



## Formative Assessment Performed by High School Teachers in the Pandemic Era

Hasti Robiasih<sup>1\*</sup>, Titi Lestari<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Education, Graduate School, Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Jl. Batikan UH-III/1043 Yogyakarta 55167

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### \*Corresponding Author:

[hasti@ustjogja.ac.id](mailto:hasti@ustjogja.ac.id)

Assessment is an integral part in learning and teaching process. Effective formative assessment is intended to improve students' achievement and raise teacher's quality. However, qualified formative assessment is rarely performed in real classroom in this pandemic era. This paper describes how senior and vocational high school teachers conduct formative assessment in this pandemic era. It focuses primarily on the type of task and activity offered, language skills and components covered, the fulfillment of good criteria of assessment, the development of students' critical thinking, also strengths and weaknesses of the assessment. The data collected by means of documents assessment created by the teachers. Data analysis was conducted by employing Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's theory. The results indicate the teachers conducted formative assessment mostly via Google Classroom and WhatsApp. In assessing speaking and reading, teachers provide various texts followed dominantly by multiple choices test. On writing, students are assigned to share their feeling and opinion about a movie or current topic, and write texts based on picture series. Teachers also employed form-focused grammar activity. It is evident that some tasks promote students' critical thinking. However, some tasks are not well-constructed in terms of the suitability with the basic competence, time allotment, and the level of difficulties. Therefore, it is questionable whether the purpose to make changes to instruction can be achieved or not.

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## INTRODUCTION

Almost all school levels have been challenged with carrying out distant educational processes, and assessment is definitely one of them. Assessment remains important in this pandemic (or post-pandemic) situation for all the benefits that it offers. A study from Lake & Olson (2020) emphasizes the need of teachers' consideration of not only at what stage the students understand the subject matters but also how take the most appropriate type of assessment design in the pandemic situation. In the absence of

face-to-face offline interactions, appropriate assessment becomes more important than before in offering constructive feedback to students.

Conducting this kind of assessment might not easy for many teachers. Although online assessment is not that new, but in distant learning period, it is necessary that the assessments designed for students require that they apply their knowledge to accommodate the shift. The question of how well teachers can utilize technological teaching devices has become a concerning issue. Many teachers may

possess the basic ability to teach or work remotely. However, they still need effort to put their online teaching into practice. For teachers who are not IT-specialized, this pandemic teaching situation may increase their anxiety and worry. They may feel unsure whether they can survive and cope this challenging situation or not. Agung & Surtikanti (2020) also find out that students may claim difficulties in understanding teachers' instruction in the assignment. Seeking for clarification feels so much harder because of the distance. In such situation, teachers' explanation in offline classroom context seems to be more preferable.

Beside the above evidence, some challenges also deal with the curriculum and subject matter. Teachers may not ignore to recheck the existing language assessment measures to suit the pedagogical shift to content-based instruction (Singh, 2015). Obviously, teachers need relatively longer time to cover the stated objectives of the curriculum. Some of them are difficult to achieve as previously targeted. However, teachers are demanded to be able to modify assessment become engaging, sufficient, and innovative. This effort can lead to a positive atmosphere of teaching and learning process. If the teachers lack knowledge about ideal principles of language assessment, the construction of test items will fail to fulfill validity, reliability as well as authenticity.

Among the possible types of assessment, task is often the best choice for teachers to reveal how far the students understand the subject matters. However, the tasks may feel overwhelming for the students during this time full of uncertainty and anxiety.

At its worst, this can badly affect the students' wellness.

The above concern leads to a further demand to decide appropriate types of the tasks as well as the procedures. Despite the many barriers, teachers should design their

tasks to best suit the students' current condition. Teachers cannot escape the fact that students may have different internet access, learning devices, or family support. Therefore, how the tasks look like and how they are done by the students have been crucial issues since they are essential to help both teachers and students achieve the learning outcomes.

Teachers cannot rely merely on summative assessment practices and strategies during their remote teaching. Reflection on such practices and strategies and approach assessment should be done in different point of view. Some of the practices may shift and there are some points needed to consider such as the language test criteria and students' different situation. Riener and Willingham in Lucas et al. (2012) propose the same idea on this, by stating that learners have different capability to learn various content areas, topic of interest, previous knowledge. These factors, of course, influence the students' learning achievement.

Therefore, formative assessment should be taken as the ideal one as it provides opportunity for students to get more engaged with its implementation, so that the learning process becomes student-centered. Besides, a wide range of activities such as self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, interviews, essays and group projects increase the enhancement of co-operation, enthusiasm and stress-free environment. Davidson & Mandalios (2009) state that teachers can apply formative assessment to monitor the students' progress. Formative assessment supports student-centeredness and authenticity of the tasks although it somehow needs extra time and energy from the teacher to design such assessment.

Due to the condition of pandemic era, teachers commonly performed the formative assessment by providing tasks and test. From the collected evidences and

the interview, it shows that they neglected or paid a little attention on the criteria of good language test. As Brown (2003) proposes that a good test is designed by employing the principles of language assessment namely practicality (deals with appropriateness of time and efficiency), validity (the task measures what is to be measured), reliability, authenticity, and wash-back or feedback which is rarely done in many assessment processes. Teachers tend to ignore those principles in constructing the formative assessment since they have only limited time to execute this due to the mode of teaching and also the limited energy. This last principle is actually what is suggested in this pandemic situation because teachers and students need stronger communication and positive relationship.

The present study tries to describe how senior and vocational high school teachers conduct formative assessment in this pandemic era. It focuses primarily on the strengths and the weaknesses of the assessments in achieving its objectives which can be revealed through the type of task and activity, language skills and components covered, and the development of students' critical thinking. The results will describe whether the tasks are designed by employing criteria of ideal language tasks since the teachers are still adapting to best serve their students. Analysis will be given under the principles of ideal tasks design, followed by further suggestions of how teachers can carry out their assessment online better.

## **METHOD**

This is a case study of formative assessment conducted by high school teachers. Because of the absence of offline teaching and learning environment, we employed online communication through WhatsApp and Google form with ten teachers from different Senior and Vocational schools in Yogyakarta who were willing to be cooperated in this

regard. Those ten teachers were selected under the consideration that the schools they work at conduct online teaching and learning activities. Some of the schools also develop official learning website as the room for their students to access information or announcement, download materials, and submit their works. These two strong reasons support the writers to get the intended data, i.e. samples of varied formative assessment during pandemic. Some students were virtually interviewed to elicit some information regarding how the tasks help them to achieve the learning objectives. The writers carefully observed the collected tasks, classified them according to the skills being assessed (listening, reading, speaking, or writing). Each of the tasks was justified based on Brown (2003) criteria of ideal language assessment. The analysis process was also based on Miles et al. (2014) model of qualitative analysis which include data collection, data display, data condensation, and conclusion drawing.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The assessment documents i.e. tasks were carefully observed. These tasks employ some different skills to be assessed. On the media used, some platforms such as WhatsApp, e-mail, YouTube, and Google Classroom were widely used. The skills assessed are reading, speaking, and writing. There is also a task for assessing grammar competence. The tasks are varied depending on teachers' creativity. Each of the tasks was given different time allotment. While some tasks appeared to be invalid in terms of content but valid in the construct validity, some of them failed to maintain reliability because the teachers may not have certain clue whether the students accomplished the tasks by themselves or not. Further description of those phenomena is presented in discussion section below.

As previously emphasized in the introduction section, conducting assessment during online learning environment takes more aspects to be considered. Before the pandemic spreads, ideal language assessment criteria have been suggested in teachers' designing tasks. Now, consideration on the media and students different condition adds the complexity of assessment design in this post-pandemic era. The discussion section below elaborates each task and reveals in what way the task fulfills the principles of ideal assessment and how it does not.

### **Reading Task Activity**

In assessing reading, teachers provide various texts followed dominantly by multiple choices test. The test may fulfill what is intended in the basic competences. However, when multiple choices are conducted in relatively long-time allotment, essential reading skills such as skimming and scanning are poorly exercised. The following is an example of testing students' reading skill:

notes:

- dikerjakan di buku catatan
- Tulis nama, kelas, nomor di pojok kiri atas (wajib)
- Pilihan jawaban/option ditulis bersama kata-katanya
- Tulis pakta kejujuran do pojok kanan atas (I am honest and I am proud) jika kamu mengerjakannya dengan jujur
- Foto hasilnya dan kirim via email paling lambat jam 23:00 hari ini

*This is text for questions 19 and 20.  
(a text titled Tornadoes)*

19. what makes the storm rotates?
- a. the visible cone which drops
  - b. winds from different directions

- c. the vortex of the wind
- d. a rain, thunder, and lighting
- e. a quick storm

20. from the text, we know that tornadoes ...

- a. are similar around the world
- b. happen in the shape of circle
- c. are not violent storms
- d. may travel dozens of miles
- e. move slowly

The above test item is requiring students' scanning and skimming skills. These two are better trained in a timed practice. As stated in the notes attached in the test above, the students get relatively long time to do the task. Students may score 100% on such items despite lacking the skills needed to find the best answers quickly. Teachers cannot really make sure whether the students really apply their scanning and skimming skills. Yet another example of testing reading skill is found in the following test item:

*Soal diberikan dan dikumpulkan melalui Google Classroom dan waktu pengerjaan 3 jam (07:00-10:00)*

### **PETUNJUK:**

*Pilihlah salah satu jawaban yang paling tepat kemudian tulislah dengan huruf balok di lembar jawab yang disediakan.*

### **KD 3.6 (Phoning)**

1. The following dialog is for no.1  
 Man : Hello, it's Fahri speaking. Who is this?  
 Woman : Hello, this is Rani calling from Mefale Furniture.  
 We would like to offer you a discount of 30 % if you buy one of our furniture.  
 Man : I'm sorry, I'm very busy now.  
 Woman : .....  
 What is the most appropriate response to say next?  
 a. Oh, I am sorry. I'll call back later  
 b. Hold on please!  
 c. Let me see if I am available

- d. *I have to hang up now*
- e. *I'd like to make a reservation*

The test item fulfills content validity as it does test what is intended in the learning objective or basic competence. It is well developed in terms of developing students' critical thinking. The media used is also more preferable in pandemic situation i.e. Google Classroom. However, the teacher might not know who cheat and who do not, due to the large number of reading item tests and the lengthy of its submission time. A study from Niemi & Kousa (2020) strengthens the possibility of teachers' uncertainty towards the students' task completion or submission, since there is a strong and undeniable indication that the students just copy and paste the answers from somewhere else.

### ***Speaking Task Activity***

There was no audio and video conference done by the teachers and students to practice their speaking skill. Mostly, making video and uploading it to certain video sharing website turns out to be the most accessible procedure of speaking activity, as presented in the task sample below.

*It is time to Cover an English Song*  
100 poin

1. *Choose one English song*
2. *Make your own video (you have to sing)*
3. *Minimum duration is 3 minutes*
4. *Use your creativity to create greatest video*
5. *You can watch YouTube video or any other example to get some inspiration*
6. *Upload your cover video to your YouTube channel and send me the link*
7. *I'll automatically check your video*
8. *This assignment due to Sunday 00.00*

As the main focus of speaking is performance, personal differences are to be taken into consideration. Not every student has a talent of singing. The ability to sing is not the main goal of the learning objective. Rather than emphasizing the act of singing, the teacher can assign the students to do monologue about certain

values of the lyrics. In other words, this task does not reflect certain basic competence or intended learning objectives as stated in the curriculum. Recorded activities also open some possibilities that teachers do not give direct feedback.

It is very understandable that adapting speaking activities to the remote teaching setting require much sufficient devices, time, energy, and appropriate activities. Samb (2013) also mentions that class the size of the class or number of the students may give significant impact to the quality of the assessment process. The newly-adapting teachers and learning platform may not be ready to welcome such great numbers of students. However, some efforts may be given through the simplest available media such as WhatsApp. Some features such as group video or audio call may work efficiently.

### ***Writing task activity***

On writing, students are assigned to share their feeling and opinion about a movie or current topic, and write texts based on picture series (semi guided and free writing). Writing competency can be revealed by asking students sharing their thought opinion or ideas. In this context the teacher's assessment leads to right way as long as the objectives are in line with the learning objectives. Below is an evidence of free writing task example.

#### ***Task:***

*How to prevent Covid-19?*

#### ***Explanation:***

*This task is given for class XI. The time allocation to do the task is 1 week (Tuesday to Tuesday) considering that many of the students live in mountain range. Task and material are delivered and submitted through WhatsApp. The teacher had chat (WA) with the students (one by one for tasks) then deleted it after she scored it. The students do the task in their book using English and capture it then send it through WhatsApp.*

The above writing activity may challenge both the teacher and the students. On the teacher's side, it is such a hard work to score the writing products because he did not mention some clear guidelines such as the length of the text and it will be much more complicated if the students send the teacher so many different texts with various length. Copying and pasting sophisticated text from the internet are just two easy acts by the students that can be the next challenge for the teacher during the grading. Thus, giving certain, current topic for writing activity is excellent since it offers the students' opportunity to know what is happening. However, teacher needs to carefully design the clear guidelines and rubric criteria for scoring the students' products.

### **Grammar task activity**

Grammar is the soul of English. Students have to acquire sufficient mastery of grammar to be able to enjoy the process of learning. In this study, the teachers also employed form-focused, discrete-point grammar activity. All of the grammar test items included in the task sample are designed in the form of non-contextual chunk.

To achieve the objective, teachers need to make the students engage with the activities by providing ones which require them to use the language in context. By using form-focused grammar activity what the students get merely the knowledge about the language. The knowledge of grammar as well as its application supports second language learning. However, meaning and function should be associated to best support students' communication language learning. In the following example taken from one of the tests, knowledge about passive sentence is tested.

*Change the sentences below into passive form!*

1. *The fire destroyed many villas in the resort area.*
2. *Farmers plough the soil before they plant rice.*
3. *The truck send the vegetables from Dieng to Semarang.*
4. *Father company me to do the homework.*
5. *My son has brought a wrong size trouser. He didn't try it before.*
6. *The teacher deliver the task and the students do it home.*
7. *The government is renovating the hospital.*
8. *My niece will postpone the wedding party because of the epidemic.*
9. *The government announced the rule of PSBB last month.*
10. *Many people need maskers and hand sanitizers since two months ago to avoid virus.*
11. *Physical and social distancing can eradicate the spread of the virus.*
12. *People wash their hands as often as possible.*
13. *People wear masker whenever they go out.*
14. *Vitamin and good diet build the body's immunity.*

A major limitation of grammar task identified in above deals with the discrete-point characteristics. It does not reflect communicative tests. This is often because communicative language tests need more efforts on the part of the test-maker. A separate grammar component such as passive voice actually can be integrated in an essay or paragraph writing, since grammar components cannot be eliminated in writing (Khan & Ali, 2018).

However, there is another example of grammar task which exposes the students to a video. Other skills such as listening and reading can be promoted here.

*Here is the task,*

*I will send you a short video of a little girl interviewed by a woman talking about corona virus. Please note all the verbs that you can read on the subtitle, write down in a piece of paper, take a photo of it, then send it to my number, privately. Do not send this to group. Write down your name and your class.*

*Deadline: one week*

The above cited test item has the main goal of listing all the verbs uttered by the speaker. With the aim to explore alternative methods of assessing grammar, Neuman (2010) conducted a mixed methods study to assess grammatical ability of English language learners through their academic writing. Taking into consideration the possibility of assessing grammatical knowledge through writing tests, Chung (2014) also aimed at developing a test of productive grammatical writing. Giving a video in grammar activity is a good idea. However, the teachers need to expand the activity to wider range of writing, not just listing words. It would be more appropriate if the teacher asked the students to identify the significant lexico-grammatical features of the text exposed in the video rather than listing only the verbs. In the same tone, Stevenson in Moodie (2002) contends that secondary level of education tends to employ repetitive tasks in contrast with higher level education, which is indicated to be adaptive, generative and innovative. Thus, the high school teachers' awareness of their innovation in designing assessment definitely needs to be strengthened.

## CONCLUSION

It is, in fact, impossible to move to distance learning quickly without lots of trial and error. Traditional assessment types like multiple choice tests have been frequently given to assess students' performance in English language teaching (ELT) at schools, but in this pandemic (or post-pandemic era), these assessment methods may need to shift, because they are not sufficiently relevant to the students' real performance (Thiam, 2011). After identifying the gaps in the test items designed by the teachers as formative assessment, we cannot deny that teachers, to a certain extent, are responsible to draw their attention towards construction of test

items. It is evident that some tasks promote students' critical thinking. However, some of them are not well-constructed by considering the suitability with the basic competence, time allotment, and type of tasks. Teachers need to create tasks that enable students to do language processing and use the language to promote language acquisition. Otherwise, the purpose to evaluate students' language development cannot be achieved. The worst thing of ineffective formative assessment is teachers will not be able to make any changes to their instruction. Besides, learner-centeredness is the main focus of many teaching and learning methods and techniques used in ELT. Performance-based assessment may become a promising type of assessment as it offers adjustment for both the teacher and the students' situation for a better learning measurement, as Reeves, in Martin & Ndoye (2016) proposes. Of course, in the decision of the assessment design, teachers should consider the integration of the four skills and implement them through language, applying the concepts of reliability, validity, washback, practicality and authenticity. We all agree that online learning is becoming more common these days. Thus, teachers may communicate their teaching practices with the whole institution to get much support because both parties share responsibility on the students learning success.

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