Building Assessment Literacy

Assessment for Better Learning - TOEFL Young Students Series

Assessment for Learning

The term '*assessment for learning*' (AfL) refers to the use of assessment to encourage and improve learning. It involves monitoring progress in order to help learners understand where they have been successful in their learning and what they need to work towards in achieving their goals. Teachers support their learners to close this gap by planning tasks and designing paths which guide the learners on their next steps

One of the earliest definitions of AfL by Assessment Reform Group is that assessment for learning is:
the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.[1]

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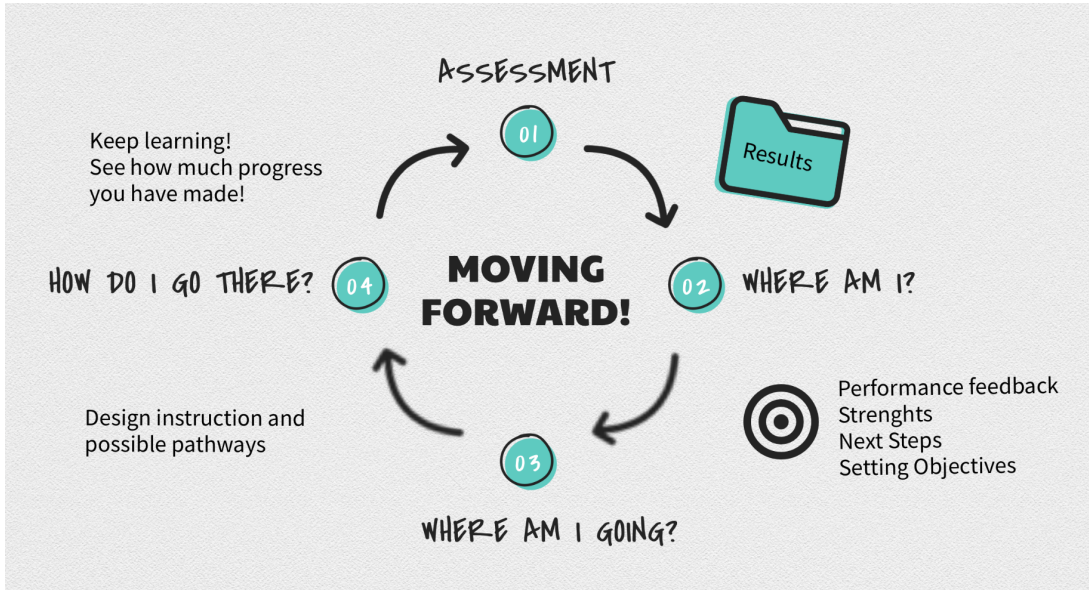
[1] Assessment Reform Group. (2002). Assessment for learning: 10 principles. Retrieved from
https://www.aaia.org.uk/content/uploads/2010/06/Assessment-for-Learning-10-principles.pdf

As John Hattie [2] describes, AfL helps in making understanding and knowledge 'more visible'. AfL helps learners understand what excellence looks like and how they can develop their own work to reach that level.

Formative Assessment

"Good teaching starts from where the students are!"

ASSESSMENT AS A LENS

Assessment as a Lens to Understand Student Learning

The term AfL has been closely associated and been interchangeably used with formative assessment for a long time mostly because both aim "forming" teaching and learning. However, AfL indicates more about the intended use of an assessment, and that assessment involves more than just tests and grades.

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[2] http://visible-learning.org/2009/02/visible-learning-meta-study/

On the other hand, formative assessment refers to a wide variety of methods that teachers use to understand student comprehension and monitor progress during a lesson, unit, or course, in order to adapt teaching to the students' learning needs.[3]

Assessment for Learning is more than just another term for formative assessment. It is an approach to the use of formative assessment as a vital tool for teaching and learning. It is the systematic, comprehensive, and intentional use of formative assessment to help teachers and students improve learning.

Formative assessment provides information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities in order to promote learning. It has the power to make the learning process of every learner visible, and it acknowledges differences between learners. It allows the teachers to give agency and empowerment to their learners, helping them develop competencies for lifelong learning while improving motivation and self-regulation.

Formative assessment improves learning by putting the learner at the center of the learning process. Learning can build on what the student already knows when the teacher gives more evidence about the students' previous learning and experience, and an understanding of where the student is currently in relation to where they need to go. In the long term, formative assessment can help students develop self- reflection, critical thinking and the capacity for self-directed learning.[4]

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[3] DanteD.DixsonandFrankC.Worrell."FormativeandSummativeAssessmentintheClassroom,"Theory Into Practice 55, no. 2 (2016): 153–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1148989.

[4] https://cdn.hundred.org/uploads/report/file/165/hundred_formative_assessment_digital__1_.pdf

Formative vs Summative Assessment

Formative assessment is a way of evaluating student learning as part of the learning process. The aim of formative assessment is to evaluate students' learning in a way that promotes the developmental aspects of learning and teaching. In other words, formative assessment is for learning, while summative assessment is of learning.

When an assessment is used for certification purposes, it may be thought of as "*assessment of learning*" (AoL). This kind of assessment looks back at how much
has been learned and sums up where the learner is at a given moment in time (summative assessment).

These are not completely separate processes: a summative assessment can be a tool for adapting teaching and learning when it is used to understand what has been learned, what is lacking, and how improvements can be made through feedback gained by the assessments.

TOEFL Young Students Series (YSS)

Designed to set the foundation for the successful development of English language skills, the TOEFL Young Students Series includes age-appropriate assessments -the TOEFL Junior and TOEFL Primary tests, products and professional development opportunities to help guide younger students to the next steps of learning.

Educators, students and parents from more than 65 countries worldwide rely on the TOEFL® Young Students Series to help ensure the development of strong English communication skills.
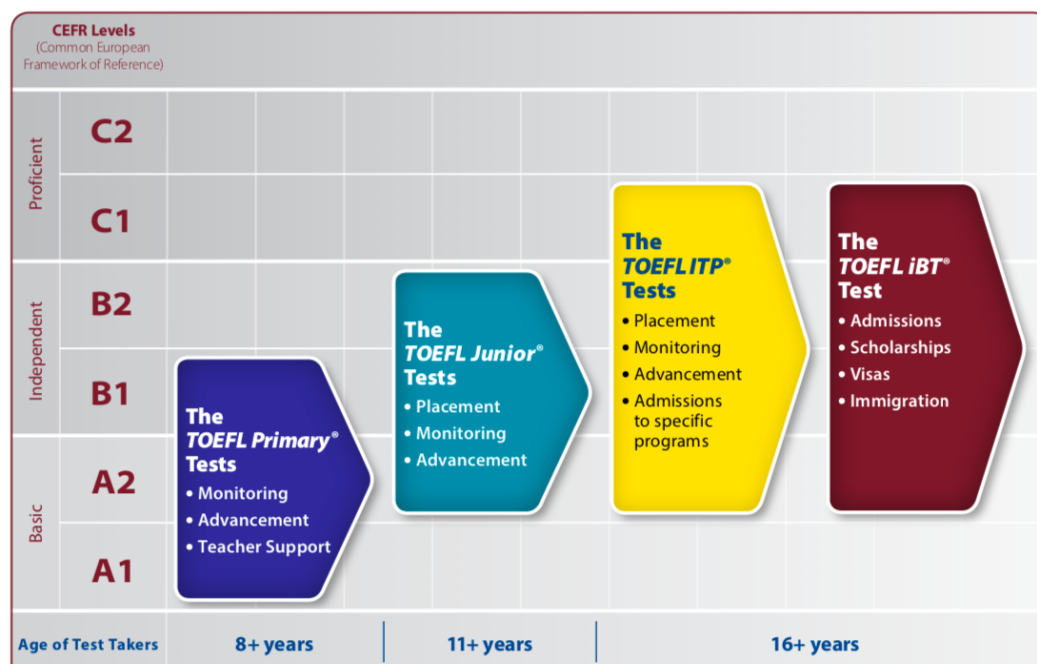
General Characteristics

TOEFL Young Students Series are:
1. Curriculum independent. They are not tied to any specific curricula.
2. Large scale. They measure students' skills from A1 to B2 level.
3. Research-based.
4. Focus on communication.
5. A great tool to give feedback using the detailed score reports and certificates

The results from the TOEFL Young Students Series provide teachers with data about student performance. This data can be used to make decisions about the next steps in instruction, which are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions teachers would have taken intuitively in the absence of that data.

The score reports include information on:
-   proficiency descriptors on student's performance in each skill
-   next steps and recommendations for improvement
-   CEFR score for each skill
-   A scale score for each skill
-   Lexile score for reading comprehension

How English Teachers Use the Information Provided on the Score Reports to Inform Their EFL Instruction

Effective assessment should co-create learning expectations and learning targets with students, and generate feedback on learning to be used by the teacher and the students to help students understand their own learning process, facilitating the students' learning how to learn.

TOEFL Young Students Series provides valuable data to inform classroom instruction. To be able to use this test data for student learning, teachers need to have a thorough understanding of the scoring framework. To achieve this, we needed to perform several steps as, without sufficient background information, it is not possible to use the data effectively.

Below is a summary of the steps we followed:

First, we had a one-hour online training session with all the teachers on understanding the assessment data in May 2021. In this training, we informed the teachers about the scores and explained what the scores might mean for their teaching.

Then, students took the TOEFL YSS assessments in September. The teachers had the results of their classrooms during the Teacher Training Week in the Netherlands in October 2021. During this week, we had a collaborative inquiry session with each school team to interpret the collected data and to give meaning to the scores. We summarized the data by following the collaborative data inquiry protocol from Harvard Graduate School of Education. The protocol has two steps:

- What do you see in the classroom score reports? - A descriptive analysis of the results
- What do you wonder? - Interpretation of the data

Subsequently, with the teachers from each school, we discussed how to contextualize the interpreted data. They compared their students' results with other sources of information such as the student performance in the classroom, students' results in other forms of assessments administered in the school and so on.

We decided that this combination of different sources of information about student performance would serve as a basis for decisions about actions that are going to be taken and

designed a framework to support the use of assessment data in teaching and learning. This framework includes a three-level system (individual, group, school) in which teachers can make decisions about the use of the data within their own classrooms. For example, on an individual level, decisions may pertain to whether a student should receive additional support. On a group level, decisions can relate to categorizing students into different levels for differentiation of instruction. On a school level, decisions may pertain to selecting a new teaching method.

Which action do you find most important in the use of test results? Choose your next steps and actions regarding your school's test results.

	Communicating Learning	Supporting Learning	Evaluating Learning
Individual Level			
Group Level			
School Level			

In December and January, we organized individual school meetings where we discussed the results and student performances, actions taken by the teachers, and their questions.

We repeated this process during and between each teacher training week and afterwards we collected answers and samples from teachers on how they have been using the assessment data in their teaching through surveys, individual and/or focus group interviews.

Overall, the teacher's responses provide valuable insight into the impact of the project on language teachers' professional development. The teachers' descriptions highlight the program's role in enhancing teachers' understanding of the value of assessments as a source of information for teaching and learning. The teachers also emphasize the importance of differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs, tracking student progress over time, and using assessment results to guide curriculum design and classroom instruction. Additionally, the teachers' descriptions underscores the importance of ongoing professional development in supporting teachers' growth and development as language educators.

The answers show a variety of ways teachers have used the data and/or planning to integrate the data into their teaching. The assessment results have been used to group students according to their level, allowing for more personalized English education and increasing both student enjoyment and learning outcomes. Additionally, the results have been used to provide students with an understanding of their language abilities and the possibilities available to them.

Some other ways they have been using the assessments:

1. Reflecting on teaching practices
2. Identifying areas of strength and weakness in students' language skills
3. Developing lesson plans and materials to address students' needs
4. Using assessments as a source of information for teaching
5. Adjusting teaching methods to meet individual student needs
6. Incorporating student-produced feedback into teaching
7. Using assessments to track student progress over time
8. Differentiating instruction based on assessment results
9. Using assessments to inform classroom instruction and curriculum design
10. Identifying areas where additional support is needed for struggling students
11. Assessing student understanding of content and concepts
12. Providing evidence of student learning for school administrators and parents
13. Providing feedback to students on their performance
14. Evaluating the effectiveness of teaching methods
15. Encouraging self-reflection among students on their learning progress
16. Analyzing the results to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in students' English skills.
17. Developing personalized learning plans based on individual student's results.
18. Dividing students into learning groups based on their results.
19. Using the results to create a library with books at different lexical levels.
20. Informing families of the students' progress.
21. Analyzing results together to determine the best way to divide the groups.
22. Using the results to train the aspects of English that students struggle with the most.
23. Discussing the results in class with students and explaining their meaning and suggestions for improvement.
24. Giving feedback and feedforward to students to help them reach their goals.
25. Using the results to set goals for the upcoming period.
26. Having individual conversations with students to discuss their progress and provide feedback.

27. Providing compliments to students on their improvement in English.
28. Using the assessments to make groups for the upcoming school year.
29. Providing individual working materials for students based on their level.
30. Using the assessments to identify students' needs and adjust teaching methods accordingly.
31. Identifying student strengths and weaknesses
32. Developing personalized learning plans for each student
33. Providing targeted feedback to students
34. Adjusting teaching strategies based on student performance
35. Analyzing data to inform classroom instruction
36. Communicating with parents about their child's progress
37. Evaluating the effectiveness of instructional materials and programs
38. Identifying areas for professional development and growth
39. Collaborating with colleagues to improve instruction
40. Planning interventions for struggling students
41. Creating and implementing school improvement plans
42. Monitoring student growth over time
43. Determining student placement and promotion
44. Meeting state and federal accountability requirements
45. Celebrating student successes and accomplishments

Some quotes from the teachers:

I have given individual feedback to every student and set goals with them. We have bought books on their appropriate lexile scores. We have tried to help the students with the higher grades to get challenged more and we help individually (and in small groups) the students with the lowest results to try and help them with English and to help them gain more confidence and lose the language anxiety.

I gave the students their assessment and told them to show it at home as well. As I didn't know the students that well before the test, the results gave me vital information on their language skills and thus it was easier to for example differentiate exercises in the classroom.

I sat down with every pupil and had a talk about the results. We really looked into them and set some goals together about were we're heading and how we can get there. Since them I have given positive feedback for every small step that gets us closer to the goal.

I have created an account on Oxfordowl. Explained to my class how it works and the aim of the site. Then I discussed with the lower score students how they could benefit from using this website to improve their

reading skills and how it also improves your vocabulary while reading. I adviced them to make use of the website by reading books on their level.
I also do more speaking with my first year class, which they enjoy.

The students will take the assessments again at the end of April. This will allow us to monitor their progress and make an evaluation of the actions taken. During the next teacher training week in May in Finland, we are going to have sessions with individual schools to make an evaluation and decide on the next steps.

What Teachers Think and Say About the Benefits of TOEFL Young Students Series

Students do not, nor should they be expected to, start every lesson at the same place and learn at the same pace. Ensuring that all students reach the learning objectives requires that teachers are able to use differentiated instruction and assessment. The TOEFL Young Students Series helps teachers to understand students' strengths and also where they are struggling. This can help teachers approach each student as a unique individual, each with their own diverse interests, experiences and understandings of the range of content and capabilities being studied in the classroom.

TOEFL YSS IS PERSONALIZED

TOEFL YSS can be used as a formative assessment that serves the students and the teachers, rather than a summative assessment providing time-delayed data that is too late for decision-makers to use. Teachers can differentiate instruction and also the assessment based on their student profile.

TOEFL YSS PROVIDES DATA ABOUT WHAT STUDENTS KNOW

TOEFL YSS provides the teachers with highly detailed data that highlights student proficiency in different language skills. It can also make the learning progress over time in these skills visible. Students can get a better understanding of their own learning and reflect on their journey and set goals for themselves.

TOEFL YSS IS NOT USED TO GRADE STUDENTS

The data from TOEFL YSS is not aimed to be used solely for summative purposes. The assessments are not "pass or fail" tests. Rather, the information gathered from the TOEFL YSS as a formative assessment tool is used to guide the teacher to create additional learning opportunities.

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS LEARN TOGETHER

Teachers learn about how the students are learning – they learn about their students. This disrupts the traditional dynamic in which the teachers know the content, the students learn the content and then the teachers assess the students' knowledge of the content at a predetermined date.

TOEFL YSS PROMOTES LEARNING

The primary purpose of TOEFL YSS is to promote learning. It focuses on the growth of the individual learner by putting the learner at the center and by taking into account what they already know, and the learning aims that have been decided by or with the teacher.

TOEFL YSS SPOTLIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LEARNERS' FUTURE GROWTH

What a student knows today is not a determination of their potential. Language learning is a developmental process which is not fixed, but is shaped by social and environmental factors, including pedagogical practice and the organization of assessments.