn towards the end of the year.

One of the students who dropped out later because his grades were very low and he had an attendance problem, was motivated for 2-3 weeks when I started applying my action research. He had difficulty in making his own sentences but tried to help his friend making sentences on a grammar point in the class and got involved in peer assessment without my request.

#### **4.6. My Reflections on Developing an Effective Learning Environment**

Analyzing the instruments revealed four main themes regarding effective learning environment:

- Regular study
- Students' attitudes towards assessment
- Students' proficiency level
- Self confidence, motivation and awareness

##### **4.6.1. Regular Study**

By doing this study, my aim was to set up some conditions that would develop an effective learning environment in my class. As I was giving tasks and the related feedback to the students according to their strengths and weaknesses, students started spending time on the tasks and studying regularly at home. We can understand this from some of their excerpts:

Student 1: The diary and tasks I received from the teacher certainly benefitted me. Especially after making my own sentences with my own words regularly, I remember these new words in the exam easily.

It can easily be understood from the student's excerpt that he started studying regularly and that also increased his proficiency level. Doing the vocabulary tasks regularly helped him remember the new words and make his own sentences more easily. The following four excerpts also support the same situation:

Student 7: We have a quiz or exam almost every week so it makes me study regularly every day.

Student 4: I think, if we study regularly, we can learn and pass the class.

Student 5: The exams and quizzes have had a positive effect on us. I feel I have to study regularly.

Student 14: Individual tasks and studies were very helpful. They especially helped me study more regularly than before.

The aforementioned student excerpts were taken after they had had an exam. Most of them realized that they needed to study regularly to learn and achieve so they started studying regularly. Although some of them realized they needed to study regularly to achieve, they did not start studying as can be seen from their excerpts. Almost all of the students became aware of the importance of the feedback that they had received and they learnt how to use it during the time that they received and practiced it. The tasks and feedback they received made them spend time and effort at home which they had not done before. The students realized the aim of the exams and quizzes which was recognizing their strengths and weaknesses after they had received feedback on a couple of exams; which led them to spend time on their weaknesses.

This outcome is in line with what Gibbs (2006) suggested as some of the conditions that support learning which are:

- Assessed tasks capture sufficient study time and effort
- Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and in enough detail
- The feedback is provided quickly enough to be useful to students

#### **4.6.2. Students' Attitudes towards Assessment**

At the beginning of the study, in the first interview, the students used to complain about the exams and quizzes and put the blame on them that they were difficult for their levels and the questions were not appropriate for their proficiency level. Some of them also knew that they did not use the exams and quizzes as a tool to improve their English but use it only to get a grade. That can be understood from what they mentioned:

Student 1: There were not any grammar points in the grammar part of the exam. I revised for a week but I could not do anything in the exam.

Student 6: We have to memorize to do well in the exam. The dialogues and expressions are about memorization.

Student 13: We use the exams only for passing the class but not to help us see our weaknesses.

Student 7: The exam questions were very difficult and they were not about the topics that we analyzed in the lesson.

After giving systematic feedback immediately after the tasks and exams and helping the students see the use of assessment, and their attitude towards assessment changed. They started using the assessment and feedback as a tool to see their weaknesses and strengths so that they became aware of the benefit of the assessment and that changed their attitudes towards assessment in a positive way; for instance, they were not blaming on the exams any more. It can be easily seen in their excerpts from the second interview which was done 10 weeks after the first interview after they had received a lot of tasks and feedback:

Student 15: Personally, I did not use the quizzes and exams as a tool to see my weaknesses or strengths but after that study, I realized why you insisted on giving feedback and realized the importance of the exams and feedback on our achievement. At the beginning I used to check only my grade when you handed back our exam or quiz papers but now when you hand them back, I check my grade and then check my mistakes on the exam paper then try to find the correct answer.

Student 6: We are having revision tests every Monday. I think it is one of the best ways for us to see our weaknesses and focus on those subjects.

Student 7: I thought the exams were difficult when I could not get a good grade in the exams. Now I realize that I did not even know how to see the type of questions in the exam. I can use the exams to see my mistakes now.

Some students also mentioned the reason why their attitudes towards the exams and feedback had changed. They mentioned that my attitude had an influence on their change:

Student 12: You gave back our exam papers after you checked them and we analyzed them with you. You were doing the same thing in the first term but you were usually giving general feedback or talking about general mistakes. In the second term, you first talked about general mistakes and weaknesses, then you gave feedback individually right after the exams or quizzes. If you hadn't showed us our mistakes one by one, we would have just checked our grades and probably made the same mistakes again and again, and we would have done this in every exam which would have made us get worse. However, discussing each mistake one by one helped us learn the correct answer from our mistakes.

Student 11: Personally, I was not listening to the general comments and mistakes about the exams or quizzes that you gave in the first term. However, I paid more attention when you started doing it individually in the second term. After the exams, we usually discussed the exam questions with our friends. We told each other if we had done them

correctly or not, but after analyzing our mistakes with you after the exams, we realized that the answers we thought were correct were normally wrong. So, it was a really good way for us to see our mistakes after the exams.

About the issue of attitude, a similar reasoning is put forward by Gibbs (2006) proposed in his study that feedback could also help the students change their attitudes towards assessment and feedback:

- Feedback is received by students and attended to
- Feedback focuses on learning rather than on marks or students themselves

#### **4.6.3. Students' Proficiency Level**

Regular study with the use of received feedback helped students improve their proficiency level of English. They realized the feedback they received for quizzes, exams, and tasks made them study regularly so that they could do better in their exams. The students also realized that regular study brought achievement as well. It could be understood from their excerpts in the second interview which was done after the study was applied for 12 weeks.

Student 16: We did not know any words at the beginning, but now we can speak and we have learnt a lot of things.

Student 4: Feedback and tasks were very helpful. In a very short time we came a long way and learnt a lot of things.

Student 11: Listening to your advice and taking the feedback into consideration, you have made us more successful. I also believe that most of our grades had got better in the last 2 exams and quizzes.

Student 10: May be the reason for our increased grades and success in the last exams is that we have learnt how to learn.

In the light of the above examples, it can be stated that the students realized that they had learnt and improved better with the help of the present study and their grades were also got better related to their regular study, use of feedback, motivation, and self confidence. In relation to the issue of proficiency level Gibbs (2006) stated similar justifications:

- These tasks engage students in productive learning activity
- Feedback is acted upon by students to improve their work or their learning

#### **4.6.4. Self Confidence, Motivation and Awareness**

With the help of the study, the students realized that they had not spent enough time studying at home but when they received tasks, this made them study regularly and spent time and effort. It was like a chain; the ones who spent time and effort at home realized that their English got better and there was improvement. When they saw that they got better, their attitudes towards assessment and feedback changed, they started using them properly and as a result of this, they noticed that they could do better both in the class participation and in the exams which motivated them, encouraged them, helped them gain self confidence and also rose awareness of what they were doing and why. Sometimes I observed in their diaries or interviews that they gained self confidence, motivation and awareness:

Student 11: I'd like to give an example for the feedback you gave us individually during the lesson. For example one of my friends was very silent and shy at the beginning and she never tended to answer the questions. When you wanted her to answer a question, you generally said "What do you think about that question? Come on. I know you can do it". Your encouragement helped her overcome her shyness and she started trying to answer the questions and participating in the lesson more.

This student realized that with my encouragement her friend gained self confidence and motivation.

Another student expressed his raising awareness in the second interview:

Student 10: At the beginning, we did the tasks without being aware of what we were or why we were doing them, but later we understood why we were doing them and we did them eagerly. Then, we enjoyed doing the tasks you gave since we were doing them consciously and we could do them easily.

One of the shy students, who was not able to form sentences at the beginning of the academic year or even raise her hand even once to participate in the lesson, mentioned while we were talking in the break that she could not make any sentences and she used to believe that she could never speak English or pass the Preparatory Class. However, after she did everything I told her during the action research and also with my encouragement, she gained self confidence and she managed making her own sentences while participating the lesson. By the end of the year, she made a lot of progress and became successful.

My action research which involved feedback after the exams and giving tasks to the students resulted in the students gaining a lot of. Through this study, they came to an understanding of the objectives of tasks, feedback, exams and quizzes and how they could

help them improve their skills and increase their motivation. This also helped to increase their self confidence and their awareness of what they were doing and why.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a summary and the research findings related to the research questions of the study as well as the recommendations for further research.

#### 5.1. Summary of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate what the students know about assessment and also create an effective learning environment in and outside the classroom based on some conditions using both summative and formative assessments. Data was collected using qualitative methods in this study. A case study design was adapted to investigate the research questions and action research was used to collect the data. The instruments used for this study were: students' dairies, focus group interviews, and teacher's observations and notes. The participants of this study were 20 students who were studying at Çağ University Preparatory School in the academic year of 2011-2012. The interview questions to collect the data were granted by Gibbs and some of his focus group questions were used. The interview questions, students' dairies and the teacher's observations and notes were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis.

#### 5.2. Conclusion

In order to investigate what the students know about assessment, an initial interview was conducted and the research question "What is assessment?" was asked to the students and the data collected was analyzed using content analysis. Some of the students thought assessment just consists of the written quizzes, and monthly exams, which is called summative assessment in the literature. On the other hand some of them thought of assessment as feedback, improvements, and reinforcement, which is called formative assessment. However, some of them knew the correct meaning of assessment. Although they could not name them as summative or formative, they mentioned both of them when they were answering the question. After the preliminary focus group interview was conducted, the researcher clarified the meaning of assessment to the students saying that it includes both summative and formative assessments.

The second research question was “How can I -as a course book teacher- create an effective learning environment in my class at Çağ University Preparatory Class?” In order to answer the question, I conducted an action research using two interviews with the focus group. The first interview was done 4 weeks after the action research was applied and the second interview was done 9 weeks later than the first one, couple of weeks before the end of the term. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis. I tried to create an effective learning environment in the class using Gibbs’ conditions that supports learning. In order to create an effective learning environment, I used summative and formative assessments as a tool. At the beginning of the action research, most of the students were in panic, demotivated, and unconfident, also most of them either did not know how to study or did not study regularly. They had negative attitudes towards exams and quizzes, so most of them thought the exams were difficult, and they could not learn English, although they study a lot. My aim was to help the students see that they could achieve by using both formative and summative assessment in the class, help them gain their confidence and create an effective learning environment. In my action research circles, after identifying the problem I started my action plans. I gave students individual feedback after each quiz and exam, and also regularly set them small tasks where they have weaknesses, in order to let them recognize their strengths and weaknesses. I also tried to make them see that if they study regularly, they can achieve their goals and learn English. I also tried them to gain their confidence and motivation by encouraging them, I did this by letting them see their achievements. When they see that they could overcome their weaknesses and be successful even with the small tasks, some of them started studying regularly. Motivation was one of the most important things that they needed. I mostly used formative assessment and feedback to give them the motivation they needed. According to one of the studies that Weurlander, Söderberg, Scheja, Hult, and Wernerson conducted “formative assessments motivate students to study, make them aware of what they have learned and where they need to study more. Thus, formative assessment can act as a tool for learning, contributing to the process and outcomes of learning” (p. 747). They also found out in their study that formative assessment influenced the students’ motivation to study in several ways and for many students, formative assessment seemed to act as external motivators (p. 752).

At the end of the action research I applied, most of the students gained their confidence and motivation; they have started studying regularly and spending time studying at home as well, most importantly they have learnt how and where to study although they had no idea about the studying strategies at the beginning, they have realized that they have learnt in



the lesson, they started recognizing their weaknesses and strengths. As a result of all these changes, they feel that they can do well in the exams as well when they spend enough time studying in the class and at home.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

1. Further studies should be conducted in order to collect more information and evidence by comparing students' grades at the beginning and at the end of the study. By doing this, the study could be supported with qualitatively which increases the validity.
2. The study could be conducted with more teachers and in more classes, so that the teachers can discuss the situations in their classes and cooperate with each other.
3. The researcher could have better control over taking notes in the diaries so that the students take their notes more regularly and properly.

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## **7. APPENDICES**

### **7.1. Appendix A: Preliminary Focus Group Interview Question**

1. What is assessment?

## **7.2. Appendix B: First Focus Group Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about how you are assessed-what assessment in Preparatory School consists of?
  - Do you think assessment only consists of written exams and quizzes in Preparatory School?
  - What do you mean by saying that?
2. What do you think of feedback? Tell me about the feedback you receive.
3. Why do I give you feedback do you think?
4. Which one is more important? Passing the class or learning?
5. Tell me about the way you are assessed and how it effects your studying-for example determining to some extent what you pay attention to, or how the feedback that I gave in the class effects your studying?



### **7.3. Appendix C: Second Focus Group Interview Questions**

1. Can you tell me how you are assessed with examples?
2. What made you learn how to learn?
3. Can you tell me about the way you are assessed and how it affects your studying-for example feedback, exams etc.?
4. Can you tell me about how you come to understand what you are supposed to be doing and how you know what is likely to get good marks or to pass or fail?
5. Do you think you overcame the stress you had in the first term about the exams?