

## **Assessment in Blended Learning: EFL Students' Perceptions of Continuous Formative Assessment in Writing Class**

التقويم في التعلم المختلط : تصورات طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية  
للتقويم التكويني المستمر في فصل التعبير الكتابي

### **L'évaluation en l'apprentissage mixte : Perceptions des étudiants d'anglais langue étrangère à l'égard de l'évaluation formative continue en classe d'écriture**

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#### **Introduction**

Hybridized learning environments, which combine face-to-face instruction with online learning, have come to the fore to create a wide range of new possibilities for assessing student learning. Online learning when mixed with face-to-face instruction can provide ample opportunities for students to be scaffolded and assessed in and beyond the classroom. This is in contrast to a traditional form of assessment where the focus can be drawn to summative assessment which gives the student one chance to be assessed, demonstrate their content knowledge and determine their grades. Relying on assessment of learning or summative assessment to track students' progress is regarded as insufficient since it fails at guiding and measuring the development of student learning. In light of the advancement of ICTs, teachers need to revisit the obsolete methods of assessment and implement new assessment methods that scaffold, monitor and provide continuous feedback even outside the classroom to maximize students' learning and adjust teaching practices to answer students' learning needs. From this perspective, adopting a process-oriented assessment method, which copes with the demands of this globalized epoch, can provide students with the opportunity to engage in peer-mediated learning, peer-feedback and incessant scaffolding as they interact. Assessment in blended learning environments gives paramount consideration to continuous formative assessment that provides ongoing evaluation which can leverage student learning and contribute to raising their awareness of their learning difficulties in and outside the classroom. However, until recently, the use of continuous formative assessment has not gained much concern in the literature, specifically in the Algerian context. Thus,

the present study is meant to investigate the issue of continuous formative assessment in the department of English at the University of Algiers 2 with an aim to find out students' perceptions of continuous formative assessment in a blended writing class.

## **1. Theoretical background**

### **1.1. The place of summative, formative and continuous formative assessment in learning development:**

It is undeniable that in order to sustain and monitor student learning process, it is crucial to adopt an assessment method that hinges on iterative process of action and reflection. Selecting an eclectic assessment method that aggregates constant scaffolding and collaboration can help students engage in active learning that is based on dialogic talks, authentic performance, mediation by "knowledgeable others" (Vygotsky, 1978) and hands-on tasks. In its broad definition, Bakerson, Trottier, and Mansfield (2015) define assessment as "the systematic process of documenting learning through measurable evidence. It is used to measure knowledge, skills, dispositions, or beliefs gleaned through instructional sequences, with an aim to improve all aspects of student learning" (p. 4). Starting from this definition, assessment methods can vary in order to accomplish different learning objectives. Thus, before embarking on explaining continuous formative assessment, it is noteworthy to distinguish between summative and formative assessment methods. On the one hand, summative assessment is related to determining student grades and overall performance, or as Herr et al (2015) argue: "summative assessments are used to measure mastery of predetermined content or standards and are the backbone of accountability systems at all academic levels" (p.189). Summative assessment methods can take the form of tests or final exams. Nonetheless, this type of assessment does not identify students' learning gaps, nor does it bring a full account on how to monitor their learning and adjust teaching practices to address students' learning needs. On the other hand, formative assessments are adopted in the teaching-learning process to provide guided practice and timely feedback to students, identify their learning deficiencies and make any necessary modifications to hone their engagement. According to Black and William (2009), one of the crucial instructional advantages of formative assessment is that it provides moments of contingency where assessment changes the direction of the learning process to one that is more effective and purposeful. In traditional classroom settings, formative assessment can come in different techniques, such as oral responses, think-pair-share activities, self-evaluation, regular quizzes, assignments, and hand signals (Fluckiger, Vigil, Pasco & Danielson, 2010).

Recently, with the emergence of internet communication technologies, a new form of assessment has been brought into the limelight to cope with the demands of this globalized world. For Herr et al. (2015), continuous formative assessment (henceforth, CFA) is implemented in blended learning contexts through the use of “synchronous collaborative web-based documents to perform continuous, real-time formative assessments of students’ understanding so that educators can adjust their instruction to address the immediate needs of their students” (p.194). This type of assessment relies on the use of frequent feedback in and outside the classroom to scaffold and sustain student learning through the use of peer-assessment, discussion boards, chat systems, wikis, and online quizzes. Through reflection and purposeful interaction, the struggling students can be offered scaffolding or more specific practice on the learning aspects that they find difficult to grasp. Hence, Bensemmane-Ihddaden (2016) has argued that it is important “to develop the critical capacities of the learners to enable them to know themselves through self-reflection, to become active and confident learners who can think for themselves and learn how to learn” (p.163). Integrating CFA in the teaching-learning process allows students to be continuously engaged in active learning where feedback is provided both in face-to-face instruction and online learning. It also allows the teacher to track students’ progress, thereby monitoring and identifying the learning deficiencies that the students may have and finding ways to consolidate their learning and address their learning needs.

Regarding students’ engagement in the learning process, Herr et al. (2015) rightly remark: “the continuous formative assessment (CFA) model has the potential to engage *all* learners *all* of the time as they provide feedback, data, quick-writes, and analyses in response to instructor prompts” (p.194, *Italics in original*). The implementation of CFA in blended learning can also be accomplished through the use of online learning platforms, such as Google classroom or Moodle, which are equipped with academic online tools that record students’ responses and grades, provide immediate access to learning resources and assignments and monitor their learning through instant feedback and extensive practice. The tools, which can help in facilitating the implementation of CFA, consist of presentations, quizzes, wikis, class survey, and collaborative online spreadsheets, which allow the students to keep track of their own progress and help the teacher to have a formative assessment on their performance (Herr & Rivas, 2010). Some of the crucial techniques of CFA are presented in the subsequent section.

## **1.2. Techniques for continuous formative assessment in blended learning:**

Algerian higher education is experiencing a tendency of implementing blended learning environments to sustain student learning. This has necessitated the need to bridge the gap between the way (s) students were used to be assessed and adopting e-assessment methods to cope with the twenty-first-century pedagogy (Crews & Curtis, 2011). From this perspective, a number of CFA techniques are suggested in order to provide the students with quality learning. First, quizzes are perceived as a very prominent online tool that online platforms offer. For Belhadj (2016), online quizzes come in the form of essay writing, multiple choice questions, matching, and true-false. They can be integrated in the learning process as course exams, feedback, or self-assessment. Online platforms can provide the teacher with the opportunity to create quizzes of various types in order to enable the students to check and monitor their understanding. In this vein, Marriott and Lau (2008) investigated the impact of e-assessment through online quizzes on students' learning outcomes. The findings demonstrated that the use of e-assessment provided the participants with scaffolding and other opportunities to test their knowledge and reinforce their practice. It also fostered student engagement and motivation for learning. Second, online quick-write is a CFA technique that is based on setting up an online spreadsheet which contains students' names and questions to the lesson (Herr et al., 2015). Given to its potential to scaffold and monitor students' learning, the aim of the online quick write technique is to enable the teacher to ask questions in order to check students' understanding of the lesson, thereby giving the teacher a formative assessment of their performance and uncover any points that need further consolidation. This technique can provide moments of contingency that can help the teacher to fill the learning gaps of his/her students.

Third, the use of the wiki tool has gained much acclamation in the twenty-first pedagogy, for it is considered as a technological tool that provides intensive collaboration (Godwin-Jones, 2003) which reinforces peer-assessment, asynchronous communication, and peer-feedback. For Li and Zhu (2017), "One feature of the wiki that may be especially conducive to writer collaboration is that each version of the wiki written document is transparent to co-writers and the transparency encourages continual refining of the shared written texts" (p.39). What is worth stressing is that encouraging students to use the wiki tool outside the classroom can provide them with the chance to be immersed in peer- revision, peer-feedback, negotiation and exchange of ideas, thereby enhancing their writing skills. Research has revealed that students tend to have

positive perceptions of using wikis in blended writing class (Mirk et al., 2010), claiming that it fosters better writing, group work, and collaboration (Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Woo et al., 2011; Chao & Lo, 2009). For instance, Li and Zhu (2017) conducted a case study to examine the use of collaborative wiki writing texts and to explore the connections between wiki mediated interactions and wiki products. The findings revealed that the use of collaborative wiki writing enhanced the quality of the participants' written productions in terms of coherence and rhetorical structure. The researchers concluded that the use of collaborative wiki writing provided the participants with scaffolding and co-ownership. Similarly, in a study conducted by Chao and Lo (2011) on students' perceptions of Wiki-based collaborative writing for EFL students, the findings showed that the students had positive perceptions of using wiki in writing. The results also revealed that the use of Wiki-based collaborative writing motivated the participants to actively engage in the writing process and assisted them through peer-editing, peer-feedback and assessment. With regard to CFA, Herr et al., (2015) explored students' perceptions of using CFA in blended learning. Through adopting a mixed-methods design, the results showed that the students had positive perceptions of using this assessment method since it reinforced their accountability, engagement, self-correction, and social learning. In this view, the researchers suggest: "in such an environment, students can evaluate their ideas and contributions in light of those of their peers, just the way professionals share their findings and provide critiques of their colleagues' work" (p. 210). It was concluded that the CFA pedagogy offered communication channels between the students and teacher, which reinforced their learning in and outside the classroom.

In the light of the literature mentioned above which highlighted the merits of CFA, the present study aims at investigating students' perceptions of using CFA in blended writing class. It is also meant to see to what extent the implementation of continuous formative assessment can scaffold, monitor and engage students' in the learning process. On the basis of this objective, the main research question is:

How do EFL students perceive continuous formative assessment in a blended writing class?

Three sub-research questions derive from the main research question:

- Does CFA monitor students' learning?
- Does CFA scaffold students' learning?
- Does CFA enhance students' engagement in the learning process?

## 2. Method

A descriptive study involving a mixed-methods design was conducted in the department of English at the University of Algiers 2 to meet the previously stated objectives. The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2018-2019 and consists of one independent variable which is continuous formative assessment and one dependent variable which is students' perceptions.

### 2.1. Sample population and research instruments

The participants were 80 second year EFL degree students. Two research instruments were used in the present study : a questionnaire and a focus group interview. The questionnaire aimed at finding out students' perceptions of CFA in blended learning and was adapted from the Student Assessment for Learning Questionnaire (SAFL-Q) developed by Pat-El, Tillema, Segerst and Vedder (2013) and the ASPECT questionnaire developed by Wiggins et al. (2017). The adapted questionnaire involves three scales with 33 items : monitoring (12 items), scaffolding (11 items) and student engagement (10 items). The participants had to rate their approval to the statements by selecting an item on a five-point Likert scale : never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), always (5). Frequency analysis was adopted to analyze the findings which emerged from the questionnaire.

In order to back up the findings obtained from the questionnaire, a focus group interview was conducted with 7 participants (4 females and 3 males). The focus group interview consisted of three questions :

- Question 1 : What is your general opinion about CFA ?
- Question 2 : How do you perceive the use of online quizzes and wiki tool in your learning process ?
- Question 3 : What do you think of engaging in peer-assessment and feedback ?

The focus group interview was analyzed qualitatively through content analysis. This required determining the themes and categories that emerged from the analysis of the verbal data. Worthy of note, the research instruments that were used in the present study were piloted before their final implementation.

### 2.2. Data collection procedure :

The students in the present study studied through the blended learning approach which combines face-to-face instruction and online learning. In class, the participants worked collaboratively in small groups of three students and approached the writing tasks as a process of before, while and after writing.

They were engaged in a process of planning, writing and revising which allowed them to continuously involve in peer-assessment and feedback. During writing, the participants were encouraged to involve in sharing ideas and contributions. The participants also relied on a peer-editing and peer evaluation sheets which were meant to engage the students in scaffolding and peer-assessment.

The in-person learning was supplemented with online learning. Thus, the participants studied online through the MOODLE learning platform. This platform contained a discussion board, quizzes, and wiki assignments to help the students to increase and assess their learning regularly. The students were propelled to post their enquiries regarding the points that they did not understand in class. This tool aided the participants to clarify the learning aspects that they did not fully grasp and be immersed in generating thoughtful responses and reflective interaction with their peers and the teacher. Moreover, the participants proceeded to doing online quizzes about the writing skill to give the teacher a continuous formative assessment on their performance, and each quiz was meant to reinforce students' writing skills in terms of sentence structure, coherence, punctuation, and spelling. The participants, who worked in pairs, were also required to engage in wiki projects which consisted of some writing assignments that revolve around peer-reviewing, proofreading, and peer-editing. The wiki tool was also supplemented with a chat system which facilitates synchronous discussion among students, thereby offering them the chance to exchange comments and replies.

All participants then completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of using CFA in blended writing classroom in addition to a focus group interview which was conducted with 7 participants. The focus group interview was audio-recorded upon the participants' consent.

### **3. Results**

The findings of the perceptual questionnaire were analyzed descriptively using frequency analysis. And the results of the focus group interview were content analyzed qualitatively. The next section presents the results of the questionnaire.

### 3.1. Results of the questionnaire

Results of the monitoring scale are presented in table 1 below :

**Table 1.** Results of the monitoring scale

N	Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	My teacher encourages me to reflect on how I can improve my assignments.	0	2	9	30	39
		0 %	2,5 %	11,25 %	37,5 %	48,75 %
2	After examining my quiz results, my teacher gives me feedback on my performance.	0	4	10	13	53
		0 %	5 %	12,5 %	16,25 %	66,25 %
3 3	Whilst working on my assignments, my teacher asks me how I think I am doing.	0	0	7	40	33
		0 %	0 %	8,75 %	50 %	41,25 %
4	My teacher allows me to think about what I want to learn.	0	0	4	11	65
		0 %	0 %	5 %	13,75 %	81,25 %
5	My teacher gives me the opportunity to decide on my own learning objectives.	0	0	6	59	15
		0 %	0 %	7,5 %	73,75 %	18,75 %
6	This learning environment encourages me to reflect on my learning process and to think about how to improve next time.	0	0	3	42	38
		0 %	0 %	3,75 %	52,5 %	47,5 %
7	In class and online tasks stress my strengths concerning learning.	0	0	4	53	23
		0 %	0 %	5 %	66,25 %	28,75 %
8	The different learning tasks help me identify my weaknesses concerning learning.	0	0	0	12	68
		0 %	0 %	0 %	15 %	85 %



9	My teacher and classmates encourage me to increase my learning process.	0	3	5	38	34
		0 %	3,75 %	6,25 %	47,5 %	42,5 %
10	If I face difficulties, my teacher discusses assignments with me to help me understand the subject matter better.	0	0	4	12	64
		0 %	0 %	5 %	15 %	80 %
11	My teacher and I consider ways to improve my weak points.	0	2	3	56	19
		0 %	2,5 %	3,75 %	70 %	23,75 %
12	After each assignment, my teacher informs me how to improve the next time.	2	1	6	49	40
		2,5 %	1,25 %	7,5 %	61,25 %	50 %

Table 1 presents the results of the monitoring scale. The findings, which are presented in table 1 above, show that 48,75 % of the participants report that the teacher always encourages them to reflect on how they can improve their learning, and 66,25 % of them say that the teacher always gives them feedback on their performance. Besides, 50 % of the respondents often report that the teacher asks them how they think they are doing while working on their assignments. When it comes to learning preferences, 81,25 % of the participants say that their teacher always allows them to think about what they want to learn, and 73,75 % report that the teacher often gives them the opportunity to think about their learning objectives. Moreover, 52,5 % of the participants often think that this learning environment helps them to reflect on their learning process and to think about how to improve next time. With regard to assessment, 66,25 % of the participants report that class and online tasks often stress their strengths concerning learning, and 85 % say that the different learning tasks help them identify their weaknesses concerning learning. Regarding interaction, the majority of the respondents report that their classmates and the teacher often encourage them to increase their learning process, and if they face difficulties, the teacher always (80 %) discusses assignments with them in order to help them understand the subject matter better. 70 % of the respondents report that their teacher always considers ways to improve their weak points, and after each assignment, the teacher often (61,25 %) informs them how to improve the next time. The results of the scaffolding scale are displayed in table 2 below. The findings of the scaffolding scale are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. Results of the scaffolding scale

N	Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	When I do not understand a topic, my teacher and classmates try to explain it in a different way.	0	0	5	49	36
		0 %	0 %	6,25 %	61,25 %	45 %
2	Using the wiki tool helped me to get feedback from my classmates and the teacher.	0	0	8	52	20
		0 %	0 %	10 %	65 %	25 %
3	I have an opportunity to show what I have learned through group discussion.	0	1	3	30	46
		0 %	1,25 %	3,75 %	37,5 %	57,5 %
4	My teacher asks questions in a way I understand.	0	0	2	36	42
		0 %	0 %	2,5 %	45 %	52,5 %
5	My teacher asks questions that help me gain understanding of the subject matter.	0	0	3	28	49
		0 %	0 %	3,75 %	35 %	61,25 %
6	My teacher allows for my contribution during the lesson and in online learning.	0	2	3	54	21
		0 %	2,5 %	3,75 %	67,5 %	26,25 %
7	I have the opportunity to ask my classmates questions during the lesson.	0	0	2	44	34
		0 %	0 %	2,5 %	55 %	42,5 %
8	I can engage in peer-correction and feedback.	0	0	4	52	24
		0 %	0 %	5 %	65 %	30 %
9	I am aware of the criteria by which my assignment will be evaluated.	0	0	2	19	59
		0 %	0 %	2,5 %	23,75 %	73,75 %
10	When I do online quizzes, it is clear to me what I can learn from them.	0	0	5	53	22
		0 %	0 %	6,25 %	66,25 %	27,5 %
11	My online assignments allow me to show what I am capable of.	0	0	3	37	40
		0 %	0 %	3,75 %	46,25 %	50 %

Table 2 shows the results of the scaffolding scale. The majority of those who responded to the first item say that when they do not understand a topic, the teacher and their classmates often (61,25 %) try to explain it in a different way. Besides, using the wiki tool often (65 %) helps the participants to get feedback from their classmates and the teacher. 57,5 % of the participants report that they often have an opportunity to show what they have learned through group discussion. With regard to questioning, 52,5 % of the respondents say that the teacher always asks questions in a way they understand, and 61,25 % of

them report that the teacher asks questions that help them gain understanding of the subject matter. The majority of those who answered this question report that the teacher often (67,5 %) allows for their contribution during the lesson and in online learning, and 55 % of them report that they often have the opportunity to ask their classmates questions during the lesson. Moreover, 65 % of the participants say that they can often engage in peer-correction and feedback, and they are always (73,75 %) aware of the criteria by which their assignments will be evaluated. Furthermore, when they do online quizzes, 66,25 % of the respondents report that it is often clear to them what they can learn from them, and their online assignments often (50 %) allow them to show what they are capable of. The results of student engagement scale are demonstrated in table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Results of the engagement scale

N	Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	Explaining the material to my group improved my understanding of it.	2	1	12	36	29
		2,5 %	1,25 %	15 %	45 %	36,25 %
2	Having the material explained to me by my group members improved my understanding of the assignments.	0	0	9	30	41
		0 %	0 %	11,25 %	37,5 %	51,25 %
3	Group discussion during online tasks contributed to my understanding of the course material.	2	2	8	24	44
		2,5 %	2,5 %	10 %	30 %	55 %
4	My classmates made valuable contributions during the activity.	0	0	10	36	34
		0 %	0 %	12,5 %	45 %	42,5 %
5	The different online tasks reinforced my practice and learning.	0	2	5	41	48
		0 %	2,5 %	6,25 %	51,25 %	60 %
6	The online quizzes and wiki stimulated my interest in the course material.	0	0	8	39	33
		0 %	0 %	10 %	48,75 %	41,25 %
7	The feedback I received from the different online quizzes boosted my engagement.	0	0	5	31	44
		0 %	0 %	6,25 %	38,57 %	55 %
8	The teacher and my classmates were available to answer questions during online activities.	0	0	6	42	32
		0 %	0 %	7,5 %	52,5 %	40 %

9	I made a valuable contribution to my group.	0	0	3	37	40
		0 %	0 %	3,75 %	46,25 %	50 %
10	Interaction with my classmates made me more interested in the learning process.	0	1	6	43	30
		0 %	1.25 %	7,5 %	53,57 %	37,5 %

Table 3 demonstrates the findings of the engagement scale. The findings which are displayed in table 3 above reveal that 45 % of the participants report that explaining the learning material to their group improve their understanding of it, and having the material explained to them by their group members always (51,25 %) increase their understanding of the assignment. 55 % of the participants say that group discussion during online tasks always contributed to their understanding of the course material, and 45 % of them report that their classmates often make valuable contributions during the activity. With regard to online learning, the different online tasks often (60 %) reinforce their practice and learning, and the online quizzes and wiki often (48,75 %) stimulate their interest in the course material. Moreover, the majority of participants (55 %) claim that the feedback they receive from the different online quizzes always boost their engagement, and 52,5 % of the respondents report that the teacher and their classmates are often available to answer their questions during online activities. As far as interaction is concerned, the respondents report that they always (50 %) make a valuable contribution to their group, and 53,57 % of them say that interaction with their classmates often make them more interested in the learning process. The next section presents the results of the focus group interview.

3.2. Results of the focus group interview

The interview was recorded and transcribed. The results related to each interview question, including the verbal data, themes, and categories, are presented in the following sections. For confidentiality purposes, the names of the seven participants have been changed to Leila, Hadjer, Meriem, Amira, Amine, Hicham, and Adam. The findings related to the first focus group interview question are presented in the next section.

- Interview question 1 : What is your general opinion about CFA ?

This question was intended to unveil students’ opinions of their experience in engaging in CFA in and outside the classroom. The general theme for this question is entitled “students’ opinion of CFA in blended learning”. The analysis of the verbal data related to the first interview question led to the emergence of three categories.

The first category is entitled “awareness of learning difficulties”. The interviewees claim that this type of assessment method, which assesses students’ learning in and outside the classroom, raises their awareness of their learning deficiencies and allows them to fill the learning gaps that they might encounter. The verbal data related to this category are presented below :

Leila : “I believe that this assessment helps me to know where I stand in relation to the different lessons that I learnt...”  
Meriem : “... This type of learning permits me to do a lot of exercises and tasks to develop my writing skills. I could send my written productions to my teacher to correct them for me and learn from my mistakes. And one thing I like most about it is that after each lesson, I can know the points I understand and the points I didn’t understand so that I know what to focus on more.”  
Hadjer : “... I could learn many things from them especially when they correct my written productions and discuss my mistakes with them and how to avoid them next time...”  
Amine : “Personally, I feel that being continuously assessed helped me to improve my learning because I can always know what are my weak areas and strong points...”  
Amira : “I believe that this assessment method helped me to catch my errors, especially when I check the feedback of my teacher and my friends...it’s like it.... made me want to learn more...”

The second category, which emerged from the analysis of the verbal data related to the first interview question, is named “communicative skills”. The interviewees hold the view that engaging in CFA boosts their communicative skills and enables them to receive regular feedback either from their classmates or the teacher. They also believe that CFA helps them to create continuous communication channels that scaffold their learning not only in the classroom but also outside class through online learning. The interviewees comment :

Leila : “...It also allows me to contact my teacher and my classmates even online to ask questions about the points I didn’t understand in class.”  
Hadjer : “Yes yes...it is very interesting because it helped me to communicate with my classmates in class and online, especially when we study in groups.”  
Amira : “...it is the first time I experience this type of learning ; it is very nice especially when I collaborate and communicate with my friends to write a good piece of writing, it helped me to share my ideas with my friends and to engage in active interaction.”

The third category is entitled “student engagement and autonomy”. The findings of the analysis of the first interview question demonstrate that the interviewees claim that this assessment method helps them extend their learning process beyond the classroom. This gave them equitable opportunities to be actively engaged in their learning process through posting their inquiries, having extra practice using online quizzes and assignments and keeping the momentum going. The extracts related to these findings are presented below :

Hicham : “... I would like to add other info. Personally, I find this assessment type very compelling because it doesn't limit our learning in the classroom only...see what I mean... but it also improves it outside class because three hours a week devoted to reading and writing skills are not enough for us to practice, so I think that online learning...how to say... prolongs yes our practice and allows us to ask questions and do many assignments.”

Amira : “...this helped me to write many essays even without the demand of my teacher and send them for correction to see my level.”

Adam : “...What I like most about this learning atmosphere is that it keeps me focused all the time. For example using the wiki quiz...honestly... it is the first time I experience this type of learning ; it is very nice especially when I collaborate and communicate with my friends to write a good piece of writing”

The findings related to the second interview question are presented in the next section.

- Interview question 2 : How do you perceive the use of online quizzes and wiki tool in your learning process ?

The general theme for this question is named “perceptions of using wiki and online quizzes”. Three categories have emerged from the analysis of the verbal data related to the second interview question. The first category is entitled “error correction and feedback”. The interviewees believe that the wiki tool and online quizzes provide them with more relevant and purposeful learning which is equipped by constructive feedback and continuous monitoring. They also claim that the regular feedback they constantly received from these online tools reinforced their self-awareness and confidence as well as improved their assessment performance :

Hadjer : “I find that online exercises and the wiki assignments are very effective to develop my understanding and practice of the writing skill...in... other words, I could for example correct the

errors of my friends at the same time discuss other alternatives for improving their work and my essays. That helped me to know the errors that should be avoided when I write an essay ; online quizzes gave more practice with feedback which helped me to see if I'm improving."

Adam : "...comparing to my level in the first year, I feel that there is improvement especially when I interact with my classmates in class and through chatting and wiki ; I can know my errors and how I should correct them. That helped me a lot to be confident."

Meriem : "Personally, feedback which I received each time I do an online quiz and interaction with you and with my classmates... how to say...allowed me to spot my mistakes and to not repeat them again..."

Amira : "...discussing my errors with my classmates was really beneficial because you feel that you are no more isolated but there is always help for you to improve."

Hicham : "The wiki tool and the different online tasks honestly motivated me to write more and do my best to improve my level."

The second category related to the second focus group interview theme is named "extended practice". A common view amongst the interviewees is that the use of the wiki tool and online quizzes enable the participants to extend their learning beyond the classroom where they received continuous scaffolding and support. The interviewees comment :

Adam : "...so I want to say that the online quizzes that I did in fact allowed me to practice many things for example sentence structure, spelling and other things related to writing which I used to have many problems. To be honest, three hours a week are not enough for us to have some intensive practice in the classroom, so as far as I'm concerned, this helped me to do many exercises online to develop my level."

Amira : "I want to talk about the wiki. Well, I have never experienced learning by using this tool before until now. I really find it very great because it helped to outline my essay, which was never the case before, to write my essay and have it corrected by you and my classmates. This really helped me to be always aware for the process of writing...it's like it becomes a habit for me and gave me extra practice on this area."

Another recurrent view amongst the interviewees is that online tools increased their motivation, and this determined the third category of the second interview question. One interviewee comments :

Meriem : "...This learning atmosphere which allows us to study even online in addition to in class honestly motivated me to write more and do my best to improve my level because I feel that I am noticed and the teacher cares about improving my level."

The results of the third interview question are demonstrated in the subsequent section.

- Interview question 3 : What do you think about engaging in peer-assessment and feedback ?

The theme for this question is "peer assessment and feedback". The analysis of the verbal data related to this question led to the emergence of two categories : critical reflection and self-awareness.

The interviewees claim that peer assessment and feedback boost their critical reflection on their learning process. They can identify their mistakes and find solutions to avoid them, thereby generating positive attitudes towards learning. The interviewees comment :

Leila : "Peer-assessment helped me to spot my mistakes and get involved in assessment especially when we use peer-editing sheet in the classroom and online assignments. So we were open to get feedback all the time."

Amira : "I used to revise my lessons, but sometimes I get confused about some aspects but with peer-assessment and teacher's feedback, I can ask for clarification whenever I want."

Amine : "for me, peer assessment allowed me to reflect on my mistakes and helped me to learn a lot from my classmates."

Moreover, the interviewees believe that peer assessment and feedback increase their self-awareness :

Hicham : "I become more aware of my learning weaknesses so I can improve them."

Meriem : "I think that teacher feedback guided me while studying and aided me to be aware of the lessons that I didn't understand so this made me to take notes or write questions to ask my teacher and my friends about."

The next section presents the discussion of results obtained from the analysis of the questionnaire and focus group interview.

## 4. Discussion

As was revealed in the results section, the students had positive perceptions of using continuous formative assessment in blended writing class. Regarding the role of CFA in monitoring students' learning process, the subjects



expressed the view that CFA created enhanced opportunities for developing their learning outcomes. A possible explanation for these results may relate to the fact that the subjects were regularly engaged in active learning in and outside the classroom, which enabled them to be immersed in a constant process of reflection. The latter allowed them to identify their learning deficiencies or gaps in understanding that need to be filled or consolidated through relying on constructive feedback and reflective interaction that kept them progressing smoothly. Therefore, questioning the students during classroom discussions and in online learning through synchronous and asynchronous tools was highly appreciated by the subjects since it allowed them to determine the activities needed for further improvement and enabled the teacher to make any necessary adjustments in instruction to help the students to meet their learning objectives and needs. Moreover, when the students were working in groups, they could always be monitored as they were involved in substantive interactions, peer-assessment, feedback and error-correction that gauged their understanding and improved their writing outcomes. In this respect, Bakerson et al. (2015) argue : “incorporating collaborative learning and reflection as part of the learning process once again allows students to take ownership of their education, increasing the value of thorough self-awareness” (p.14). These raised the subjects’ awareness of their own writing difficulties and urged them to think of solutions to avoid them as was demonstrated in the analysis of the questionnaire and focus group interview results. It can be said that the subjects had positive perceptions of using CFA to monitor their learning, which is the prerequisite of raising students’ awareness of their learning process and boosting their reflection. In so doing, the students were continuously guided during their learning, which allowed them to set attainable objectives and be responsible for their own learning process.

As for the role of CFA in scaffolding students learning, the subjects’ claimed that this assessment method provided them with intensive instructional support. The results of the present study revealed that the subjects expressed positive perceptions regarding the different activities that were meant to scaffold their learning process. The subjects claimed that engaging in group discussion offered them the chance to provide explanation to the ones who faced some learning difficulties ; this increased their active contribution to the different writing tasks, thereby cultivating peer-to-peer learning and assessment. Besides, online learning enabled the subjects to extend their learning process and have extra practice on the writing aspects that they found difficult to understand. The subjects also held the view that the use of online quizzes and the wiki

tool motivated them to increase their participation in group discussion, evaluate their written productions and reinforce their learning outcomes through constructive feedback, extended practice and reflective interaction. For Banks (2012), online quizzes enable “students know immediately if they have not mastered the content and can work through the content until they gain mastery” (p. 85). Thus, embedding assessment in the learning process through online assignments fostered students’ ownership through giving them the chance to determine their understanding of the learning materials. This study produced results which corroborate the findings of the studies conducted by Chao and Lo (2011), Mirk et al. (2010) and Marriott and Lau (2008) and which demonstrated that the use of wikis and online quizzes, as assessment tools, were highly enjoyed by the participants since they scaffolded their learning and honed their motivation in the learning process.

When it comes to students’ engagement, positive perceptions were generated as a result of engaging in CFA, an assessment method that makes students empowered even outside the classroom. The current study found that the subjects seemed to enjoy the advantages brought by CFA especially in what concerns interest, interaction, and learning reinforcement. The subjects expressed the view that CFA increased their engagement since they were able to involve in collaborative learning either virtually through wikis or in-person learning through group work. This allowed them to continuously exchange additional clarifications, share information, and provide feedback to each other, aiming at improving their learning outcomes. From this perspective, Bakerson et al. (2015) rightly remark : “creating small-group Wikis, where students can post one key element that they thought was important and then reflect upon how it relates to them, promotes critical thinking and increases students’ engagement.”(p.14). The findings of the current study also showed that the timely feedback, which was given either in class or in online learning, engaged the subjects in the learning process and stimulated their interest to learn more. Providing constructive feedback to students was highly vital as it helped the students to identify their misconceptions or misunderstandings and forged lasting engagement, leading to intensive scaffolding and generating positive attitudes towards learning. Therefore, as the students have positive perceptions of CFA, the current study suggests that it is more effective to support and assess students’ learning not only at the end of the semester or course unit but also during the learning process in face-to-face instruction and online learning.

## Conclusion

The current study investigated students' perceptions of continuous formative assessment in a blended writing class at the University of Algiers 2. It aimed at finding out how EFL students perceive the use of CFA and to what extent it monitors, scaffolds and engages them in the learning process. This study was a descriptive one involving a mixed-methods design and conducted in the department of English at the University of Algiers 2. The sample consisted of 80 second year EFL degree students. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire and focus group interview. The findings demonstrated that the subjects expressed positive perceptions of CFA, claiming that this assessment method provided them with adequate monitoring and continuous scaffolding and honed their engagement in the learning process. Despite its descriptive nature, this research study offers some insight into the significance of incorporating continuous formative assessment in foreign language education at university to improve students' learning outcomes. It emphasizes the view that assessing students continuously in face-to-face instruction and online learning can lead to enhanced opportunities for reflective interaction, collaboration, scaffolding, and monitoring students' progress. Nevertheless, it is recommended that further research be undertaken to investigate the impact of continuous formative assessment on developing students' productive and receptive language skills at university level. This process-oriented assessment method, which copes for the demands of the twenty-first century pedagogy, may empower students and increase their academic success.

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## Abstract

Blended Learning environments, which coalesce online learning with face-to-face instruction, are often characterized by providing ongoing assessment to students to sustain their learning and hone their engagement. One of the assessment methods that is believed to heighten students' learning is continuous formative assessment which hinges on iterative scaffolding and monitoring, thereby cultivating peer-to-peer learning. The objective of the present study is to investigate EFL students' perceptions of continuous formative assessment in a blended writing class. To this end, a descriptive study involving a mixed-methods design was conducted with 80 second year EFL degree students at the University of Algiers 2. The findings, which emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire and focus group interview, indicated that the subjects had positive perceptions of CFA. They claimed that it scaffolded and monitored their learning and helped them feel more accountable and engaged in their learning process. It also provided them with learning tasks to involve in peer-assessment and peer-mediated learning. The article concludes with pointing out some avenues for further research.

## Keywords

Blended learning ; continuous formative assessment ; monitoring ; scaffolding ; student engagement ; perceptions

## المخلص

تتميز بيئات التعلم المختلطة التي تجمع بين التعلم على الانترنت والتعليم وجها لوجه بتوفير تقويم مستمر للطلاب من اجل مواصلة تعلمهم ورفع مستوى مشاركتهم. من بين أساليب التقويم التي يعتقد أنها تؤدي إلى زيادة تعلم الطلاب هو التقويم التكويني المستمر الذي يتركز على استخدام الوسائط التربوية والمشاركة ، وبالتالي تنمية التعلم مع الأقران. الهدف من هذا البحث هو دراسة تصورات طلاب اللغة الانجليزية للتقويم التكويني المستمر في فصل التعبير الكتابي المختلط. من اجل هذا، أجريت دراسة وصفية على عينة من 08 مشارك من طلاب السنة الثانية لغة انجليزية بجامعة الجزائر2. وقد كشفت النتائج المنبثقة عن تحليل الاستبيان والمقابلة الشفهية إلى أن المشاركون عبروا عن تصورات ايجابية لاستخدامهم التقويم التكويني المستمر في فصل التعبير الكتابي المختلط حيث ساعدتهم على تعزيز تعلمهم واستقلاليتهم وانخراطهم في عملية التعلم. كما وفرت لهم نشاطات تعليمية لإشراكهم في تقويم الأقران و التعلم بواسطة الأقران. وتم استعراض عدد من التوصيات المنبثقة من الدراسة المجراة، وكذلك تقديم مقترحات لبعض الدراسات المستقبلية .

## كلمات مفتاحية

التعلم المختلط، التقويم التكويني المستمر، مراقبة التعلم، الوسائط التربوية، انخراط المتعلم، تصورات الطلاب.

## Résumé

Les environnements d'apprentissage mixte, qui combinent l'apprentissage en ligne et l'enseignement en personne, sont caractérisés par une évaluation continue des étudiants

pour soutenir leur apprentissage et améliorer leur engagement. L'une des méthodes d'évaluation qui renforcent l'apprentissage des étudiants est l'évaluation formative continue. Cette dernière est basée sur le soutien scolaire et un suivi itératif, ce qui favorise l'apprentissage entre pairs. L'objectif de cet article est d'étudier les perceptions des étudiants à l'égard de l'évaluation formative continue de rédaction en class mixte. Pour cela, une étude descriptive a été menée avec 80 étudiants de deuxième année d'anglais langue étrangère à l'Université d'Alger 2. Les résultats indiquent que l'utilisation de l'EFC dans l'apprentissage mixte a servi à supporter et surveiller l'apprentissage des étudiants. Ils ont déclaré que cette évaluation les aidait à se sentir autonomes et fortement engagés dans leur processus d'apprentissage. Elle apporte des activités pédagogiques qui donnent des résultats considérables concernant l'apprentissage et l'évaluation par les pairs. Cet article conclut en soulignant futurs travaux portant sur l'évaluation formative continue dans l'apprentissage mixte.

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### **Mots-clés**

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L'apprentissage mixte ; l'évaluation formative continue ; suivi scolaire ; soutien scolaire ; l'engagement des étudiants ; perceptions