ASSESSMENT LITERACY OF TEYL TEACHERS AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Amalul Umam

Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor
amalul.umam@uika-bogor.ac.id

Yani Awalia Indah

Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor
yaniawalia.indah@uika-bogor.a.id

ABSTRACT

Assessment is the key of learning process from which the result of an education system is derived. It means that the ability of English teachers in assessing their students is very important. This study discusses the assessment literacy of TEYL teachers and how it is related to classroom practices. Analysis is employed in the study to the existing literature of assessment literacy. The result reveals that assessment literacy of teachers determines the success of the learning process. Some suggestions and recommendations for classroom practices are discussed.

Keywords: *assessment, assessment literacy, ESL classroom, TEYL teachers*

INTRODUCTION

The term 'assessment literacy' is an important theme in the assessment literature since it was brought up by Stiggins (1991) for use in general education. In general, it refers to the ability to read and write but it is also used to indicate an individual's knowledge or competency in a specified subject area. For the last two decades, assessment literacy, assessment knowledge, or assessment competence have been used interchangeably in general education to describe 'teachers' understanding of assessment processes as well as their capacity to design assessment tasks, develop adequate criteria for making valid judgments on the quality of students' performances, and understand and act upon the information that is collected through assessment' (Hay & Penney, 2013, pp. 69–70).

Assessing student performance is one of the most critical aspects of the job of a classroom teacher. It impacts nearly everything that teachers do. Research on mainstream classroom teaching has revealed that dayto-day assessment of student learning is unquestionably one of teachers' most demanding, complex and important tasks (Shulman, 1986). According to Stiggins (1999), "The quality of instruction in any classroom turns on the quality of the assessments used there" (p.20). Teachers' inadequate knowledge and capacity in assessment can disable the quality of education (Popham, 2004). Cui (2008) argues that teachers should obtain their assessment knowledge and skills before they begin teaching. Coombe, Al-Hamly and Troudi (2009) emphasizes that without a higher level of assessment literacy, teachers will be unable to help students attain a higher level of academic achievement. Popham (2004) even advocates that teachers' assessment illiteracy is professional suicide.

In Indonesian context, government applies the 2013 curriculum in which teachers are challenged to use authentic assessment. It is said that the objective of the new curriculum will be attained by paying attention to the educational content, switching the learning paradigm from the teacher centered approach into student-centered approach and using competency-based assessment, replacing the test-based assessment by authentic-based assessment that measures attitude, knowledge, and skills based on the learning process and learning results (Retnawati, Hadi, & CHandra, 2016).

However, there are some problems that teachers face during the implementation of the 2013 curriculum. Teachers stated that the difficulty in applying the 2013 curriculum is at the time of assessment implementation (Maba, 2017). The teachers do not understand about the assessment and they believe that it is too complicated to implement. Therefore, a study of assessment literacy would shed light on the problems faced by the teachers.

This study will focus on the assessment literacy of TEYL teachers and its importance for classroom practices. Ellis (2014) notes that the term 'young learner' is vague and can lead to confusion. Legally, a 'young learner' may be anyone under the age of 18; in reality, however, using one term to cover such a diverse age range is unhelpful. Instead, Ellis proposes that at the very least, a distinction between pre- and post-11 or 12 year olds should be made. This is because of the huge differences in 'physical, psychological, social, emotional, conceptual and cognitive development' among children in these age groups, leading to very different approaches to teaching. The pre- and post-11 or 12 label is also useful as the 'the younger the better' controversy concerns this younger age group.

Ellis points out that most research to date has focused on the older age group of secondary-school learners. Moreover, the rapid and comprehensive lowering of the age at

which English is introduced to children in many countries, together with the spread of preschool English, means it is timely to focus on these younger age groups. Finally, given the differences in approach needed to teach pre-/primary- and secondary-school learners, focusing on one of these groups allows for a more in-depth look at a number of issues, such as appropriate pedagogies and contexts of learning. Therefore, young learners are those at pre-primary and primary level, roughly from the age of 3 up to 11 or 12 years old. In Indonesian context, they are in the level of primary and junior high school.

"Young learners are notoriously poor test takers…. [T]he younger the child being evaluated, assessed, or tested, the more errors are made…[and] the greater the risk of assigning false labels to them" (Katz 1997:1). Traditional classroom testing procedures can cause children a great deal of anxiety that affects their language learning as well as their self-image (Smith, 1996). Therefore, children need to learn and be evaluated in an anxiety-reduced, if not anxiety-free, environment. This can be achieved if children perceive assessment as an integral component of the learning/teaching process rather than an independent process whose purpose is to pass judgment on their abilities in relation to their classmates. In other words, teachers must have assessment literacy, especially teachers of English for young learners.

Assessment literacy has been employed by several writers in recent years to describe what the constituency of language teachers and instructors needs to know about assessment matters (Inbar-Lourie, 2008), but the concept of assessment literacy could also be expanded to describe the level of knowledge, skills, and understanding of assessment principles and practice that is increasingly required by other test stakeholder groups, depending on their needs and context (e.g., among educational advisors or government officials, policy planners and decision makers, the media, and the general public).

Teachers who are assessment literate understand what assessment methods to use in order to gather dependable information about student achievement, communicate assessment results effectively, and understand how to use assessment to maximize student motivation and learning. There are five essential competencies of sound classroom assessment practice are described as follows by Stiggins (2004) :

a) Why assess? Assessment procedures and results serve clear and appropriate purposes.

b) Assess what? Assessments reflect clear and valued learning targets.

c) Assess how? Learning targets are translated into assessments that yield accurate results.

d) Communicate how? Assessment results are managed well and communicated effectively.

e) Involve students how? Students are involved in their own assessment.

In the curriculum 2013, there is one of the significant changes, which is the use of a new method of assessment. Based on the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 81a, year 2013 about the implementation of 2013 Curriculum, teachers are required to implement authentic assessments as a method of assessing the students' competence. Moreover, according to the regulation of the National Minister of Education and Culture number 104 year 2014 on assessment system, teachers are expected to assess students' skills using performance, project, and portfolio assessments.

The implementation of those types of authentic assessments are quite challenging for English teachers. Based on the preliminary research, time limitation and scoring complexity are the assessments' main obstacles. Another difficulty is related to the management of classroom assessment activities due to the huge student population. In addition, teachers also must assess students' attitude, knowledge and social.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The following assessment techniques can be used for effective and practical measurements of students' abilities, progress, and achievement in a variety of educational settings.

Nonverbal Responses: At the early stages of learning, before the emergence of speech, children should be instructed and assessed largely through the use of physical performance responses and pictorial products (Tannenbaum 1996). These tasks require simple directions to carry out. As an assessment technique, this type of response may help lower the level of anxiety normally associated with evaluation, as students see it as a natural extension of learning activities. At a later stage, students may perform hands-on tasks. For example, they may be asked to "produce and manipulate drawings, dioramas, models, graphs, and charts" (Tannenbaum 1996:1). This technique fits very well within the Total Physical Response methodology for early language development (Asher, 1988).

Oral Interview: Pierce and O'Malley (1992) suggest using visual cues in oral interviews at the early stages of acquisition. Thus a student may be asked to choose pictures to talk about, and the teacher's role is to guide the student by asking questions that require the use of related vocabulary. This technique works well during the early speech and speech emergence stages.

Role-play: This informal assessment technique combines oral performance and physical activity. Children of all ages, when assessed through this technique, feel comfortable and motivated, especially when the activity lends itself to cooperative learning and is seen as a fun way of learning. Kelner (1993) believes that role-play. can be an enjoyable way of

informal assessment that could be used effectively within a content-based curriculum.

Written Narratives: Assessment of the written communicative abilities of children could be achieved through purposeful, authentic tasks, such as writing letters to friends, writing letters to favorite television program characters, and writing and responding to invitations. Young learners enjoy storytelling and are usually motivated to listen to stories as well as to tell them. Teachers can take advantage of this interest in stories and have their students write narratives that relate to personal experiences, retell or modify nursery stories and fairy tales, or retell historical events from different perspectives. Oller (1987) suggests the use of a narrative development technique in an integrated process of teaching and assessment. The first step in the process is to check on how well learners are following the story line. To establish the basic facts, the teacher asks yes-no questions, then the teacher moves on to information questions.

Presentations: Presentations are important for assessment because they can provide a comprehensive record of students' abilities in both oral and written performance. Furthermore, presentations give the teacher some insights into student's interests, work habits, and organizational abilities. Presentations cover a wide range of meaningful activities, including poetry readings, plays, role-plays, dramatizations, and interviews. Classroom presentations are nowadays becoming more sophisticated as a result of increasing access to educational technology. In many parts of the world, students are becoming more aware of the power of multimedia for communicating information, and they enjoy keeping audio, video, and electronic records of their involvement in class presentations.

Student-Teacher Conferences: Student-teacher conferences, including structured interviews, can be an effective informal way of assessing a student's progress in language learning. Conferences and interviews provide opportunities for one-on-one interactions where the teacher can learn about a student's communicative abilities, emotional and social well-being, attention span, attitudes, pace of learning, and strengths and weaknesses (Smith 1996; Allerson and Grabe, 1986).

In the curriculum 2013 teachers must be able to assess not only the cognitive domain of the students but also the social attitudes, and spiritual. So, there are some techniques that can be used in assessing the students. To assess cognitive domain, teachers can apply formative assessment because it can help decrease the level of anxiety generated by concentration on linguistic accuracy and increase students' comfort zone and feeling of success by stressing communicative fluency. To assess social attitudes and spiritual aspects, teachers can perform observation during the learning process. In some situations, some teachers and researchers call for allowing students to have a say not only in deciding the

format of the test but also in deciding its content and the way it is administered. Thus, Mayerhof (1992) suggests allowing students to discuss questions during the test quietly as long as each writes his own answers; of course, she is referring to subjective types of questions. Friel (1989) recommends involving students in suggesting topics for the test or in generating some questions.

In classroom practices, teachers must understand exactly what and why they want to assess during the learning process, how to assess and how to communicate the result of the assessment. In the curriculum 2013, cognitive ability can be assessed by using non-verbal responses. For example, a teacher can ask his students to perform some verbs that the teacher commands. The teacher can say certain verbs like 'jump, sit, stand, etc' and students must perform those verbs. This is one of the techniques under total physical response.

In higher level of education, a teacher can apply higher level of cognitive. For example, in junior high school level, a teacher can request his students to perform a presentation based on a project that he has assigned before. The project can be a report of environmental problems that are available around the students. This kind of project belongs to authentic assessment from which the students derive the information from the real world. In performing the presentation, automatically, students show their ability in speaking, reasoning, analysing, and delivering the subject matter of the presentation.

In doing so, the students, to some extent, perform higher order thinking skills that are supposed to be included in the curriculum 2013. At the same time, students are also trained to communicate their ideas when they are doing the presentation, which is also recommended in the curriculum 2013.

For the teachers, they must have rubrics when they are conducting performance based assessment, such as role-play, written narrative, presentation, student-teacher conferences, etc. The rubric will be used as a guideline for the teachers in grading the students' performances. The rubric can be taken from some reliable sources and some adjustments can be done as well, to meet the needs of the intended classrooms. As a result, teachers will be able to communicate the results of the assessment to the stakeholders.

For assessing the spiritual and social attitudes, teachers can have a daily log or journal that is written after the learning activity is completed each day. From the journal, the teachers will have some notes about the behaviour of the students from which teachers can communicate to the parents and stakeholders. To help the teachers remember the whole activity in the classroom, they can make some small notes on a small paper during the learning process, which are then translated onto the journal. With the notes and the journal, teachers will be able to assess and justify the spiritual and social attitudes of the students,

whether the students meet the requirements of the school or not.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that assessment is one of the most significant aspects in language learning. To be able to perform assessment, teachers must be assessment literate. Many studies have shown that many teachers in Indonesia have not met that criteria. So, training can be done to help teachers from which they will know what, how, and when to assess their students.

In the curriculum 2013, teachers must understand that cognitive domain is not the only aspect that they must pay attention to. They must give some attention and consideration to the spiritual and social attitudes as well. Observation and journal writing are two things that teachers can employ to help them in recording the spiritual and social attitudes of the students.

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