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**CRITICAL FRIEND APPROACH – AN INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL
OF STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHING**

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Annotation. Implementing innovative assessment methods has a crucial role for having an effective and productive teaching and learning process. Formative assessment has gained ground in educational process in recent years. It represents the means that helps instructors improve their teaching and students – advance their performance. Critical Friend Approach is an innovative assessment tool that can develop essential learning skills in students and boost their achievement. The present paper aims at reviewing the general peculiarities of a Critical Friend Approach assessment tool, describes its implementation procedure steps in the teaching process and presents the findings of the study dealing with Georgian students’ perceptions of Critical Friend Approach application in foreign language teaching.

Keywords: Critical Friend Approach, foreign language teaching, assessment, feedback

**ПОДХОД «КРИТИЧЕСКОГО ДРУГА» КАК ИННОВАЦИОННЫЙ
ИНСТРУМЕНТ ОЦЕНКИ УСПЕВАЕМОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ В
ПРЕПОДАВАНИИ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ**

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Аннотация. Внедрение инновационных методов оценки играет решающую роль в обеспечении эффективного и продуктивного процесса преподавания и обучения. В последние годы формативная оценка закрепились в образовательном процессе, представляя собой средство, которое помогает преподавателям совершенствовать свое преподавание, а студентам - повышать свою успеваемость. Подход Critical Friend Approach является инновационным инструментом оценки, который может развить основные навыки обучения у учащихся и повысить их успеваемость. Цель исследования - рассмотреть общие особенности инструмента оценки «Подход по принципу критического отношения к другу», описать шаги процедуры его применения в процессе обучения и представить результаты исследования, касающегося восприятия грузинскими студентами применения принципа и отношение к данному методу в обучении иностранному языку. последние годы формативная оценка закрепились в образовательном процессе, представляя собой средство, которое помогает преподавателям совершенствовать свое преподавание, а студентам - повышать свою успеваемость.

Ключевые слова: Подход критического друга, обучение иностранному языку, оценка, обратная связь

INTRODUCTION

Critical Friend Approach is a tool of formative assessment elaborated by the European Union *Erasmus+* project ASSET (Assessment Tools for Higher Education Learning Environment) in 2017-2020. Sokhumi State University of Tbilisi, Georgia started piloting Critical Friend Approach as a member University of the project in fall semester of the academic year of 2018-2019. Piloting has been first carried out in Bachelor programs of the faculty of Education Sciences. The implementation of the tool was later expanded at all five faculties of the University, at Bachelor, Master and PhD levels.

The idea of a ‘critical friend’ or ‘critical colleague’ was first recommended by Stenhouse (1975) as a ‘partner’ who can give advice and is working with the teacher–researcher in the action research on face-to-face basis (Stenhouse 1975 cited in ASSET 2018). Critical friends act as professional friends: the “critical” aspect relates to the task and the “friend” aspects relates to you as a person (ASSET 2018).

Theoretical foundations of Critical Friend Approach are: constructivism, humanism and reflective practice. According to constructivism, people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In humanism learning is student centered and personalized, and the educator’s role is that of a facilitator. Reflective practice involves thinking about and critically analyzing one's actions with the goal of improving one's professional practice.

Critical Friend Approach can be used in different teaching approaches: Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Case-Based Learning (CBL), Evidence Based Practice (EBP) and Project-Based Learning (PJBL).

Two types of Critical Friend Approach are discussed in the article: Group Tuning Protocol which serves as a helpful tool to receive advice from a professional friend in times of having a problem and Face-to-face Approach of Critical Friend which serves as an assessment of a friend.

Procedures of Critical Friend Approach Implementation in the Classroom

Group Tuning Protocol process

Students form a group of 4-7. Roles are: 1 facilitator, 1 presenter and all the rest are discussants. Group members are assigned to roles.

Facilitator - opens the session by presenting a problem to the audience.

Presenter - talks about his or her problem.

After his or her talk the **discussants** ask clarifying questions to get more information. The colleagues – discussants - examine a presenter’s problem and work out recommendations individually.

A **presenter** makes notes of the recommendations and decides which recommendations will be useful for him or her. Shares his or her new thinking about what she/he learned from the participants’ feedback. There is no more feedback offered.

Facilitator summarizes the discussion.

Reflection

After Group Tuning Protocol process group members answer to the **reflection questions**:

Facilitator:

- How did it feel to be a facilitator?
- Do you think you organized the meeting and managed time efficiently?
- Were there any hindering factors? Which one(s)?
- How did you deal with overcoming obstacles?
- What did you learn about yourself?

Presenter:

- Were you given an opportunity to explain your issue clearly?
- Was the feedback given by your colleagues useful? Why? Explain
- What was the most challenging thing during the meeting?
- How are you going to employ the suggestions given by your colleagues to improve your work?

Discussants:

- What communication problems did you encounter?
- Did clarifying questions help you understand the problem better?
- Do you think the suggestions you gave to the presenter were useful?
- How will you use the experience gained in addressing the problems in your own work?

Self-assessment and peer-assessment fan

The final step of Group Tuning Protocol Process is **self-assessment and peer-assessment fan**. Each student assesses to what extent each member of the group including himself/herself contributed to group work.

Name and surname	Group friend 5	Group friend 4	Group friend 3	Group friend 2	Group friend 1	Self-assessment
What was his/her contribution to group work? (max. 5 scores)						
How many good ideas did he/she contribute to group? (max. 5 scores)						
How positively and beneficially for group did he listen, accept and take into consideration ideas and proposals of other group members (max. 5 scores)						
How responsibly and conscientiously did he fulfill assigned task? (max. 5 scores)						
what was his contribution to producing group's joint product? (max. 5 scores)						

Face-to-face Approach

Another type Critical Friend Approach is an individual approach – between 2 students. It can serve as a peer assessment in class. This kind of approach is based on providing feedback. Students provide effective feedback to their peers which can be “warm”, consisting of supportive, appreciative statements about the work presented, “cool”, offering different way to think about the work presented and “hard”, extending the presenter’s thinking and raising his/her concerns. It is significant that feedback was provided properly in a supportive tone and practical suggestions were added. Critical friend should provide a different perspective as well as ensure balance between support and challenge.

ASSET (2018) enumerates criteria of effective feedback:

- Is understandable;
- Is concise and specific;
- Does not contain any negative expressions;
- Begins with positive commentary, focuses on the positive side of the work;

- Is based on the instructional goals;
- Does not refer to the personal qualities of the feedback receiver;
- Measures the progress/outcome and does not compare someone with someone;
- The efforts made by the feedback receiver is appreciated;
- Indicates the reasons for the success of feedback receiver;
- Does not correct errors, but rather indicates the way/ways to address the problems;
- Is constructive;
- Gives suggestions and is not compulsory;
- Helps the feedback receiver with self-reflection;
- The problem is also seen from the perspective of feedback receiver;
- Does not put the feedback receiver in a defensive position.

A critical friendship requires trust and building a safe environment for its participants. Critical Friend Approach gives students an opportunity to develop reflective, analytical, critical, metacognitive and collaborative skills. It increases their readiness to study novelty and readiness to criticism. Students realize positive effects of formative feedback.

Critical Friend approach ensures delegating responsibility for students, respect for different opinions and build trust-based relationships. Students value collaborative environment - the atmosphere of mutual trust and mutual assistance occurs in class.

Group Tuning Protocol for Examining Argumentative Essay Writing in Foreign Language Teaching

It starts with a teacher giving a topic to students to write an argumentative essay on it. Students write a first draft of a 5-paragraph argumentative essay on the topic. A worksheet is provided to them in order to follow the set guidelines.

Worksheet 1 (For the first draft of the argumentative essay)

Introduction	
Hook Statement	
Background Information	
Thesis Statement	
Body Paragraph 1	
Topic Sentence	
Supporting Details	
Concluding Sentence	
Body Paragraph 2	
Topic Sentence	
Supporting Details	

Concluding Sentence	
Body Paragraph 3	
Counterargument	
Your refutation	
Counterargument	
Your refutation	
Conclusion	
Restatement of Thesis	
Summarizing of Main Points	
Overall Concluding Statement	

After writing the first draft of the essay students form a group of 4-7 to hold a Group Protocol process. A facilitator is chosen among group members.

I. Introduction: Facilitator introduces the presenter and the discussants, briefly introduces protocol goals and guidelines.

II. Presentation: Presenter explains the context of his work and introduces his paper to the group.

III. Examining the work: Discussants look closely at the work and examine each paragraph of the essay carefully.

IV. Clarifying questions: Discussants ask clarifying questions about unclear areas of the essay.

V. Pause for reflections: Discussants make notes where they might help the presenter to improve or 'fine tune' that particular work and how they would like to contribute to the feedback session.

VI. Feedback: Discussants provide warm and cool feedback on each paragraph of the essay.

Discussants can brainstorm other PROs and CONs with explanations and examples for the thesis statement given in the article by the author.

Presenter is silent, listens carefully and fills the outline on Worksheet 2 based on the feedback received from peers:

1. Presenter writes down new PRO and CON points for his thesis statement that were provided by the discussants.
2. Presenter can make adjustments in his counterarguments as well. He can choose 1-2 counterarguments from CON list and he needs to write a refutation for each.

Worksheet 2 (For the development of the thesis statement)

N	PRO (with explanation and example)	CON (with explanation and example)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

3. Presenter can also change organization of his essay, he can choose one of the approaches that is most suitable for him (handout 1).

Handout 1 (Essay structure)

Introduction	Introduction	Introduction
Pro point 1 + support	Con point(s) + refutation(s)	Con point 1 + your refutation
Pro point 2 + support	Pro point 1 + support	Con point 2 + your refutation
Con point(s) + refutation(s)	Pro point 2 + support	Con point 3 + your refutation
Conclusion	Conclusion	Conclusion

4. Presenter can change and develop his original essay draft (Worksheet 3).

Worksheet 3 (For the final draft of the argumentative essay)

Introduction	
Hook Statement	
Background Information	
Thesis Statement	
Body Paragraph 1	
Topic Sentence	
Supporting Details	
Concluding Sentence	
Body Paragraph 2	
Topic Sentence	
Supporting Details	
Concluding Sentence	
Body Paragraph 3	
Counterargument	
Your refutation	
Counterargument	
Your refutation	
Conclusion	
Restatement of Thesis	
Summarizing of Main Points	
Overall Concluding Statement	

VII. Reflection: Presenter talks about the changes he made in his essay and presents the final draft of the argumentative essay.

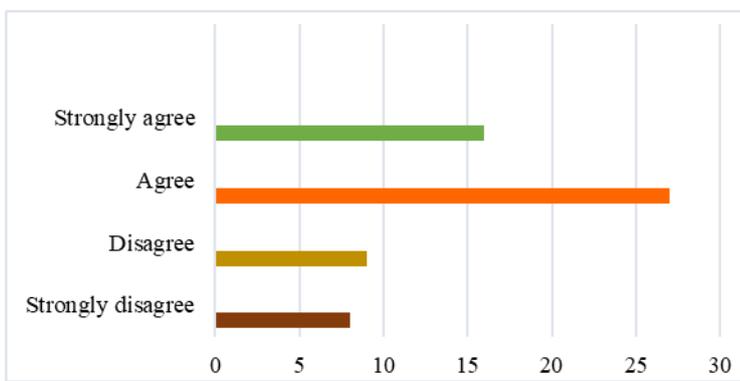
VIII. Debrief of Protocol: Presenter and then participants discuss how well the protocol process worked and what achievements were obtained. Facilitator thanks the presenter and group discussants and sums up the process.

THE RESEARCH

The goal of the research was to explore Georgian students’ attitudes and feelings towards the feedback received from their Critical Friends either in Group Tuning Protocol or Face-to-face Approach. The research was conducted at Sokhumi State University of Georgia. The quantitative method was chosen as a method for the research. Respondents were year 1 and year 2 students of Bachelor educational programmes of Sokhumi State University taking the courses - General English and General Russian, and students of 60 ECTS Teacher Training 1-year program taking the courses of English Language Teaching Methodology and Russian Language Teaching Methodology. Respondents were 60 students in total. Critical Friend approach has been implemented in their courses throughout the whole academic year of 2019-2020. The participation was voluntary and their names were kept anonymous.

Q.1 I don’t mind to be assessed by a critical friend in my class.

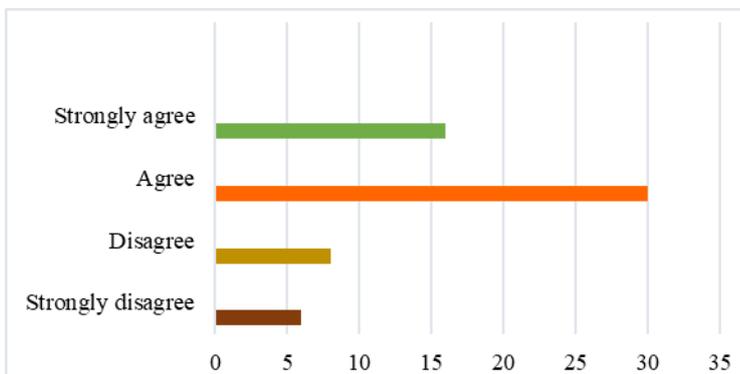
Figure 1.



The survey showed that 43 students out of 60 don’t mind to be assessed by a critical friend in their classes.

Q. 2 I trust my critical friend to objectively assess me.

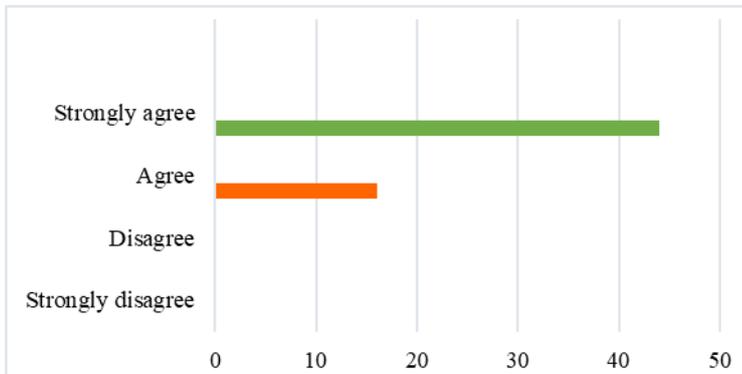
Figure 2.



46 students expressed their attitude towards their critical friends in a positive way, they revealed that they trust their critical friends in objectively assessing them.

Q. 3 I feel more responsible for my learning when I am assessed by a critical friend.

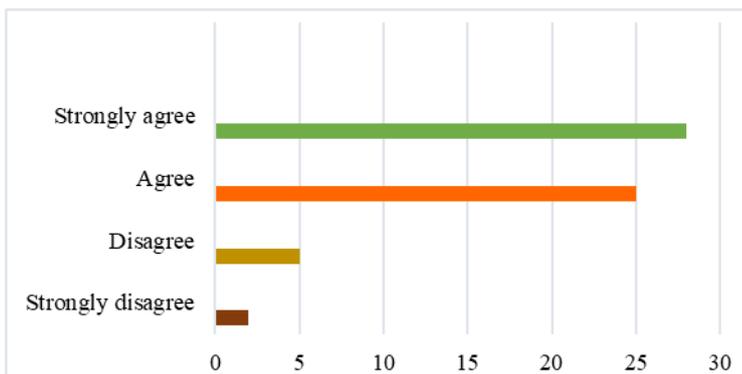
Figure 3.



The figure illustrates that total majority of the respondent students declared that they feel more responsibility of their studies when they are assessed by critical friends.

Q. 4 I discover my own strengths and weaknesses by having feedback from my critical friends.

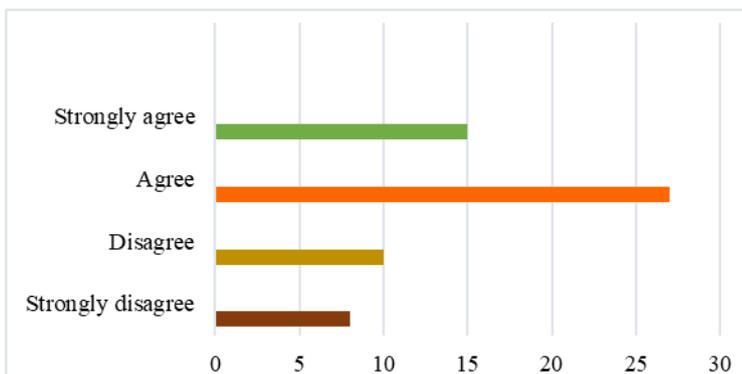
Figure 4.



From the survey it turned out that 53 students perceive feedback from critical friends as helpful in identifying their own strengths and weaknesses.

Q. 5 Feedback of my critical friend is as reliable as that of my teacher.

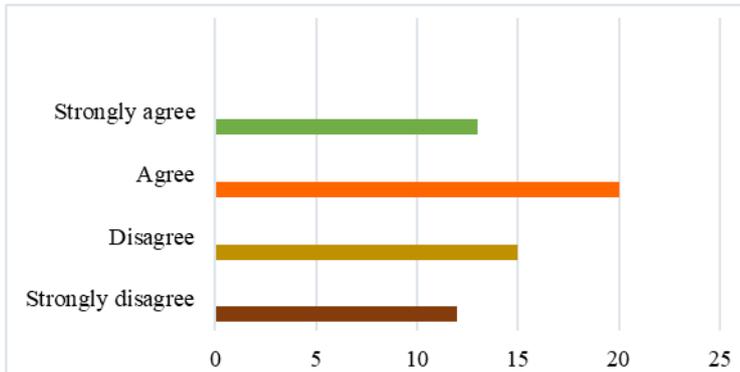
Figure 5.



In terms of comparing feedback of a critical friend to that of a teacher, we got such a picture that 42 respondents perceive feedback of a critical friend as reliable as a teacher’s feedback, whereas 18 students consider a teacher’s feedback superior.

Q. 6 I prefer to give feedback to my peers rather than receive feedback from them.

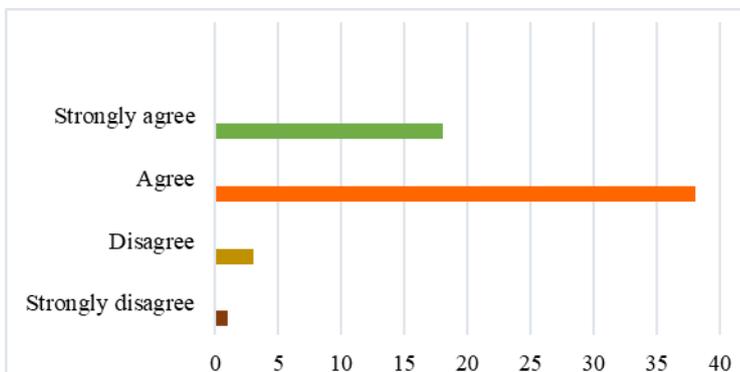
Figure 6.



The results indicated that 33 students out of 60 prefer to give feedback to peers, the rest 27 students seem to prefer receiving of feedback.

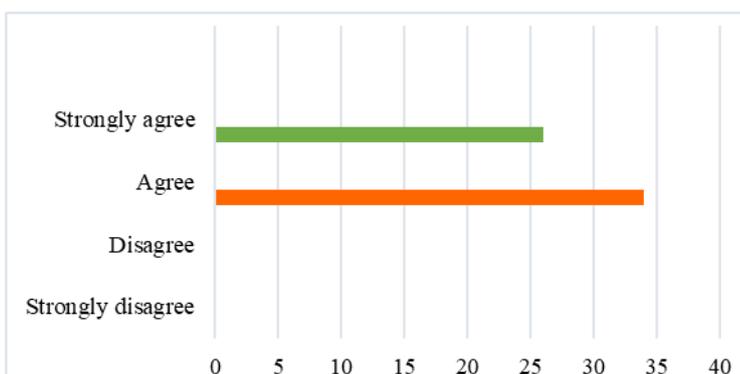
Q. 7. I am nervous when I am assessed by my friends.

Figure 7.



56 students revealed that they are nervous when they are assessed by their friends.

Q. 8. I always receive some useful advice from my critical friends in Group Tuning Protocol process.



The whole majority of the students feel that feedback received from their critical friends in Group Tuning Protocol process are considerable and they find those feedback useful.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of the results show that the majority of students don't object to be assessed by critical friends in class. They believe that their critical friends fairly assess them. All of the 60 respondents take responsibility more when they know that they will be evaluated by critical friends. Feedback from their peers help them see their strengths and weaknesses. 70 percent of the participants consider that the feedback from their friend is as reliable as that of a teacher. It turns out that they have developed serious attitudes towards the feedback of their friends as almost all of them revealed that waiting for friends' feedback make them feel nervous. Students like giving the feedback as well as getting them. Each student expressed that they always receive useful tips from their critical friends in Group Tuning Protocol process.

CONCLUSION

Critical Friend Approach is an effective innovative formative assessment tool that helps students become more involved in the learning process, enhance their teamwork and collaboration skills, develop critical thinking and analytical skills, reasoning and argumentation skills which themselves lead to significant academic improvements of students.

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