SHOULD TEACHERS BE CREATIVE IN ASSESSING THE STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENT?

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The need of a good English teaching and learning process has been the top priority of English teaching in Indonesia. A good teaching and learning process which focuses on the activities in using the language inside and outside the classroom to facilitate learners in using the language is believed to be the core of successful language learning. However, once the teachers come to the end of the semester, they find it difficult to avoid using multiple choice questions in assessing their students’ achievement. The question is “Should we always use multiple choice questions to assess or check the students’ progress? Is there any other format or technique to assess our students? Do we use those different formats or techniques in our class? Are we creative enough in using the various assessment formats and techniques?” Those questions need honest answers from every teacher in order to support a successful English language teaching and learning process.

A. Introduction: English Teachers’ Perception on Language Assessment

The need for qualified English teachers has been a current issue for many decades. The word qualified requires the teachers to have both academic and interpersonal qualities. Good command of English, good ability to plan, teach, assess and report their students’ progress are some of the basic requirements for good English teachers. Instead of those competencies, good English teachers also possess the interpersonal qualities such as the ability to work in a team, responsible to their jobs and the ability to demonstrate high levels of competence and responsibility. This paper is trying to reveal the current phenomenon related to English teachers’ eagerness in assessing their students’ achievement (that the writer found) as well as some alternatives in assessing the students.

For many years, English teachers competencies in planning and teaching the students have been a hot issue. The government of Indonesia has launched and conducted so many programs to promote and improve English teachers competencies such as curriculum designing workshop, lesson planning training, as well as the teacher certification program. The latest one seems to be “effective” in promoting the teachers to improve their competencies since the program requires them to be well equipped with many certificates of training or workshops, many scientific papers etc for the portfolio. The portfolio is regarded as a representation of their being active in working as well as improving their teaching abilities. And if they cannot meet those requirements, they will
have to join another teacher training program known as PLPG to improve their teaching abilities.

Unfortunately, from some observations, the writer found that most of the trainings and workshops focused more on teachers’ competencies in planning and delivering the materials to the students (teaching process). There were only very few of them that help teachers improve their ability in assessing the students progress or achievement. The worse fact is that some of them even did not know any other forms of assessment instead of tests. As a result, they only used this technique of assessing to check the students achievement or progress. The more surprising facts are that some of those English teachers “only” used the test items from LKS or even from the handbook and they even only used the multiple choice and short answer tests to assess the students. They did not develop the tests by themselves and they did not use the more interactive techniques of assessing the students’ achievement. Those facts of course are really ironic since they are trying to improve their ability of planning and delivering the materials, but they do not know how to measure their students’ “real” achievement.

Those facts also reveal that some English teachers tend to consider assessing the same with testing. In fact, Brown (2004:5) clearly states that assessing is not the same as testing. Furthermore, he illustrates assessing as a process in English teaching in the following stacked Venn.

From the Venn above, it can be seen that in the teaching and learning process of English, assessment is part of it. Then, testing is one technique used to assess the students. In other words, there are some other techniques than can be used to monitor students’ progress or achievement. The alternative techniques are commonly known as the non test-techniques. Some of them are journals, portfolios, observations, peer-assessments and performance-based assessments.

However, some English teachers rely on tests- especially multiple choices and matching- as a method of assessing their students. They may know that those techniques have high practicality and reliability as they can easily be administered and have been used for many times with an accurate result, but they may not realize that those types of assessments are lack of authenticity. On the other words, the non-test techniques require more efforts to administer than the tests techniques but they might reveal the real students competencies in using the language in the authentic situation.

The practicality and reliability reasons seem to be a good and strong motivation for some English teachers to use the tests. Some English teachers still rely on the test techniques, even though they actually have performed the non-test techniques. The good
thing is that most English teachers (seems to) have combined the test and non-test techniques to get the information about their students’ progress and achievement. They realize that tests sometimes do not show their students’ real ability, so they prefer to combine the tests with some other techniques of assessing, e.g. portfolio and performance assessment.

B. What are the principles of a good language assessment?

When the writer had a short interview with some English teachers in a conference, he found that most of them know about ‘terms’ related to good assessment e.g. valid and reliable. But when they were asked about what the terms mean, they did not give clear answers. This shows that some of English teachers do not actually understand the principles of a good language assessment. Brown (2004:19) states that good language assessment should meet at least the following requirements:

a. Practicality,
   The term practical is closely related to how easy the assessment is administered as well as how easy the result is analyzed and reported. An assessment should be feasible to administer. A complicated, high-cost, and time consuming assessment is not suggested, even though it might have high authenticity. A computer adapted testing (CAT) might be a good choice for English teachers, but unfortunately, many schools are not yet ready for such model of assessment. Chapelle (2006: 4) suggests that CAT promises systematic assessment for students’ learning, as well as practicality in checking and reporting but not in administering.

b. Reliability
   The term reliability is sometimes related to how consistent and dependable the assessment is. A reliable test, for example, should give consistent result when used to measure students’ progress or achievement. This term is also related to the assessment administration, as the condition when the assessment is conducted also determines the result of an assessment.

c. Validity
   “A good test is a valid one”. That statement seems to be the very common answer given by the writer’s students when he asked them what a good test is. “But what is validity?” Their next answer is silence. Validity refers to how good the assessment process is able to show the real purpose of the assessment. Brown (2004: 22) divides validity into content validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, construct validity, consequential validity, and face validity.

d. Authenticity
   Authenticity is sometimes considered as the degree to which an assessment is able to simulate real world situations so that the assessment process can really measure students’ ability in the real world.

e. Washback
   This term is closely related to how well an assessment process can motivate the students to prepare themselves for the assessment process, to have more efforts to improve their skills for the future and to get involved more in the teaching and learning process.
C. How Do We Design a Good Language Assessment?

Since many teachers still rely on tests as the main technique of assessing the students, the knowledge and skills of designing a good language assessment (instead of the tests) is an urgent thing for the teachers if they want to creatively conduct an assessment. Louma (2004: 2) states that in designing a good language assessment, teachers should define the purpose of the assessment itself first. This means what the developers want to assess. Furthermore, Brown (2004:42) suggests that before designing a good language assessment, teachers need to consider the following things:

a. The purpose of the assessment
   In designing an assessment, teachers should set the purpose of the assessment itself. Is it for testing students proficiency, placing the students level, predict the students achievement or even finding or monitoring students progress and achievement.

b. The objective of the assessment
   The word objective is sometimes confused with purpose. Objective here means that teachers should know what language skills are about to assess. Different language skills might require different technique to assess. To be able to decide the objective of the assessment, teachers need to know the micro-skills of each skill to assess.

c. How to make sure that the assessment specification reflect the purpose and objective
   Teachers need to assure that the objective comprises the competencies to assess. In other words, the objective of the assessment needs to go along with the purpose of the assessment, by considering the competencies that have been mastered (or assumed to be mastered) and are going to be measured.

d. The selection of the tasks and items to use in the assessment
   There are so many tasks that can be utilized to assess students’ progress and achievement. Teachers need to select what tasks that can be used to assess the students by considering the objective and purpose of the assessment. There are also some types of activities that can be used for multipurpose and objectives, e.g. interview. An interview can be both used to place students at a certain level and to measure their progress. Related to the objectives, this task can be used to assess students’ pronunciation ability, e.g. stress, intonation, fluency and accuracy, as well as to measure their reading skills, e.g. by giving them a short article before interviewing them.

e. The scoring, grading and feedback for the students
   Before conducting the assessment, teachers need to consider what kind of feedback to give to the students after the assessment process. Is it a number, letter, or even notes? A combination of letter or number with some notes might be a good idea for teachers to use.

D. What tasks can be used to assess our students?

As mentioned before, the very common type of assessment for teachers of English is tests, and the very common types of tests are multiple choice and short answer tasks. Theoretically, the writer is sure that all English teachers have already
known about some other techniques of assessing the students’ achievement. However, the writer is really sure that looking back at some other techniques, as well as tests, will be a good idea too. What activities, including tests, are appropriate to assess the students creatively? Brown (2004: 116-248) suggests many alternatives for us.

a. For assessing students’ skills with tests, English teachers can use variety of tests (instead of multiple choice and short answer essay). However, they need to pay more attention to the types of activities, since different activities require different types of tests.

i. In intensive listening, they can use recognizing phonological and morphological elements such as using minimal-pair questions and paraphrase recognition. In responsive listening, they can use appropriate response to a question and open-ended response to a question. In selective listening, they can use listening cloze, information transfer with pictures or chart filling, as well as sentence repetition. And in extensive listening, teachers can use dictation, communicative stimulus-response tasks, or even note taking.

ii. In imitative speaking, teachers can use word repetition tasks, or PhonePass® test. In intensive listening, teachers can use directed response tasks, reading aloud tasks, sentence/dialogue completion tasks and oral questionnaires, as well as picture-cued tasks. In responsive speaking, teachers can use question and answer technique, giving instructions and directions, and paraphrasing. In interactive speaking, teachers can use interview, role play, games such as Tinkertoy and crossword puzzles, and picture-cued story. And in extensive listening, teachers can use oral presentation, retelling a story, and news event.

iii. In perceptive reading, teachers can use reading aloud, written response, and picture-cued items. In selective reading, teachers can use multiple choice with form focused criteria, matching tasks, editing tasks, pictured-cued tasks, and gap filling tasks. In interactive reading, cloze tasks, impromptu reading plus comprehension questions, short answer tasks, editing long texts, scanning, ordering tasks, and information transfer are really applicable. In extensive reading, teachers might assign the students with summarizing and responding, and note-taking and outlining.

iv. In imitative writing, teachers of English can use tasks in (hand) writing letters, words and punctuation, spelling tasks and detecting phoneme-grapheme correspondences. In intensive or controlled writing, dictation, grammatical transformation tasks, picture-cued tasks, vocabulary assessment tasks, ordering tasks, short answer and sentence completion tasks might be challenging for the students. In responsive and extensive writing, teachers can use guided question and answer, paragraph construction tasks, and paraphrasing.

b. Instead of using tests, teachers of English can use performance based techniques (Shohamy: 1995). This is actually not too different from the activities mentioned above. In this type of technique, teachers need to assign students with productive, observable skills of content tasks.

c. The third alternative in assessing the students is alternative in assessment. Some of the alternative assessment are:
i. **Portfolios.** This is an assessment technique which requires students to keep a collection of their works to keep a track of their progress, and achievement. Gottlieb (1995) in Brown (2004: 256) suggests that portfolios include collecting, reflecting, assessing, documenting, linking and evaluating.

ii. **Journals.** This term is related to students’ free reflection, assessment, and thoughts that are usually written without an expectation to be judged by the teachers. It can be in the form of language–learning logs, grammar journals, etc (Brown (2004:260).

iii. **Observations.** This is an activity which teachers mostly do in the classroom since they face their students when they teach them. It refers to an activity in which teachers observe students progress continuously to monitor their learning.

iv. **Self and Peer-assessment.** This activity seems to be the rarest one to do. Actually, teachers can use this activity to let the students assess themselves or their peer. It helps them express their own assessment on their own progress since some students are afraid of being assessed by the teachers.

**E. Conclusion**

Assessing the students’ progress and achievement is a part of the teaching and learning process which is sometimes taken for granted by some English teachers. They consider assessing the same with testing. This thinking needs to be changed since testing is only a part of assessing. To assess the students’ progress, English teachers can use many other types of activities which involve students more and possess higher authenticity.

**REFERENCE**


