TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG LEARNERS' ENGLISH PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

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Abstract

Assessing the productive skills namely speaking and writing tends to be more difficult than assessing the receptive skills namely listening and reading. The teachers need to pay more attention in assessing these skills especially for the elementary school students who are in the beginner level of English ability. Therefore, the aims of this research were to find out : The test format, marking criteria and the scoring scheme used by the teachers in assessing students' productive skills. This research was conducted under descriptive design. The respondents were 2 English teachers of SekolahDasar Islam Terpadu 'Aisyiyah (SDITA) Taman HarapanCurup. The data were taken from observation, interview and document analysis. The results of this research were : 1) The test formats used by the teachers to assess speaking skill were interview, picture description, and presentation while composition, brief description, writing the interview result and writing the expression were used to assess writing skill. 2) The criteria used by the teachers were pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency for speaking assessment, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics for writing assessment, 3) The teacher use the scoring scale to score students' productive skills. The scale itself depends on the criteria or language components which were being assessed and each scale of score has its own description. Virtually, it would be better if the teachers write down some notes in students writing product so that they can analyze their weakness easily.

Keywords: assessment, productive skills, young learners

Introduction

In human age, there is a critical period where the language acquisition tends to be better. Lenneberg (1967) pointed out that "between the age of three and the early teens the possibility for primary language acquisition continuous to be good" (p.158).Since English has become a necessary nowadays, it is important to be taught in the early age. Concerning with it, this study was conducted in Elementary School.

Regarding to the teaching learning process, the assessment plays the important part. Alberta says that assessment indicates whether students learning activities need to be modified or enriched or if outside intervention is needed (Alberta, 2007). It means that the assessment is needed to determine whether the learning objectives have been accomplished or not. Furthermore, it is strongly related to the students' motivation. As Christiane (1998)

said, "we should do everything we can to motivate our students, and positive evaluation will certainly help in this respect." (p.203). In other words the assessment becomes one of teacher's effort in motivating students which will affect the successful of learning process.

In language teaching, there are four skills which are divided into two categories namely receptive and productive skill. Golkova and Hubackova (2014) described that the category of receptive skills recognized as passive skills is demonstrated by reading and listening.Passive language skills do not force students to produce anything actively. The productive skill, on the other hand demonstrated by speaking and writing, are also called active skills - mean the transmission of information that alanguage user produces in either spoken or written form.

Each skill in both productive and receptive skill should be assessed differently

since the ability which is being assessed is different each other.

As most active users of any foreign language know, speaking and writing are in reciprocal relationship.Undoubtedly, grammatical structures, words and their proper use, and certain extent of accuracy need to berespected. These are implemented in both types of active skills.

Based on the grand tour observation to some elementary schools in RejangLebong regency, the researcher found that SDITA Taman Harapan is the only school which has assessed the whole English skills separatedly. Furthermore, the teachers used the subjective test in assessing students' speaking and writing skill.

Considering the things that need to be assessed in productive skill, this research then investigate the assessment system of students' productive skills applied by the English teachers of SDITA Taman HarapanCurup including the test format, marking criteria and the scoring scheme.

Hopefully, this research can be references for the other schools and the teachers to apply the more appropriate assessment system. For the teacher, for example, it can be used to analyze students' weakness in certain material, and inform the teacher whether the learning activities need to be modified or enriched. For students, the appropriate assessment system will give the fair judgement to the students based on their own ability so that they can measure their weakness and strength toward the material as a tool to improve their ability.

Assessment

Assessment is the process of gathering evidence of what the child can do. It is supported by Ur (2009) who states that "in assessment, the learner is simply informed how well or badly he or she has performed" (p.167). In other words, assessment is done as an effort to evaluate students' progress and improvement by giving the real information to the students based on their performance. In this part, the appropriate test format, marking criteria and

scoring scheme are needed. Through these three aspects, the effective assessment is hoped to be reached.

Assessment Format

Weir (1998) states that "as a general rule it is best to assess by a variety of test formats" (p.42). So the varied test formats are needed in testing students' ability. In this research, the test format that is aimed by the researcher is the way that is used by the teacher to assess their students' language ability that includes the task and activity, In the following are the test formats described by some experts that can be used in assessing students' productive skill.

1. Testing Writing

Ur (2012) pointed out some formats of writing test. "Firstly, composition, the activity that leads students to write a composition of some sentences based on the topic given by the teacher. Secondly, brief descriptions and dialogues. It is usually used in elementary level where the students are given a picture to be described or the beginning of a dialogue to continue with a set number of exchanges" (p.181).

2. Testing Speaking

Ur outlined some simple formats of speaking test that are more appropriate to be applied in elementary school that consists of interview, picture description, presentation and group or pair discussion. In interview the students are asked to make a dialogue or conversation between two people about the topic or material that is learnt. In picture description the student describes a picture or a series of pictures. It is particularly suitable for younger learners or beginners like elementary school students. In presentation the student is asked to present an extended description, explanation or other oral account where they are given a topic and time to prepare, while then the tester simply listens and assesses. Last, in group or pair discussions the teacher divides students in a pair or small group and then gives a topic to

be dicussed. It can be used in order to assess the speaking ability of two or more students at the same time (Ur, 2012).

The Marking Criteria and Scoring Scheme of English Productive Skills

Alister (2015) pointed out that "assessment criteria define, for each assessment instrument, the knowledge, skills and other qualities being assessed and the standard of achievement which must be met to receive a particular grade or mark" (p.7). For productive skills, the following criteria are very needed in measuring students' ability.

a. Speaking skill

Regarding to the marking criteria and scoring scheme, Jones et.al asserts, "for analytic system there are six elements/components to be assessed, i.e. fluency, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation of sentences, pronunciation of words and sounds, interactive communication, and vocabulary resources." (as cited in Nur Mukminatien, 2000, p. 40). Based on the criteria, students' then assessed by using the scoring scheme either holistic or analytic scoring procedure.

b. Writing Skill

As a productive skill, the main element of writing is the idea or the content where it will be supported by the accuracy of grammar use and the word choice in order to get the best writing. Moreover, the mechanics such as punctuation, spelling and capitalization are also the important part in order to avoid the misunderstanding of the message between the writer and the reader. In accordance with this idea, the criteria or language components of writing have been outlined as follows (O'Malley, 1966, p.142).

Table 1: Components/Criteria of Writing Described by O'Malley

No	Language Component	Description
1	Idea development/ organization	Focuses on central idea with appropriate elaboration and conclusion.
2	Fluency/struct ure	Appropriate verb tense used wirh a variety of grammatical and syntactic structures.
3	Word Choice	Uses varied and precise vocabulary appropriate for purpose.
4	Mechanics	Absense of errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Since this research was conducted in elementary school so the researcher investigated what criteria which used by the teacher and how do the teacher give a score. Regarding to the scoring scheme, the researcher use some theories such as given by Hughes and Ur as the guidance in order to investigate how do the teachers score students' skills. Similar to speaking test, the writing test also use a scoring rubric since it is a productive skill to. For analytical scoring, each criterion were scored separately before it sums to the single score, meanwhile in the holistic scoring the score is given generally to the students' work.

In accordance to assessment study, the researcher found several related studies. One of them is a research entitled "An Analysis of Teacher's Techniques in Testing Students' Four English Skills (A descriptive research in the second grade of MTsN 1 Kepahiang)" that was analyzed by Ade KurniaPutri, S. Pd. I. In her research, she investigated the techniques used by teacher in testing students' four language skills according to H. Douglas brown theory and her findings showed that the techniques used by teacher were authentic listening and listening cloze for testing listening, discussions and conversation and read aloud for testing speaking, picture cued for testing reading, and picture cued and ordering for writing. It tends to be different with this present research since the researcher investigated not only the test techniques or test format but also the criteria and the scoring schemes used by the teacher in evaluating students' English productiveskills.

Methodology

This research employed descriptive study. Gay and Airasian (2000) state that Gay and Airasian (2000)"descriptive study determines and describes the way things are, thus this research reported the result of research just as it was found" (p. 175). In other words, this research reports the real data based on what is found in the field without some addition or assumption from the researcher. Observation, interview and document analysis were used as the techniques of collecting data where the instruments for obtaining data used by the researcher were interview guidance and checklist. The observation was done to investigate the test format while interview were used to investigate the marking criteria and the scoring scheme used by the students in assessing students' English skills. The respondents of this research were 2 English teachers of SDITA Taman HarapanCurup who taught English in 4, 5 amd 6 grade.

Findings and discussion

1. The Test Format Used by the Teachers in Assessing Students' English Productive Skills

The findings towards test format used by the teachers of SDITA Taman HarapanCurup were gotten by three techniques of data collection namely observation, interview and document analysis. This technique of triangulation which means the use of multiple techniques is used to strengthen the data gotten as the research findings, and after analyze the data gotten by those several techniques, the researcher found that the test format used by the teachers in assessing students' English abilities are served on the following table.

Table 2. The Test Formats Used by the English Teachers in Evaluating Students' English Ability

No.	Skill	Test Format
1.	Speaking	1. Interview
		2. Picture Description
		3. Presentation
2.	Writing	1. Composition
		2. Brief Description and Dialogues
		3. Writing a result of interview
		4. Writing the expressions based on some statements

The Criteria Used by the Teachers in Assessing Students' English Productive Skills

The investigation towards criteria used by teachers of SDITA Taman HarapanCurup were done through interview and document analysis. From both techniques of collecting data, it was found that the teachers used the same criteria in assessing students' ability in each language skill as served on the table below.

Table 3. The Criteria Used by the Teachers in Assessing Students' English Ability

No.	Skill	Marking Criteria
1.	Speaking	1. Pronunciation
		2. Vocabulary
		3. Fluency
2.	Writing	1. Structure/Grammar
		2. Vocabulary
		3. Mechanics

2. The Scoring Scheme Used by the Teachers in Assessing Students' English Skills

The investigation toward scoring schemes used by the students was done through interview and was supported by the document analysis. The documents that were analyzed covered teachers' lesson plan, textbook, teachers' note and students' work. The finding showed that both teachers speaking and writing skills they used scoring scale to score students' work and performance. The scale itself depends on the criteria or language components which were being assessed and each scale of score has its on description.

In scoring speaking, the teachers use the subjective test. In scoring speaking skill, the researcher found that the teachers tend to use the holistic scoring procedure where they use the scoring scale that included the description of the whole criteria used in assessing students' ability without separating the score for each criterion. The scoring scales of both teachers are 60 to 90.

Although the range of scale between both teacher were quite different, there were a quite similar description of criteria or language component that were used as the indicators in assessing and giving the score towards students' performance. In students' works, the researcher found that there was only a single score without any separation of score based on each criterion used.

In scoring writing, the teachers tend to use the holistic scoring in assessing students' writing ability where the scoring scale is 70 to 100. From the interview and document analysis, the researcher found that both teachers used some scoring scales based on some fix criteria of language component which were being assessed namely structure, vocabulary and mechanics. On the other words, it can be said that the teachers scored the students' writing with a single score without separating the score for each criteria.

In addition, based on the interview and document analysis the researcher found that the English teachers in SDITA Taman HarapanCurup classified the score of students' English skills into three aspect, cognitive, psychomotoric and affective. Its classification were based on the operational verb in the indicators of material developed by the teacher that classified into the appropriate aspect using revision of taxonomy bloom given by school that has fixed classification of each operational verb.

Conclusion and Suggestion

From the finding and discussion, it could be concluded that the teachers used different test format in evaluating students' English four skills. Those were seem to be accordance with the theory of test format given by some experts that every languange skill must be assessed differently, but for listening test format it will be better if the teachers let the students to listen the real native speaker words from the tape recorder, video or another audio visual tool in order to introduce the students with the real English accent, in hope it can give them bigger

motivation to learn English. Regarding to the marking criteria, both of the teachers used some fix criteria in assessing students' English ability for each skill. Both of them use the similar criteria namely pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency for speaking assessment, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics for writing assessment, understanding/identifying information for reading and listening assessment. The criteria used was fixed to the level of students in elementary school, so not all of the criteria described by the theory applied in assessing students' skills. In line with scoring scheme, the teachers used the scoring scales which consisted of breakdown of grade or marks with the descriptions of the criteria used in assessing students' ability. The scoring schemes to assess reading and listening used by the teachers were same. They use the objective scoring where there was a fix score for each question. Meanwhile, in assessing students' productive skills namely speaking and writing, both teachers used scoring scale with the similar description for each scale, the differences were only on the range of the scale. On the other hand, it was found that both of them did not separate the score of each criteria used especially for speaking and writing as the productive skills that sums into a final score but rather they gave directly a single score for students' work, so there were no detail information about students weakness. Therefore, it will be better if the teachers give some explanations first about what things that are going to be assessed in each skill, in hope the students can maximise their effort on some important parts to get the maximal score. Furthermore, it will be better if the teachers make some notes about students mistakes in hope that they will realize their weakness and can make the improvement for the certain part needed.

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