

ASSESSING ENGLISH LEARNERS IN VARIOUS WAYS

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Abstract

This study aimed to know the implementation of a new test design given by the lecturer in English for Media class and to find out the perceived impacts by the students related to the tests given. A new way mentioned here is a lecturer gives freedom to the students to choose their own material to be presented or practice in the final test. The writer found that, this new way is success in reducing the students' tensions in facing the final test; it could be seen from the process and the results of the test that are quite good. Moreover, in the process of the test, all students are excited in selecting and preparing materials to be presented in the test. Moreover, based on the results of direct observation and interviews to the students, the writer concluded that the implementation of this test creates a good atmosphere; fun and the tension level of students are also lighter. This brings a positive impact on the students, where the results obtained by the students in this test were also better than the previous test. In other words, by providing many options to the students in the test is better than only giving one choice to do.

Keywords: Assessment, test, students' tension

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui implementasi dari desain tes baru yang diberikan oleh dosen pada kelas *English for media* dan untuk mencari tahu dampak yang dirasakan oleh mahasiswa berkenaan dengan tes yang diberikan. Cara baru yang disebutkan disini adalah dosen memberikan kebebasan kepada mahasiswa untuk memilih materi yang mereka dipersentasikan atau dilatih pada ujian akhir. Penulis menemukan bahwa cara baru ini sukses untuk menurunkan ketegangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa dalam menghadapi ujian akhir. Hal ini dapat terlihat dari proses dan hasil tes yang bagus. Selain itu, pada saat tes, semua mahasiswa tertarik dalam memilih dan mempersiapkan yang akan dipersentasikan. Berdasarkan hasil dari observasi langsung dan interview mahasiswa, penulis menyimpulkan bahwa implementasi dari tes ini menciptakan atmosfir yang bagus. Hal ini membawa dampak yang positif pada mahasiswa, dimana hasil yang diperoleh dari siswa dengan melakukan tes ini lebih baik daripada hasil tes sebelumnya. Dengan kata lain, dengan menyediakan banyak pilihan kepada mahasiswa dalam menghadapi tes lebih baik daripada hanya memberikan hanya satu hal untuk dilakukan.

Kata kunci: penilaian, tes, dan ketegangan mahasiswa.

Introduction

One of the problems in education is how should a lecturer assess student learning outcomes. A lecturer generally gives an assessment of the students based on the tasks given to the student, class attendance, and exams in mid-semester and end of the semester. Questions that arise then are whether assessment in mid-semester and end of this semester has represented the actual ability of the student and whether a lecturer has been fair in assessing the ability of students? The questions are very important to be discussed considering the results of these assessments can give psychological and real impact to the students. According to Linch (1996:2), “teachers or lecturers use test scores to gauge a student's academic strengths and weaknesses”. Assessment methods aid teachers in evaluating student-learning outcomes. Desired student learning outcomes include mastery of content knowledge, performance skills, and product developments.

As a lecturer, the writer often find students who feel depressed in facing the test, the impact of this condition is a low student test results. This kind of thing condition often happens to students in nearly all subjects. The writer themselves while still in college often feel tremendous pressure when the lecturer said that there would be a test. The word test seems something creepy and weight to face the students, especially in Indonesia, where the majority of teachers in both schools and colleges conduct tests to students in the same ways, namely a written test and an oral test, in which the questions and the answer sheet has been prepared by the teacher.

Tests are given to students from time to time and inevitably they must pass as a graduation requirement. Clever students may enjoy this process, because they can show the superiority from another friend. However, for students who are inadequate, they will feel anxious, worried and would not be able to. There is enormous pressure to succeed in the test, because if they fail it will make them labeled stupid for failing in the test. Almost all people do not want to fail in a test, as well as with students, they want to successfully pass the test so that they can feel proud and free from guilt and inadequate. This is what often makes some students force themselves to succeed in a negative way, such as cheating during tests performed.

The writer tried a different way to test the students' understanding related to material that is taught. Then, in English for Media class the writer needs to decrease the pressure level of students in facing the final test. As we know, no students in a classroom with identical abilities, experiences, and needs. Learning style, language proficiency, background knowledge, readiness to learn, and other factors can vary widely within a single class group. Regardless of their individual differences, however, students are expected to master the same concepts, principles, and skills. Helping all students succeed in their learning is an enormous challenge that requires innovative thinking. Therefore, the writer tries to find new and different ways to test the students, so, they could be more relaxed, confident and more creative in facing the test.

Research Questions

The writer formulated the following questions:

1. How is the implementation of giving various ways in testing the students of *English for Media Class*?
2. What are the perceived impacts by the students related to the tests given?

Related Literature

What is Assessment?

Assessment is at the heart of education. When lecturers or teachers carry out assessment, it means that they have to measure the performance of the students and the progress they make. Assessment is one of the most valuable sources of information about what is happening in a learning environment. Assessment is generally seen as something done to students by lecturers or teachers. Gardiner (2002:109) state that "Educational assessment seeks to determine how well students are learning and is an integral part of the quest for improved education. It provides feedback to students, educators, parents, policy makers, and the public about the effectiveness of educational services." Moreover, Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glaser (2001:1) state that "assessment is essential not only to guide the development of individual students but also to monitor and continuously improve the quality of programs, inform prospective students and their parents, and provide evidence of accountability to those who pay our way."

Assessment is needed for learning, assessment and feedbacks are crucial for helping people learn. Assessment should mirror good instruction; happen continuously as part of instruction; and provide information about the levels of understanding that students are reaching. In order for learners to gain insight into their learning and their understanding, frequent feedback is critical: students need to monitor their learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999).

In addition, assessment is also needed for effective teaching. Bain (2004) define two important conclusions about the best college teachers; first, how do they prepare to teach? They begin with questions about student learning objectives rather than about what the teacher will do. The second is how do they check their progress and evaluate their efforts? They have some systematic program to assess their own efforts and to make appropriate changes. They assess their students based on the primary learning objectives rather than on arbitrary standards.

Moreover, Bain (2004) said that people tend to learn most effectively (in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on the way they think, act, or feel) when they are trying to solve problems (intellectual, physical, artistic, practical, abstract, etc.) or create something new that they find intriguing, beautiful, and/or important; they are able to do so in a challenging yet supportive environment in which they can feel a sense of control over their own education; they can work collaboratively with other learners to grapple with the problems; they believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly; and they can try, fail, and receive feedback from expert learners in advance of and separate from any summative judgment of their efforts.

The following are different types of assessments and their attributes and questions (Lepi, 2013), they are:

- 1) There are many types of assessments: diagnostic, formative, summative, norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and interim/benchmarked are the types overviewed here.
- 2) There are five main question types: multiple choices, constructed response, extended constructed response, technology enhanced, and performance task.

- 3) Three main delivery methods of assessment: paper and pencil, online, or computer adaptive testing (which uses an algorithm to adapt to a user's responses).
- 4) Scoring can be done by hand, by computer, or distributed scoring.

Informal Assessments

Informal assessment is a way of collecting information about our students' performance in normal classroom conditions (Harris & McCanne, 1994). Moreover they say that informal assessment is sometimes referred to as continuous assessment as it is done over a period of time like a term or an academic year. Informal assessments are not data driven but rather content and performance driven. Informal assessment techniques can be used at anytime without interfering with instructional time (Navarete, Wilde, Nelson, Martínez & Hargett, 1990). Informal assessment is usually done by observing the performance of students while in the classroom, when they speaking, writing, reading or listening. Through these observations, teachers are able to know which students who have performed well and which are lacking. In addition, the participation of students in the classroom and liveliness they also can be used as a source of valuation. For example, running records are informal assessments because they indicate how well a student is reading a specific book. Scores such as 10 correct out of 15, percent of words read correctly, and most rubric scores; are given from this type of assessment. Informal assessments include observations, interviews, record reviews, and performance reviews that are less structured than formal assessments and may not be validated or tested for reliability. Some are developed by teachers or youth service practitioners, and some are available for free on the Internet. Informal assessments may include portfolios, interest inventories, work samples, and personal preference questionnaires.

However, to carry out effective informal assessment teachers or lecturers need to carry out systematic observation. Firstly teachers or lecturers need to work out what they are going to assess, as it is obviously impossible to assess all students' performance all the time. Then teachers or lecturers must establish clear criteria for assessing students and not only rely on rough impressions. Finally it is important to link the informal assessment with formal assessment (tests) and with self-assessment done by the students themselves. (Harris & McCanne, 1994:5). Informal

assessments sometimes referred to as criterion referenced measures or performance based measures, should be used to inform instruction.

Harris & McCanne (1994) said that the information given to the students should help them identify areas which may cause them difficulties when they do formal tests. Teachers must also give students feedback and help them to think for themselves about the information, as well as heightening their awareness of how they assess themselves. In order to be effective, informal assessment activities must be carefully planned. With appropriate planning, they can be reliable and valid, and they can serve diagnostic purposes as well as formative and summative evaluation purposes within all types of bilingual education programs.

Formal Assessments

Formal assessments are tests that systematically measure how well a student has mastered learning outcomes. Formal assessments are systematic, preplanned methods of testing students that are used to determine how well students have learned the material that is being taught in the classroom. In other words, formal assessments provide a way of answering the question, 'What do the students know?' (Study: 2015). Formal assessments consist primarily of standardized tests or performance reviews that have been validated and tested using samples of the intended test groups. They have specific test administration and scoring procedures, as well as credential or training requirements for test administrators. Test scores may be criterion-based (based on knowledge or ability in a specific academic or vocational area) or norm-referenced (based on a comparison to the sample of the test-taker's peers).

Each formal assessment has the same set of expectations for all of the students who are taking the assessment. Each formal assessment also has specific criteria used for scoring and interpretation. Other uses of formative assessments include; providing a means of comparing a student to other students in the classroom and providing a means of comparing a student to a larger group beyond the classroom. The main purpose of formative assessment is to measure the amount of knowledge that students have retained from what they have been previously taught. Stuar (2015) writes five types of formal assessment in education, namely:

Formal Oral Tests

Oral tests are one of the most common formal assessments, and they are used for everything from grade school to language proficiency evaluations. The exact format of the test will differ according to the purpose of the test, but most will require the person to think on her feet and answer concisely but thoroughly. You can prepare for oral tests by practicing beforehand, and it may help to record your voice or practice in front of a mirror or with a friend. It is important to not only answer or evaluate the question properly, but also to articulate the response clearly.

Long- and Short-Answer Tests

Written exams are often administered in schools and colleges, and they are used to test subjects without conventional "right" and "wrong" answers. In long-answer essays, students will typically be given a subject and are instructed to expand on the topic by creating an argument that builds on and is supported by proof. Because these assessments often rely on critical thinking rather than memorization, you may be allowed aids like dictionaries. In short-answer tests, people succinctly answer a question with a few sentences, rather than a full essay.

Multiple Choice Formats

Multiple choice exams are a simple form of assessment in which the person taking a test is expected to select the correct answer from a list that also includes several wrong choices. These tests are common in almost any discipline. Unlike other forms of assessment, multiple choice tests can be answered correctly even if you are not sure of the answer. You can improve your odds on multiple choice questions by eliminating answers you know to be wrong and selecting from one of the answers that may be correct.

Problem-Solving Test Style

Problem-solving tests can take many forms, from simple math tests where people must solve formulas to more abstract assessments where people are expected to evaluate a situational problem and develop or select an appropriate solution. These tests often also overlap with other test formats, taking the form of an oral, written or multiple choice test. You can develop your problem-solving abilities by taking practice problem-solving tests.

Observational Assessments and Monitoring

Not every test requires the student to be an active participant in the assessment. In some cases, an evaluator will assess the subject's level by monitoring him. This may involve watching the student perform a task or assessing his behavior in the classroom. Ideally, the subject will not change his behavior because of this monitoring, allowing the person watching to gain an accurate impression of the student.

Methodology

This study applied descriptive qualitative design. The study conducted at Cokroaminoto Palopo University. The subject of this study is the students of English Education Study Program at Cokroaminoto Palopo University (UNCP) in the third semester of English for Media Class in which divided in two classes, each class consist of 40 students. The instruments used are observation, interview and document review. Other supporting data instruments used in this study are camera and audio recording. Data analysis conducted by using the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (1994) covered three strategies: (1) data reduction, (2) data display and (3) drawing and verifying the conclusion.

Findings and Discussions

This study aimed to know the implementation of a new test design given by the lecturer in English for Media class and to find out the perceived impacts by the students related to the tests given. There are many ways to test the students, but which ways is more fun and reduce the pressure on students in facing the test. In English for Media class during five months the writer observed and applied a new way to assess the students.

The writer began this study from the beginning of the course until the end of the lecture schedule that is two weeks after the final test. The writer as the lecturer of the course tried different ways of assessing students in the class. A different way mentioned here is a lecturer gives freedom to the students to choose their own material to be performed or practice in the final test. Thus, each student has a different material that will be practiced in the final test. The students chose the test

based on their ability, for instance if they feel confidence with speaking test, so they can perform as a presenter on the test later.

First step, before the lecturer gives the test, students are first provided with each test material in the learning process of each meeting. So it can be concluded that each of the students are familiar and know each activities offered in the final test. In the course English for the Media, the writer as a lecturer gives some topics about English for media, namely; English for newspaper, magazines, radio, television, internet, and advertisement. In particular, the use of English for those media then minimized again on job-related to media, such as TV presenter, newsreader, storytelling about movies, announcer and writing an article about the media. All topics above had practiced in daily teaching and learning activities to all students in English for the media class.

Second step, to determine whether by specify the material or practical tasks in the test better than giving freedom to the students to decide for themselves what to do in the test, the writer as the lecturer in the mid test determined the matter of the test, so that all students tested in the same manner and material that has been determined by the lecturer. Based on the writer's observation, the students seemed under pressured and unexcited when the information about the test is given. Moreover, the process of the test running bored, the students unexcited, under pressured, and the results of the test was low, there were only a few students who can be considered successful in the test.

Third step, at this stage, the writer applied a different way from the previous test. In the final test the students were asked to choose one topic that has been studied to be presented. The students are free to choose the material to be presented in the final test, they can choose a topic based on their interest, talents, ability and of course they feel comfortable with its choice. By this way, the students do not feel overwhelmed in facing the final test that determines their final score in English for Media class. This new method success in reduced the students' tensions in the final test, it could be seen by the observation in the process of the test. Where, all students were excited in selecting and preparing materials to be presented in the test. For the record, this way has been conveyed two weeks before the test scheduled, with the consideration that the students need sufficient time for preparation. On the day of

the test, the lecturer only acts as a jury who assesses and comments on the students' performance.

Then, how the perceive impact of this test to the students? When the lecturer announces the different ways to test the students, the first impression that the lecturer saw is the enthusiasm of the students in facing the test. Lecturer can feel the positive aura and happiness of students, the students have a passion to asked and clarify their understanding about the test. Students' creativity and confidence increased by providing variety options for students for the final test. Students can choose freely all options offered for the test, in this case the lecturer has prepared a variety of options that represent the four skills in the English language that is speaking, reading, listening and writing. Thus, the students are directly invited to show their interest and abilities related to the four skills.

Based on the results of direct observation and interview to the students, the writer concluded that the implementation of this test creates a much more relaxed atmosphere, fun and the tension level of the students in facing the test are also lighter. This brings a positive impact on the students where the results obtained by students in this test were also better than the previous test. In other words, by providing many options to students in the test is better than just giving one choice to do in the test, because every student is a different child and each child have different talents and interests. It would be nice if lecturer provides an assessment to students not on one thing only. If you teach the elephants and birds to climb a tree, it would have overwhelmed and lost from squirrels and monkeys, then why do not teach elephants, birds, monkeys and squirrel to take a green leaf on a tree, so they may have several different ways to get the leaf.

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