

## The Effects of Formative Assessment on Algerian Secondary School Pupils' Text Comprehension

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### Abstract

Formative assessment has proved its potential in improving the learning outcomes of EFL learners. However, its use is quite restricted in the Algerian secondary school. Thus, instead of playing a formative role, the assessment found in the Algerian EFL classroom is of a summative nature. Accordingly, the purpose behind the current research is to shed light on the importance of formative assessment in the teaching and learning processes by highlighting its effect on text comprehension, as the latter may be an obstacle to effective language learning and academic achievement among Algerian secondary school pupils. To reach this end, the present research attempts to investigate the impact of formative assessment on pupils' text comprehension as well as their achievement and attitudes through answering the following research questions: (1) how does formative assessment develop pupils' text comprehension? (2) What changes can the experiment bring in terms of students' achievements and attitudes towards text comprehension? This research is based on a quasi-experimental design delivered to sixteen third year secondary school pupils as the latter are required to sit for the 'Baccalaureate' exam in which text comprehension is of crucial importance. A pretest, a posttest, an intervention which lasted five weeks and a questionnaire were used to find out the impact of formative assessment on the development of pupil's text comprehension. The results obtained showed a significant progress in pupils' outcomes in the four language competences: grammatical, textual, functional and sociolinguistic and namely in grammatical and textual competences. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that formative assessment should be an integral part of the teaching process.

*Key words:* formative assessment, functional competence, grammatical competence, sociolinguistic knowledge, textual knowledge, text comprehension

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## **Introduction**

Drawing from the colossal work of Black and William (1998), formative assessment has been proved to be among the main factors leading to high achievements in educational settings. Lending credence to Black and William's work, researchers and teachers all over the world attempted to test the efficacy of formative assessment within their contexts. Moreover, formative assessment has been linked to different areas including the language skills. In the Algerian secondary school textbook, formative assessment is introduced at the end of each teaching unit, the unit takes four to six weeks to be dealt with; and this actually what makes the assessment take a summative aspect rather than a formative one.

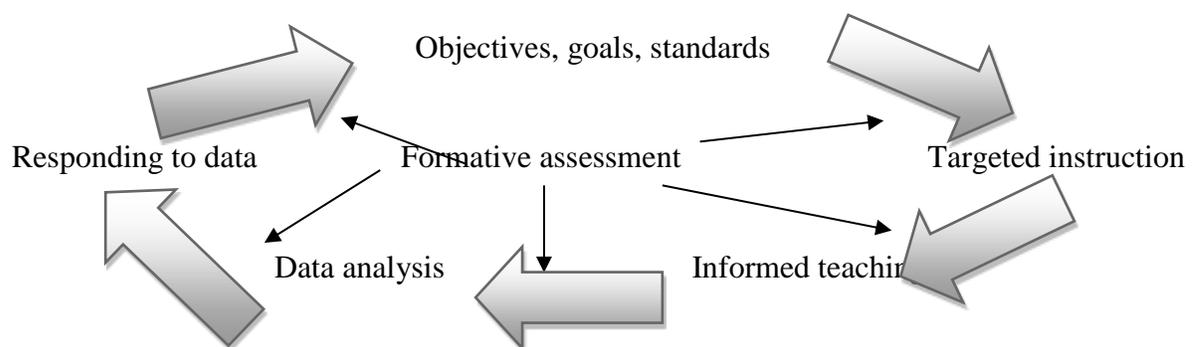
Text comprehension is among the focal areas that the teacher and the students alike attempt to develop during the language learning process in order to achieve success not only in the educational setting but also in professional life. However, text comprehension constitutes an impediment for many learners, dealing with the different parameters of the text requires a set of abilities and provokes certain strategies in order to fully comprehend the text and fulfill the different tasks that follow. As far as the Algerian context is concerned, the third year secondary school pupils have to comprehend texts in exams and tests and more importantly in the Baccalaureate exam (national exam) in order to be able to answer a set of tasks related to the text provided. Though the Algerian pupils practice reading in the classroom they still lack the necessary strategies and skills to handle text comprehension, this lack can be actually attributed to the limited practice of reading comprehension inside the classroom. Therefore, we believe that regular practice of reading comprehension inside the classroom leads to good results in text comprehension. Accordingly, the present work was carried out with the aim of checking the efficacy of formative assessment in the Algerian secondary school EFL classroom posing the following research questions: How does formative assessment help pupils develop their text comprehension? And what impact does it have on the different reading competences? Indeed, the focal point was to check the effects of formative assessment on pupils' text comprehension with a close reference to the four language competences provided in Bachman and Palmer's model (1996).

## **1. Literature Review**

### ***1.1. Formative Assessment***

Formative assessment represents one of the main areas of the teaching and learning processes. Different researchers approached the concept with varying interests; it is based on the "idea that evidence of student achievement is elicited, is interpreted, and leads to actions that results in better learning than would have been the case in the absence of such evidence" (William and Black, 1998 Qtd in William, 2010, p. 18). In other words, in formative assessment the teacher gathers data from students, interprets these data to identify students' level, and then acts in accordance with this interpretation.

The leading force of formative assessment is feedback, i.e., it is based on timely constructive feedback which constitutes the cornerstone in the teaching process, in this regard states Irons (2007, p. 07) “any task or activity which creates feedback for students about their learning achievements can be called formative assessment”. Formative assessment operates in a cyclical way through, first, stating the goals and objectives to be reached at the end of the course, second following a certain way of instruction which is meant to reach the stated objectives, and third delivering the lesson which is characterized mainly by feedback. At the end the teacher checks his pupils’ achievement including the areas of strength and areas of weaknesses and then responds to these data by adjusting teaching to reach the objectives in a more effective way. Greenstein (2010) summarizes the main instructional principles related to formative assessment in the figure below:



**Figure1: the Cycle of Instruction with Formative Assessment (Greenstein, 2010, p. 24)**

Accordingly, instruction related to formative assessment is critical for its success or failure as pointed out by Greenstein: “what teachers and students need is assessment and instruction that are conceived as a unit, employed as a unit, and applied as a unit” (2010, p. 24).

### ***1.1.1. The importance of Formative Assessment***

A plethora of research works (Herman, Osmundson, Ayala, Schneider, and Timms 2006, Popham 2008, Black and William 1998a/b, Shepard 2000) came to the conclusion that formative assessment is useful for learning improvement; it is “one of the most important interventions for promoting high-performance” (OECD, 2005, p. 22). The importance of formative assessment dwells in the fact that it takes errors into account, regulates and adapts the learning materials in accordance with the learning realities in order to reinforce success. Accordingly, the assessment phase is followed by a remediation phase on the basis of the gaps encountered; the remediation activities should help the pupils overcome their difficulties. Formative assessment allows the verification of whether or not the pupils attain the different language points (lexical, grammatical and so on).

The non-judgmental feature of formative assessment makes it an important tool for both the teacher and the learner as it helps the former to diagnose his students' level through regular practice, and also inform the latter about his abilities and weaknesses. Indeed, formative assessment "refers to frequent, interactive assessments of students' progress and understanding. Teachers are then able to adjust teaching approaches to better meet identified learning needs" (OECD, 2005, p. 13), in this way, then, formative assessment paves the way for progress since it is based on a day-to-day interaction between the teacher and the students. Moreover, it raises the student's responsibility towards his learning, and hence makes him involved in every step of the learning process; this involvement is guided by teacher's feedback and opinions.

In a nutshell, though formative assessment is not the "silver-bullet" to solve all educational issues, it promotes good opportunities to enhance learning by addressing the main goals of the teaching-learning process.

### ***1.2. Text Comprehension***

Defining text comprehension is somehow critical because it does not involve only one skill but rather a set of intertwined skills. However, if one attempts to define text comprehension, he would simply say that it "is the interpretation of the information in the text... At the core of comprehension is our ability to mentally interconnect different events in the text and form a coherent representation of what the text is about" (Kendeou et al. 2007, Qtd in Grabe, 2009, p. 39). Though this definition seems digestible, it provokes different skills when one digs deeper, i.e., the interpretation of information requires a set of cognitive and metacognitive skills which are intertwined together to achieve successful comprehension of the text in hand. Indeed, text comprehension requires a set of skills and competences as stated by McNamara (2007, p. 4): "deep comprehension requires inferences, linking ideas coherently, scrutinizing the validity of claims with a critical stance, and sometimes understanding the motives of authors", in order to have a profound understanding of the text, the reader should employ a set of skills and master a series of competences. These competences can be clearly tested in relation to the different models of language ability including the model of Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996): Communicative language ability. The following section describes this language model with a close reference to the four language competences and shows how this model can be applied to text comprehension.

#### ***1.2.1. Bachman and Palmer's Model Applied to Text Comprehension***

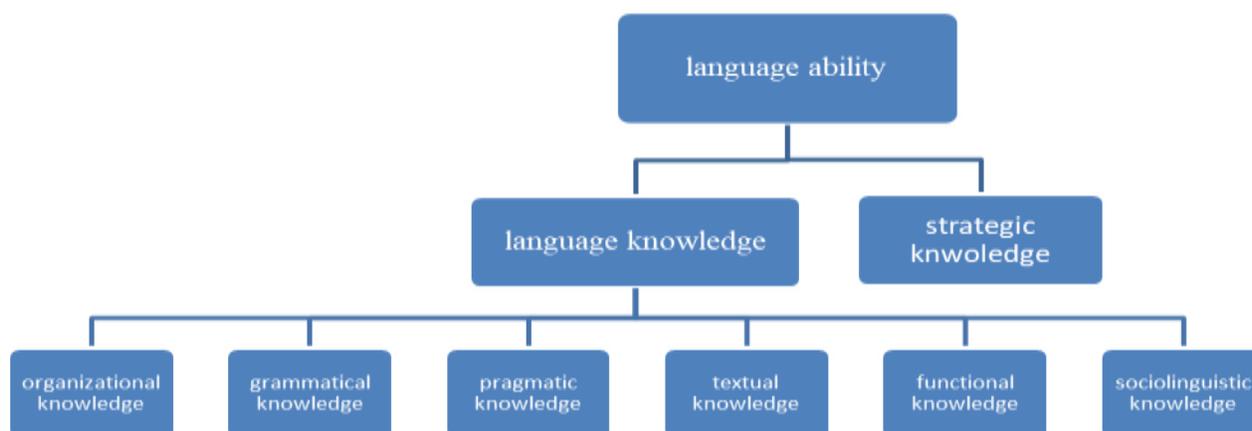
Before digging into the relationship between Bachman and Palmer's model and text comprehension, it is necessary to have a closer look at the model. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996) language operates through different, yet intertwined components, these include personal characteristics, topical knowledge, effective schemata and language ability. The last component is our main concern in the present study, language ability is based on the model provided by Bachman (1990); it is composed of language knowledge and strategic knowledge. The former is concerned with the information found in memory and which is available to use in a given context of language use. Language knowledge includes two broad categories: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge.

- a) **Organizational knowledge:** knowledge related to the structures of the language and the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences; it is composed of:
- **Grammatical knowledge:** similar to Canale and Swain's (1980) grammatical competence. It includes knowledge of vocabulary, knowledge of syntax, and knowledge of phonology.
  - **Textual knowledge:** includes knowledge of conversational and rhetorical organization, in addition to coherence and cohesion.
- b) **Pragmatic knowledge:** refers to the ability to relate words and utterances to their appropriate context and the communicative goals of the language user, it includes:
- **Functional knowledge:** Bachman (1990) refers to it as illocutionary competence, the relationship between language utterances and the intentions. Functional knowledge is based on the following aspects: knowledge of ideational functions, knowledge of manipulative functions, knowledge of heuristic functions, and knowledge of imaginative functions. These functions do not occur in isolation but they interact in a given discourse.
  - **Sociolinguistic knowledge:** enables the person to relate language to the appropriate context. It includes knowledge of dialects and registers, idiomatic expressions, cultural references and figures of speech.

Worth noting is the fact that strategic competence is not included in the present study as the researcher attempts to explore only the four language competences.

Bachman and Palmer's model is applied to the different language skills including reading. Regarding Language knowledge, McKay (2006) provides a set of skills in relation to Bachman and Palmer's model. She lists them in relation to the different competences:

- **Grammatical knowledge in reading:** involves the ability to decode letters and words, large vocabulary and accurate grammar.
- **Textual knowledge in reading:** is related to the ability to distinguish different text genres and the ability to comprehend organizational development in a text. Accordingly, it is through textual knowledge that the person can understand the meaning of the text and also to predict what comes next and what is the purpose behind the text.
- **Functional knowledge in reading:** the ability to relate sentences and texts to their exact meaning, in addition to the intention behind.
- **Sociolinguistic knowledge in reading:** is concerned with the ability to depict and understand the cultural references in the text.



**Figure 2: Bachman and Palmer's model of language ability (Adapted 199, p. 67-68)**

## 2. The Study

### 2.1. Statement of the Problem

Text comprehension constitutes a major pillar in pupils' understanding of how language operates. However, this specific area of language is still seen as an obstacle for many learners. Formative assessment seems to be helpful to eliminate pupils' difficulties in text comprehension mainly those related to grammatical and textual competences.

### 2.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present research work is carried on the basis of the following research questions:

- How does formative assessment develop pupils' text comprehension?
- What changes can the experiment bring in terms of pupils' achievements and attitudes towards text comprehension?

On the basis of the afore-mentioned questions, we hypothesize the following:

- Formative assessment raises teacher's awareness about his pupils' difficulties and the problems they encounter in text comprehension and this, in turn, will help him in assisting them to overcome these difficulties and problems.
- The experiment is meant to enhance pupils' achievements through regular practice of texts. Accordingly, pupils will develop the language competences mainly the grammatical one; moreover, they will build up positive attitudes towards text comprehension.

### 2.3. Research Objectives

Formative assessment is meant to enhance pupils' achievements and develop their proficiency level. Accordingly, the present work had been carried out to see the extent to which this claim can be applicable to the Algerian third year secondary school pupils mainly in terms of text comprehension. The aim is therefore to examine the impact of formative assessment on pupils' text comprehension. Another aim behind choosing these texts in the intervention as formative assessments is to make the pupils familiar with task types that they are likely to encounter in

standardized summative assessments and this, in turn, will decrease pupils' test anxiety, and therefore increase achievement.

#### ***2.4. Research Method***

Drawing from the objectives stated earlier, the researcher opts for an experimental research design which is based on the causal links as stated by Denscombe (2007, p. 49): "experiments are generally concerned with determining the cause of any changes that occur to the thing being studied"; within experimental design the cause and effect relationship exists between two variables: the independent variable and the dependent variable. In the present work the independent variable is formative assessment while the dependent variable is text comprehension. The researcher opted mainly for one group pretest-posttest experimental design. Additionally, the researcher employed also a questionnaire as a support to crosscheck data.

In the present research work, the researcher opts for a one group pretest- posttest experimental research design (pre-experiment) where there is only one group who receives the treatment, thus she employs a quasi-experimental design.

#### ***2.5. Research Approach***

As the work adheres into an experimental design, the approach used for data collection and data analysis is a quantitative approach in nature. Moreover, the researcher employs the qualitative approach for the questionnaire. The former approach helps the researcher to draw a link between the research variables on the basis of the numerical data gathered before and after the intervention while the latter is concerned with descriptive analysis of the participants' views about the intervention.

#### ***2.6. Research Procedure***

The researcher goes through different, yet intertwined steps to fulfill the research objectives. Three main phases were included:

- **Pre-intervention phase:** this part is concerned with exploring the pupils' main weaknesses regarding text comprehension; the pupils are tested using a pretest. The pretest is designed by the researcher, it includes a set of tasks designed in relation to the four language competences (see appendix A). The pretest helps the researcher to design the appropriate sessions based on the pupils' answers.
- **The intervention phase:** after identifying pupils' weaknesses in the former phase, the researcher launches an intervention which lasted five weeks. The researcher relies on a set of previous Baccalaureate exam samples, the tasks found in these sample exams are mainly concerned with the four language competences. The design of these exam samples is similar to that of the pretest and the posttest where the pupils have to read the text provided and answer the tasks which follow. The intervention is mainly concerned with the pupils' weaknesses in text comprehension in relation to the language competences.

- **Post-intervention phase:** this phase is concerned with the evaluation of the intervention; pupils were given a posttest (see appendix B) with the same criteria found in the pretest. Additionally, the pupils were given a post-intervention questionnaire (see appendix C).

### **2.7. Research Population**

The sample population consists of sixteen pupils (12 females and 4 males), their ages range between 17 and 21 years old, their first language is Arabic and English for them is regarded as a foreign language. The participants are third year pupils at Mohammed Mchernen secondary school, Tlemcen Algeria; they are enrolled in 'Foreign Languages' stream. The group under study is randomly assigned, the group basically comprised 25 pupils, and the researcher randomly chooses sixteen pupils. Regarding the school as a whole the researcher opts for a non-probability convenience sampling as the school is chosen for the fact that it scored very low in the previous years in the Bacallaureate exam. The small number of participants actually serves the researcher as she was able to reach each individual pupil.

### **2.8. Research Instruments**

The present research work is carried out via three main instruments: a pretest, a posttest and a questionnaire.

a) **Description of the pretest:** the pretest is conducted prior to the intervention; it is mainly intended to draw the pupils' proficiency level in text comprehension, in addition to the following aims:

- To figure out which competence among the four competences (grammatical, textual, functional and sociolinguistic) represents an obstacle for pupils.
- To have an idea about the pupils' overall level of text comprehension.

Accordingly, the pretest is composed of a reading passage followed by a set of tasks related to the four language competences. The activities provided includes a variety of comprehension questions, grammatical items, and vocabulary items, each activity is designed to explore a given language competence. Worth noting is the fact that the researcher designs the pretest on the basis of the previous Bacallaureate exams, besides, because of the time constraint the researcher was unable to pilot the pretest.

- b) **Description of the posttest:** the participants are tested after the intervention to check the impact of the course they have received in their overall performance in text comprehension, and also to compare their achievement in the four language competences in relation to the pretest. The posttest also is designed by the researcher drawing from the previous Bacallaureate exams and taking into account the main points tackled in the pretest.
- c) **Description of the post-intervention questionnaire:** after the posttest, the pupils are asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of the following rubrics:

- **Pupils' attitudes:** this rubric contains questions which were mainly intended to draw pupils' attitudes concerning the intervention they have received.
- **Pupils' difficulties:** this rubric aims at exploring whether the intervention helps the pupils to overcome the main difficulties faced in the pretest.

#### d) *Description of the intervention*

The intervention takes place during the third semester during the academic year 2016-2017; it is a set of sample baccalaureate exams which are given as formative assessment each Wednesday. The sample exams are mainly related to the first two parts of the English exams proposed in the different 'Baccalaureat' exams, i.e., text comprehension and text exploration. Each Wednesday there is an exam to deal with, pupils are given one hour to answer the different tasks, in the second hour, the researcher corrects the previous test given. During the first hour pupils are exposed to intensive feedback, i.e., they are guided by corrective feedback which is provided on the spot to each individual pupil. During the correction session, the researcher corrects the test given focusing mainly on the main difficulties detected in the pupils' answers. The activities provided are mainly intended to develop the four language competences (Bachman and Palmer model 1996) mainly grammatical and textual/ functional (including sociolinguistic and functional) ones as pupils show lack in these two areas. Accordingly, the sample exams provided are composed of a set of activities: each activity is designed for a given competence.

### 2.9. Analysis of the Main Results

#### a) *Analysis of the pretest and posttest results*

The results obtained from the pretest and the posttest are compared in the graph below, what can be clearly observed is the fact that the pupils' scores increased significantly, and this is also confirmed through the table 1 which exhibits pupils' scores in terms of the central tendency.

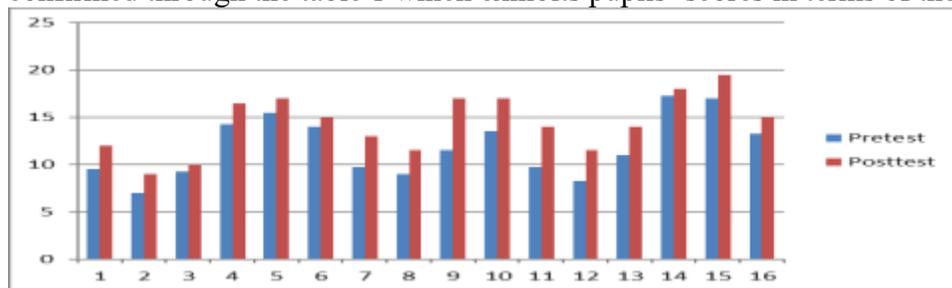


Figure 3: comparison of pupils' scores in the pretest and posttest

Table1: Comparison of pupils' scores in terms of central tendency

	Pretest	Posttest
<b>Mean</b>	11.85	14.37
<b>Median</b>	11.25	14.5
<b>Standard deviation</b>	3.16	3.03

What is relevant from the table above is the fact that the pupils outperform in the posttest. The pupils record a difference of 2.98 in the mean scores between the two tests, and this is satisfactory. The pupils' scores in the different tasks are also compared in the table below:

**Table 2: comparison of pupils' scores in the different tasks of the pretest and the posttest**

<b>Two tests results: Aspects of text comprehension and text exploration</b>							
<b>Proficiency</b>		<b>Proficient% N=16</b>		<b>Partially proficient% N=16</b>		<b>Not proficient% N=16</b>	
		<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>
<b>TEXT COMPREHENSION</b>	<b>Tasks</b>						
	Task one: type of text (textual knowledge)	14	15	/	/	02	01
	Task two: true/false (textual/functional knowledge)	02	12	11	03	03	01
	Task three: questions related to the text (textual/ functional knowledge)	01	13	12	03	03	/
	Task four: in which paragraph is mentioned the idea (textual knowledge)	14	14	/	/	02	02
	Task five: who or what do the underlined words refer to (textual/ functional)	03	13	08	03	05	/
	Task six: give a title to the text (textual knowledge)	06	13	07	/	03	03
<b>TEXT EXPLORATION</b>	Task one: definitions (synonyms) (grammatical/functional knowledge)	08	10	05	04	03	02
	Task two: complete the table (grammatical knowledge)	02	11	08	04	06	01
	Task three: grammar (grammatical knowledge)	03	12	07	03	06	01
	Task four: phonetics (grammatical knowledge)	10	12	05	04	01	/
	Task five: reorder the sentences (textual/ functional knowledge)	09	11	05	04	02	01

The results above show that the difference in the scores is significant between the pretest and the posttest. Additionally, the pupils' responses to the different tasks vary widely between the pretest and the posttest. Regarding the first part, i.e., the part concerned with textual and textual/ functional

competence, the great majority of the pupils achieve well in comparison to the pretest results, the “proficient” category exceeds the average in approximately all the tasks which indicates that the majority of pupils’ answers are correct. On the other hand, the “low proficient” category reaches very low rates with only a few number of pupils not exceeding three. Regarding the part concerned with grammatical competence, the pupils’ scores also increase considerably with a high number of correct answers: 12 while in the pretest the number of correct answers was restricted to lower scores. In the same line of thought, the pupils’ wrong answers decrease in this category of tasks.

#### *b) Analysis of the Questionnaire*

The pupils’ answers to the post-intervention questionnaire reveal that all the participants are satisfied with the intervention they have received. Moreover, they learn many points including vocabulary items, consolidation of grammatical rules, and the way to deal with the text and answer the different questions. As far as the pupils’ difficulties are concerned, all the pupils state that they overcome their difficulties in text comprehension. The results are summarized in the table below:

**Table 2: Pupils’ competences development in relation to text comprehension**

<b>Alternatives</b>	<b>AF</b>
Vocabulary (know the words) (grammatical/functional competence)	14
Grammatical structures found in the text (grammatical competence)	10
Distinguish the different discourse genres (textual competence)	09
Having enough knowledge about the topic of the text (functional competence)	09
Knowing how to pronounce words (grammatical competence)	08
Understanding words separately and the text as a whole (textual competence)	07
Understanding cultural items in the text (sociolinguistic competence)	06
All of them	/

As the table shows the great majority of pupils state that the intervention helps them in overcoming difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in addition to discourse identification. Hence, they develop grammatical and textual competence, in addition to functional competence through background knowledge and vocabulary also.

#### **2.10. Discussion of the Main Results**

To assess the efficacy of the intervention a posttest was administered to pupils at the end of the intervention in addition to a post-intervention questionnaire which carried the same aim as the posttest. The pupils’ scores in the posttest reveal many points: the pupils’ achievements increase considerably in comparison to the pretest. This increase is clear first in pupils’ overall scores and second in their correct answers to the different tasks of the posttest. What has brought this satisfactory end is the intensive feedback which pupils receive throughout the intervention. Indeed, feedback represents one of the cornerstones of formative assessment upon which it operates

effectively and leads to enhancement and progress in pupils' outcomes, Gipps (1994: 129) highlights this fact by stating that feedback "contributes directly to progress in learning through formative assessment". Additionally, the feedback that pupils receive during the intervention help them widely and wisely in overcoming their difficulties in text comprehension since it is based on error correction and guiding comments, such type of feedback is believed to be the most effective feedback mainly for low achievers (Boston 2002). Feedback that formative assessment offers is meant to reshape pupils' understanding of the different areas and realign their acquired competences in a correct manner. Accordingly, the role that feedback plays in the process of formative assessment is crucial, in the present study for instance formative assessment allows the researcher to know the different problems pupils encounter when dealing with a text, this in turn helps her to offer appropriate feedback related to these problems, and the pupils also felt free to ask about the ambiguous points which they were unable to understand during the lesson, and also to interact freely with the teacher (researcher). Accordingly, the data gleaned by means of the intervention, the post-intervention questionnaire and the posttest confirm our first hypothesis.

The pupils' responses to the post-intervention questionnaire reveal that they like the intervention they have received, moreover the majority of them find it very beneficial since they have learned many things including: grammar rules, new vocabulary items, some reading strategies and the ways how to deal with a text and how to answer different questions. As a matter of fact, this is the main concern of formative assessment, it improves learning in general through "helping students see the connections and clarify meaning in small, successive steps as new knowledge is related to existing understanding" (McMillan 2007: 1). As far as text comprehension is concerned, the pupils' scores in posttest items reveal that they develop their understanding of text through the sessions that they have received; these sessions are based on feedback as it has been already clarified, the pupils are taught how to deal with the text and the strategies used to handle the different tasks linked to it. The results of the post-intervention questionnaire and the posttest demonstrate that pupils' text comprehension develop considerably after the intervention, this is attributed mainly to the regular practice of texts. Furthermore, the pupils state that the intervention helps them in answering the different tasks related to text comprehension, besides it makes them accustomed with the text and its tasks, hence the pupils become more opened to these tasks and more importantly they develop a positive attitude towards them. Finally, the correlation between the results obtained through the post-intervention questionnaire and the posttest leads the researcher to confirm the second hypothesis which suggests that the experiment is meant to develop pupils' achievements through regular practice of texts; therefore they will develop their language competences and also will develop positive attitudes towards text comprehension.

### **Limitations**

As any other study, the researcher encounters some problems when conducting the experiment. The major limitation is the time constraint; first for the intervention the researcher decides for more sessions however because of the time is insufficient she shortens the intervention to five weeks. Second, the researcher cannot pilot the pretest because of time. Additionally, the researcher was

unable to investigate some focal points of text comprehension mainly text comprehension strategies because of time. As far as the research ethics are concerned, the researcher tells the participants about the nature of the experiment and the objectives behind the intervention. Additionally, the researcher asks for permission from the head of the secondary school to conduct the experiment.

### **Pedagogical implications**

The present study yields important results concerning the focal role that formative assessment plays in educational settings namely in the area of text comprehension. Indeed, formative assessment provides the teacher with the necessary tools to deal effectively with the pupils. For that point, we suggest that formative assessment should be an integral part in the teaching learning process, the pupils should be assessed on a regular basis and should be provided by intensive feedback carried to each individual pupil. Accordingly, we suggest that the number of pupils should be limited in the classroom so that the teacher can reach each individual pupil and provide him/her with the necessary feedback relevant to their points of strengths and points of weaknesses mainly.

Based on the data gathered we also suggest that formative assessment should be guided by intensive constructive feedback in order to raise pupils' awareness to the main areas of weaknesses and strengths. Moreover, teachers need to be acknowledged about the importance of formative assessment in the educational setting and be trained to use it in the classroom under different forms, in the present study, for instance, the researcher opted for a set of Bacca-laureate exams which were used as formative assessments, however, teachers can use diverse methods to implement formative assessment in their classrooms according to their students' needs, interests and learning preferences. Finally, the researcher suggests that formative assessment should be mandated in the secondary school syllabus on a regular basis.

### **Conclusion**

The effect of formative assessment is acknowledged worldwide in educational arenas. Accordingly, the present study has been carried out with the endeavour to explore the effects of formative assessment on pupils' text comprehension. The results were very satisfactory and reflected the effect of formative assessment on the improvement of pupils' text comprehension and completion of tasks related to the text. This research offers a platform from which further research in the area can depart mainly to offer more effective strategies through which formative assessment can operate.

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### Appendix A: Pretest

#### **Read the text carefully then do the activities.**

In Britain there are a number of different kinds of Higher Education. First of all, of course, there are universities. Can have failed to have heard of Oxford and Cambridge, the two oldest universities in England, but, of course, there are a number of other universities, many of which have opened since the war. The latest of these is the Open University, a unique institution, which, as its name suggests, is open to all. Students of the Open University are not obliged to have any previous qualifications. All the students are part-time and are taught through the medium of television and radio, although they do receive some personal tuition as well through centers located near their own homes. The first graduate were awarded their degrees in 1973.

Besides the universities, there are other institutions such as Polytechnics and technical colleges. These tend to offer courses of a vocational nature as well as academic courses. If a student wants to study management, accounting or librarianship, for example, he would be more likely to go to one of these institutions.

The vast majority of students receive grants from their local Authority, which cover tuition fees and allow a certain amount of money to the students to pay their keep and their books. Most of the colleges and universities have a good proportion of students from overseas.

#### **1. Choose the best answer**

**The text is:** a. descriptive b. argumentative c. Narrative

#### **2. Are the these statements True or False**

- a. All British universities are more recent than Oxford and Cambridge.
- b. Qualifications are required to enter the Open University.
- c. Higher Education in Britain is free of charge.
- d. The majority of colleges and universities in Britain accept foreign students.

**3. Answer the following questions according to the text**

- a. Give two reasons which make of the Open University a unique institution.
  - b. Are students at the Open University compelled to attend full-time lectures? Justify by quoting from the text.
  - c. Who attends Polytechnic and Technical colleges?
- 4. In which paragraph is it mentioned that students are helped to finance their studies?**
- 5. Who or what do the underlined words refer to?**
- a. Its (§)
  - b. their (§1)
  - c. these (§2)
  - d. which (§3)

**6. Give a title to the text**

**B. Text Exploration**

**1. Match the words with their definitions.**

Words	Definitions
1. Degrees	a. money given by a government to help students.
2. Grants	b. connected with skills, knowledge.
3. vocational	c. given by official decision as a prize.
4. awarded	d. grades given by a university to someone who has passed an examination

**2. Complete the chart as shown in the example.**

	Verb	Noun	adjective
<b>Example :</b>	to educate	Education	Educational
	.....	qualification	.....
	.....	.....	Specialized
	To respect	.....	.....

**3. Combine the pair of sentences with the connectors provided.**

**Provided that - Although – such.....that - whereas**

- 1. a. In America education is considered to be the responsibility of each state. great Britain has a national educational system.
- b. ....
- 2. a. Many students receive grants. They still have financial problems.
- b. ....
- 2. a. Reading is an important skill. Students ought to master it at an early age.
- b. ....

**4. Classify the following words according to the pronunciation of their final “s”**

Colleges – qualifications – students – courses – suggests-kinds

/S/	/Z/	/IZ/

**5. Reorder the following sentences to make a coherent paragraph (1.5 pts)**

- a. and then take special national examination
- b. in order to be accepted to a university.
- c. during the last two years of high school,
- d. the students specialize in college preparatory courses

### Appendix B: Posttest

Read the text carefully then do the activities.

**The text:**

South Africa has 12 million learners, 366.000 teachers and about 28.000 schools including 1.000 private schools. School life spans 13 years or grades – although the first year of education, grade 0 or “reception year” and the last three years (grade 10, 11 and grade 12 or “matric”) are not compulsory.

The educational system is characterized by diversity: schools and universities vary greatly in terms of quality, financial resources and size. Top quality schools and universities are to be found in both the state and the private education sector.

Most state schools are aided to some extent by the government that provides the minimum, and parents contribute to basics and extras in the form of school fees. Private colleges and universities are a more recent phenomenon in the country unlike private schools which have existed for centuries.

For universities entrance, a matric “endorsement” is required. The sector is vibrant with more than a million students, 21 public universities, 15 technikons and many colleges. All the universities and technikons are autonomous.

Education gets a big budget compared with most other countries. However, more money is always needed to address the backlogs left by 40 years of apartheid education, where money was pumped into white education at the expenses of black schools in the townships and rural areas.

The backlogs are immense: illiteracy rates are high, teachers in township schools are poorly trained and the matric pass rate remains low.

Redressing the resource imbalance, rebuilding the educational environment and retraining teachers is a slow and difficult process, but significant improvements have been made up to now.

**1. Choose the best answer**

The text is: Narrative            Expository            descriptive

**2. Say whether the following statements are true or false according to the text.**

- a) Private schools are a recent phenomenon in S. Africa.
- b) Universities are dependent on the government.
- c) Literacy degrees are low among blacks.

**3. Answer the following questions according to the text.**

- a) What is meant by “reception year”?
- b) In what way schools and universities are different in S. Africa?
- c) What is the difference between private colleges and private schools?

**4. In which paragraph is it mentioned that high school in S. Africa is not obligatory.**

.....

**5. What or who do the underlined words refer to.**

- a) ...both... (§2)=
- b) ...which... (§3)=

**6. Give the general idea of the text**

- a) Illiteracy in South Africa.

- b)S. African educational system.
- c) Public & private schools in S. Africa

**B/ Text Exploration**

1. Find in the text words or phrases close in meaning to the following:

- a) Independent (§4) =
- b) huge (§6)=
- c) Important (§7) =

2. Complete the following table as shown in the example.

Verb	Noun	Adjective
<b>Example:</b> educate	Education	educative
contribute	.....	.....
.....	improvement	.....
.....	.....	trained

3. Complete sentence (b) so that it means the same as sentence (a).

- 1. a) State schools are aided by the government.
- b) The government.....
- 2. a) I didn't revise well, I regret it now.
- b) I wish.....

4. Classify the following words according to the pronunciation of the final "ed".

Passed - aided - required - pumped - trained - existed

/d/	/id/	/t/

5. Re-order the following sentences to get a coherent paragraph.

- a) The first were living in poor conditions,
- b) But this situation changed nowadays.
- c) Whereas the second were rich and powerful,
- d) South Africa was divided into blacks and whites.

**Appendix C: Post-intervention questionnaire**

**Rubric one: Pupils' attitudes:**

1. Are you satisfied with the course you have received?

Yes  Somehow  No

2. To what extent was this course helpful?

Very helpful  Helpful  not helpful

- How?
- 3. What did you like most about the course?
- 4. What you dislike about the course?
- 5. What has this course taught you?

**Rubric two: Pupils' difficulties:**

6. Does the course help you to overcome your difficulties in the English exam?

Yes  No

