

## **THE IMPLICATION OF ADDITIONAL PRACTICE FOR EFL LEARNERS IN WRITING SKILL ASSESSMENT**

**Harnani**

Informatics Management, Politeknik Komputer Niaga LPKIA Bandung

Corresponding author: Harnani, Informatics Management, Politeknik Komputer Niaga LPKIA Bandung

E-mail: [harnani@lpkia.ac.id](mailto:harnani@lpkia.ac.id)

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### **Abstract:**

Additional material or practice is highly needed in language learning and teaching in order to progress as expected. However, its usage and delivery frequency may differ and to a certain extent may affect the language assessment for EFL students. This study outlines the effect of providing various and frequent additional writing practice to language assessment. The aim of the study is twofold, firstly, it is to identify the implication of adding more practice, aside from the provided materials, to writing skill assessment, and secondly, to examine whether uniformity exists among the teachers in choosing the added practice and the frequency in providing it and how this uniformity influences the expected assessment. This study applied a qualitative method and used questionnaire, interview and lesson observation as the instruments. The result of the analyzed data showed that the various additional writing practice could well be one of contributing factors to the inconsistency in writing skill assessment for intermediate level EFL students. The data also showed that there was no uniformity among the teachers in choosing the additional writing practice and the frequency in providing it, which may also have resulted an implication in writing assessment. Agreement among teachers in creating and selecting a number of identical practice and sustaining the frequency in delivering it may propose a consistency in writing skill assessment.

### **Keyword:**

language assessment; writing skill; writing practice



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The rising demand and immediate need in learning English has triggered a flourishing number of English courses in Indonesia. It shows how English at secondary institution becomes one of the primary needs for students. This phenomenon is “supported” by the incomplete knowledge that the students receive from their school. English courses try to complete the knowledge by providing more comprehensive lessons covering the major skills; reading, listening, writing, and speaking.

Unlike schools, English courses provide more various materials. At times, the teachers at English courses have to own more creativity in using the materials and present it in the classrooms. One of the English courses in Bandung aims its programs to make students better speakers of English, therefore, the lessons are more focused to speaking/conversations. Nevertheless, as an English course, it provides comprehensive assessment and testing for all skills. However, as the situations observed, there are some implications often occur in the higher levels, particularly intermediate levels concerning the writing assessment.

Theories on assessment are, up to this moment, abundant, however they try to underline and imply the same definition. According to Brown (2004), assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. Whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment,

or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the students' performance. Assessment is oftentimes mistaken with tests. Tests only occur at the identifiable times and they are conducted in order to measure and evaluate the student's achievement. Brown further distinguishes the assessment into two kinds; informal and formal assessment. Informal assessment is more unplanned than formal assessment. Informal assessment can take a number of forms, starting with incidental, unplanned comments and responses, along with coaching and other impromptu feedback to the student. Informal assessment also involves classroom tasks designed to elicit the students' performance. On the other hand, formal assessments are exercises or procedures specifically designed to tap into a storehouse of skills and knowledge. They are systematic, planned sampling techniques constructed to give teacher and student an appraisal of student achievement.

Writing skill needs to be assessed from different categories. Brown (2004) points out that there are four categories of written performance that capture the range of written production. They are as follows:

1. Imitative. This category includes the ability to spell correctly and to perceive phoneme-grapheme correspondences in the English spelling system. It is a level at which learners are trying to master mechanics of writing.
2. Intensive (controlled). This category includes meaning and context which are of some importance in determining correctness and appropriateness. It is a follow-up from the imitative, but rather strictly controlled by the test design.
3. Responsive. Here, assessment tasks require learners to perform at a limited discourse level. It goes beyond grammar. In fact the writer is considered to have had mastered the fundamentals of sentence-level grammar. Tasks responds to the genre, of writing, expression of ideas, etc.
4. Extensive. It implies successful management of all the process and strategies of writing for all purposes, up to the length of an essay, a major research project report, or even a thesis.

Writing practice can be conducted in various forms, some of which are dictation, grammatical transformation tasks, paraphrasing, etc. These forms of written practice are depend on the categories of written performance which will be assessed. On the process of getting the expected assessment, there are materials and practice/tasks to bridge the tests.

For teachers at the English course, they may face some implications in intermediate levels involving the assessment that influences the next assessment on the next level. Since the course is more focusing its programs on the speaking, then the syllabus provide more materials aiming for this skill. However, they have tests that require their writing skill, therefore, the students of intermediate level often have low scores for writing, particularly story writing on the final test. Some teachers offer different practices or tasks in order to improve the students' writing skill, but little is known about what forms of writing practices and the numbers they are given in each term. Normally, more practice leads to better results.

These wide-ranging and different types of written practices become essential factors that may cause an implication in assessment; every teacher has his own choice in determining and using the materials to improve the students' writing skill. This study is conducted to identify whether different additional writing practice provided by different intermediate teachers may impose an implication on the expected assessment. In additional, the study is also aimed to find out whether the teachers provide different frequency in distributing the additional writing practice and how it may influence the expected assessment for the students. This study is expected to provide some answers on how the variety and the frequency in distributing writing practice may influence the assessment.

There are many factors that may cause implications on writing assessment, however, this study is more concentrated on identifying the impact of variety and/or uniformity of additional written practice on the expected assessment and whether different frequency of distributing the additional practice among the teachers may result in the implication. The study is expected to shed some light regarding language assessment. By identifying any possible factors which influence the writing assessment may minimize the implications.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

This research was a descriptive study and used a qualitative method. The qualitative research involves fieldwork and it is also descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through the words or pictures. (Merriam, 1988, cited by Creswell, 1994). This study applied questionnaire, interview and lesson observation as the instruments.

The subjects of this study were teachers of intermediate levels in an English course in Bandung, and the number for high level teachers in the course was only four. The technique of choosing participants is based on the theory proposed by Babbie (1990) cited by Creswell (1994) who says that potential respondents are chosen on the basis of their convenience and availability.

There are four levels of Intermediates in the course. The data of this study was analysed to gain comprehensive information. Then, the collected data was compared to one another level of Intermediates. Subsequently, the analysed data was identified thoroughly in relation with the existed implications on the writing assessment. This identification would further help in finding the causes of the implications.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **A. FINDINGS**

The collected data is interpreted for each level in the English course in order to get a crystal picture of how the written practice is conducted to acquire the expected assessment.

#### **Intermediate 1**

For this level, two teachers give additional written practice, however the forms are varied. One of the teachers gives cloze practice, word formation, and writing. Meanwhile, the other teacher gives the written practice in a form of paraphrase, writing, and sentence auction (a game in choosing correct sentences). The range of frequency in giving the practice is also varied between the two teachers; one of them gives between 1-2 practice, while another one gives between 1-3 practice for each term. They always give additional written practice, either created it by themselves or taken it from other sources, because they reckon that the handouts (materials) are not sufficient and lack of variations.

#### **Intermediate 2**

For Intermediate 2, two teachers respond that they need additional written practice because there is not enough supporting materials and the provided materials/handouts are still lack of written practice. They supply the written practice in various forms, from cloze practice, paraphrase, until writing. As for writing, one teacher responds that the writing material is created by herself. The frequency in giving the students with the written practice is also varied. One of them gives the practice once or twice, while the other teacher gives 1-3 times per each term.

#### **Intermediate 3**

In order to fulfill the students' needs, two teachers still reckon that they need to supply the students with additional written practice. The frequency is varied, range from once to three times. The forms of written practice are similar to the ones given in Intermediate 2; cloze practice, paraphrase, and writing. They respond that some lessons for this level do not have enough exercises, hence the additional materials to add the practice.

#### **Intermediate 4**

All of the three teachers agree that additional materials are highly needed for this level. They give the written practice in forms of cloze practice, word formation, paraphrase, and writing. They agree that the available materials do not provide sufficient practice for the students. Based on the finding, one of the teachers reckons that some lessons are not suitable for certain class (with students coming from different background, mixed abilities, mixed school background). The frequency in giving the additional practice is the most frequent than other intermediate levels.

### **B. DISCUSSIONS**

Based on the findings, it is clear that teachers of intermediate levels have certain difficulties in using the available materials. Most of the time they use additional practice to support and assist the students in improving their writing skill. Rendering to the teachers' reasons, some lessons do not provide sufficient materials and practice. These additional practices are different from one another, because they create the practices and/or withdraw them from other sources. This has become one of the causes of why the assessment for intermediate students, particularly on writing skill, often results on some implications. The frequency of giving the additional written practice is also varied. Certainly, these factors play a role in influencing the students' assessment in intermediate levels. There is no uniformity in giving the written practice and the frequency in giving it.

In general, for intermediate levels, the teachers in this English course still think that the available materials are not ample to support and assist the students in improving the students' writing skill, hence the teachers supply more practice by adding some materials for each term whenever they are needed. These "varieties" influence the students' writing skill as there is no uniformity among the teachers in providing the additional written practice and the frequency in distributing it, particularly when the teachers handle the same level but different classes. Certainly, it imposes the writing assessment as the procedures and practices for writing skill have too many differences, some of which are the kinds of the practice, and the frequency in distributing it. In short, the implication is particularly portrayed when the students level up and different teacher would have to rearrange the previous assessment.

The findings also show that the teachers reckon, particularly for Intermediate 4, the available materials are still in need of improvements, such as the content, the number of practices, etc. This explains the varieties of additional written practice given by the teachers.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The writing assessment in the English course has often resulted on some implications. This study reveals two causes that may strongly result in the implications. The teachers of Intermediate levels use different additional writing practice with different frequency. This leads to an implication on the writing assessment as the teachers use different policies for each level. Furthermore, each level of Intermediate (starting from Intermediate 2) has essay writing on the final test that holds more points. The available materials are also viewed as inadequate and do not fully support the expected writing skill considering the students' level. Therefore, various writing practice are added by different teachers. Considering the non-uniformity on the additional practice and the frequency in distributing it, the students' writing skill comes in too many differences and shows too much inequality, particularly if there are two same levels taught by different teachers.

This study proposes some suggestions for syllabus designers. The inadequate and/or inapt materials for Intermediate levels should be added or deconstructed so that the available materials will be in line with the test and the expected results. In addition, this study also suggests that there should be standardization for the teachers in giving the students with additional materials, particularly regarding the content and the frequency. Generally, the more frequent the practice is given, the better results that the students will show. This study offers further and future investigations and studies, especially, regarding the tests.

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