

Reflection on Challenges Faced by Chinese Students in Australian Curriculum Assessment System based on AfL

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Abstract: The growing population of international students in Australian higher education institutions presents a unique set of challenges for educators responsible for implementing the Assessment for Learning (AfL) principle. This article explores the specific obstacles faced by Chinese students as they strive to adapt to the Australian higher education curriculum evaluation system from their own perspectives. Additionally, the authors of this article offer in-depth and targeted strategies aimed at enriching the learning experiences of Chinese international students by applying AfL principles. These proposed methods are intended to provide assistance to international students who share a similar educational background in China, helping them overcome the diverse learning challenges encountered in a new and unfamiliar educational setting.

Keywords: AfL Principle; Curriculum Assessment; Critical Thinking.

1. Introduction

Like many international education powerhouses, Australia is a faithful and active Assessment for Learning (AfL) promoter. Implementing AfL principles in Australian classrooms is challenging due to the diverse learner backgrounds. Exploring alternative methods could involve analyzing student responses to innovative assessments. Furthermore, Gan et al. (2019) also point out that research on students' perspectives needs to be improved as most current studies on AfL practice are from teachers' points of view [4]. As a Chinese student in Australia, reflecting on AfL principles is important for improving learning methods for students from Chinese higher education backgrounds, as they have different learning styles due to diverse assessment systems and cultural backgrounds.

The purpose of this article is to outline the challenges author encountered as a Chinese international student when learning AfL. The author of this article will analyze the factors that made AfL unsuitable for Chinese students and explore how to adapt AfL principles to better align with the needs of Chinese international students. The aim is to assist more international students with a Chinese higher education background in overcoming similar challenges in new educational environments.

2. Change in Understanding of Learning Assessments

According to Broadfoot et al. (2002), the Ten Principles of AfL are learner-centered and aim to develop learners' ability for self-directed learning [3]. The theory emphasises the centrality of learning assessment in classroom practice and clarifies the relationship between teachers and students in learning assessment tasks. Throughout my current study abroad experience, I have come to deeply appreciate the differences in learning assessment between Australian higher education and Chinese mainland higher education. My perspective on learning assessment has shifted from being teacher-centered to becoming student-centered. In mainland China, only teachers could conduct assessment activities, and only their results were considered trustworthy. In other words,

assessment was solely the teacher's responsibility. Aside from the outcomes, Students felt the assessments did not meet their needs as they were focused on passing the course.

The most significant factor causing changes in assessment understanding is the transformation of the learning environment. This change is the result of human selection, my learning environment has changed because I chose to study abroad. To adapt to the new learning environment, I have to transform my existing understanding of learning assessment and learn new concepts. Another factor is that I benefit from the self-assessment tasks mentioned in the AfL principles. In the UEEC writing course, a clear and detailed grading scale will be provided. Teachers will guide students in understanding the grading instructions for each grade. They will demonstrate using rubrics and sample essays to evaluate their work against specific criteria. Additionally, teachers will support students in assessing their writing assignments and promptly addressing any confusion during self-assessment [2]. Lastly, teachers will encourage students to articulate the rationale behind their scores about the grading scale. The clear assessment criteria and guidance have significantly improved my proficiency and flexibility in using the structure and wording of English academic writing. Moreover, this has positively motivated me to complete the self-assessment task.

3. Analysis of The Cases and Challenges of Prior Learning

Some papers explain that macro factors may be related to Chinese cultural traditions. The teachers and students in mainland China are commonly associated with teacher centrality and authority [7]. This perception is influenced by China's historical imperial examination system, which traditionally considers summative exams the most trustworthy form of assessment [6]. Therefore, in my learning thinking, I rely more on teacher teaching than active self-discovery like most Chinese mainland students.

In many Chinese mainland universities, teachers have observed that secondary school exam focus has led students to adopt a passive approach to learning. Consequently, university classes still rely mainly on teacher-led explanations. Although I received my undergraduate higher education in

China, I did not have intense self-reflection and critical thinking skills [4]. This also made it challenging for me when I first came to Australia to study. I struggled to keep up with my first class at UNSW due to my lack of preparation and difficulty understanding the language. I often found it hard to follow the teacher's words and could not participate effectively in group discussions. Teachers in different classes pointed out that my critical thinking was inadequate when working on a writing assignment independently. In short, Chinese students' self-reflection ability and critical thinking training are seriously insufficient because of the influence of Chinese cultural traditions.

Many Chinese mainland students still rely on rote memorization and test-solving tactics rather than actual learning, even after entering universities, due to the emphasis on test scores. I am no exception. IELTS preparation has been a long and challenging learning journey for me. Chinese educators at off-campus institutions and public schools have never incorporated AfL principles into their teaching. When I struggled with a 6.0 score on my speaking test, my teachers advised me to memorize a thick IELTS vocabulary book and a corpus. It was not until I barely passed the speaking test and came to Australia to study TESOL that I realized that the way I had studied English was wrong. Most Chinese teachers and students ignore that the essential function of language is to communicate and not pass exams. I believe that Chinese teachers and students lack exposure to AfL principles, leading to an IELTS test misunderstanding. In other words, a misunderstanding of the learning assessment objectives leads to the selection of inappropriate learning methods.

Teachers in the Chinese mainland provide little exposure to alternative assessment methods beyond exams, contributing to the micro-level reasons. Gan et al. (2019) found that few teachers in mainland China use self-assessment due to inadequate resources and training [5]. Teachers are concerned that innovative assessment methods will increase their workload, so most Chinese mainland teachers need more motivation to implement the AfL strategy, despite its promotion by the Chinese Ministry of Education [7].

4. Difficulties in Changing Learning Thinking and Methods

I struggled with self-assessment during my previous academic pursuits and felt uncertain about its purpose. Using assessment criteria and improving my learning based on the results was challenging. Completing the self-assessment left me feeling helpless. Due to the stringent examination system and teacher-led education tradition in mainland China, many Chinese university students struggle to adapt quickly to different assessment systems outside of China. As more Chinese students study abroad, Australian educators need to address this issue to maintain higher education standards in Australia.

5. Reflection on the Application of AfL

For effective AfL, Chinese students need to learn independently, understand AfL's core principles, and address assessment challenges with teacher guidance. They should embrace student-centered learning and work in partnership with their teachers to transform their approach to learning [2]. I enrolled in the specialized EDST5443 Assessment for Learning course, which provided me with a thorough understanding of assessment principles. Actively

participating in assessment tasks is crucial for skill enhancement. Initially, Chinese students may require teacher support to improve their abilities due to their prior learning experiences. This course was instrumental in providing the assistance I needed. The course instructor initially explained the meaning and procedures of AfL and how to benefit from the assessment task [1]. The course assignment by AfL encouraged personal reflection and considering how to use AfL to enhance future learning. The teacher's clear feedback helped me correct mistakes in my reflection and improve my learning methods. As Boud and Dochy (2010) argue, teachers will gradually reduce their help to students while providing more opportunities for students to develop their skills to perform tasks independently [2]. I do feel this from teacher feedback. Instructors tend to offer guidance rather than instructions, which has significantly influenced my shift in thinking and approach to learning. When I studied in China, I only received grades for my written assignments without any feedback, leading me to feel apprehensive about seeking guidance from my teachers. However, upon understanding that Australian teachers provided feedback to aid students in improving their learning, I gained the confidence to seek assistance and utilize feedback to enhance my learning, ultimately reshaping my views on learning and the teacher-student dynamic.

6. Conclusion

This article's author discusses a new perspective on AfL and reflects on how this approach has transformed her learning. The author's own learning experience aligns with that of most Chinese university students, as supported by relevant literature on implementing AfL in the Chinese academic context. Based on the situation described, the paper examines how international students with backgrounds in Chinese higher education face challenges when adjusting their learning approaches and methods. At the end of the article, students receive specific suggestions for using AfL to improve future learning.

The reflections are based on personal learning experiences and insights from the literature regarding implementing AfL in Chinese educational environments. Therefore, it still has reference value for international students with Chinese higher education background in terms of learning and practice.

Chinese student enrollment in Australian higher education is increasing due to a tough job market. Thus, it is crucial to explore AfL principles to help these students improve learning and adapt quickly to the Australian higher education environment.

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