

Empowering Students' Writing Skill through Performance Assessment

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Abstract

It is quite common to our understanding that classroom assessment outcomes are not sensitive to the goal of teaching and learning language skills. More specifically, the assessment cannot allow the students to present what they know and what they are supposed to do. The purpose of classroom assessment is to inform teaching and to improve learning. Performance assessment gives the students a chance to demonstrate their knowledge and absorb a wide variety of information on language teaching and learning activities. This study aims to analyze the implementation of performance assessment in improving students' writing skills and disclosing the students' psychological factors on implementing performance assessment in the writing learning process. This is a descriptive quantitative study that was carried out for three months, namely October-December 2018. The participants of the research were 28 English department students of Udayana University. The instruments used were writing rubric, questionnaires, and interviews. These data were analyzed with the assistance of the excel chart data series software program and then followed by qualitative interpretation. The questionnaire data were displayed in the form of a percentage, while the data from the interviews were narrated in detail based on students' responses. The findings of the study reported a positive impact on students' writing skills (the mean post-test result = 78), boosts students' interest and awareness (92,85%), self-esteem (85,71%), and their motivation (78,57%). The practitioners are expected to implement performance assessment in enhancing students to be a competent English writer.

Keywords: empowering, performance assessment, teaching and learning process, writing skill

Introduction

Writing skill has a vital role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it is needed in supporting the learners' academic success (Aliyu, 2020). Writing skills requires EFL learners to employ their linguistic competence to generate the main idea, supporting the idea, sum up the concept of the experts, have sufficient knowledge of diction choice, topic selection, punctuation, make good connection among sentences, and find appropriate references. Writing skill is a thinking tool for the other three language skills and language components, such as

vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar (Khazrouni, 2019). Khazrouni further claimed that English writing skill has an important role for EFL learners to develop several skills in their English learning, such as analyzing, arguing, critical thinking skills. Besides, English writing skill encourages students to employ their understanding of micro linguistics, i.e., morphology, syntax, and semantics that have already been learned in English class (Menggo, Suastra, Budiarsa, & Padmadewi, 2019). This idea is in line with the research findings conducted by (Tusyanah, Anissa, Chayatina, Sakitri, & Utami, 2019), who claimed that writing is a fundamental skill in language learning. The learners must employ their knowledge of the language, such as grammar, diction, punctuation, spelling, and many more. These enable learners to have a well-structured way of the presentation of thoughts in writing communication. Measuring and knowing students' performance in writing classes is a must in the process of teaching English. An English teacher can identify learners' weaknesses and strengths and provide valuable input to enhance their writing skills ability (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2019). Performance assessment is strongly believed to provide better feedback about the learners' performance and writing skills. Performance-based assessment is viewed as the most appropriate way to evaluate the learners' language performance, including writing skills (Yulia, 2018). Through the use of performance assessment, the learners can be informed of their strengths and weaknesses as well as teachers' basis for giving feedback and making judgments about their language learning progress. Performance-based assessment is not only adapted for reading instruction but also other language skills (Lynch, 2003). In addition, (Espinosa, 2015) asserted that performance-based assessments are preferred to be used by many educators since it is very objective on students' English writing skills so that students feel satisfied and constantly reflect on weaknesses of their writing ability. Besides, this type of assessment encourages students to really know the level of understanding of writing skills and realize the knowledge and skills of writing English that they have been known.

Previous research about performance assessment empowers students' writing skills has been conducted by (Efendi, 2017; Murtini, Padmadewi, & Putra, 2013). These previous researchers report that performance assessment used in the writing class aids both learners and the English teachers. Learners feel challenged, motivated, practiced, and provided valuable feedback on the student's learning to encourage further writing development. At the same time, English teachers can evaluate their teaching methods' weaknesses, which enable them to become professional English teachers. Moreover, performance assessment is also believed to be able to empower students' English productive skill-writing skills by providing inputs, encourage the potential of learners, and problem-solving skills, which is in line with learners' real needs (Rukmini & Saputri, 2017). Problem-solving skills encourage students to be creative thinkers in completing the various tasks given (Ndiung, Dantes, Ardana, & Marhaeni, 2019). Nevertheless, the understanding and the effect of performance assessment in teaching paragraph writing have not been strengthened by relevant and current research findings.

The performance assessment is considered capable of boosting learners' writing skill, reflect learning progress, provide feedback to their shortcomings in a well-organized way, promote critical thinking skill, and perform language proficiency by doing something that means in their real-life world (Prastikawati, Budiman, & Sodik, 2016; Vangah, Jafarpour, & Mohammadi, 2016). This current research, the understanding, and the effect of performance assessment to empower students' writing ability are highly provided.

Previous researches showed that performance assessment could increase writing skills and encourage students psychologically, i.e., by improving motivation to overcome their self-efficacy barriers in writing English. For example, (Menggo, Suparwa, & Astawa, 2019; Prasetyowati &

Sa'adah, 2018) claimed that self-assessment as a direct assessment or performance assessment could improve students' written production, self-confidence, the encouragement of autonomy, and motivation of their self-involvement, and decrease the teachers' doubt for giving the students mark. Performance assessment is suitable for increasing learners' aptitude for displaying writing, which is appropriate using grammar and vocabulary choice or displaying a writing ability that has the right meaning in a socio-cultural context (Qutaishat & Bataineh, 2014). They further claimed that performance assessment allows learners to present their English knowledge and skills that are directly observed by the teachers. Learners are asked to narrate something useful outside of school, that is describing something and demonstrating a process of something.

In reference to those mentioned above, the researchers attempted to analyze and disclose performance assessment effects on paragraph writing ability.

Literature review

Writing skill

Writing is one of the necessary skills in English language learning. It is considered as one of the most difficult from other skills. However, writing skill has a power to engage students' academic success due to writing enables to reinforce the grammatical structure, enhance students' vocabulary, shape the scientific structure of human life either verbally or in writing form, and help other language skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading (Javed, Juan, & Nazli, 2013; Nodoushan, 2014).

The writers need to specify the purposes and types or genres of writing. The purposes of writing are broadly divided into informative, persuasive, and expressive/narrative of writing. These three types of writing forms describe the kinds of writing in which the assessment will be based on the classroom's grade-level. On the other hand, the genre is related to the different writing tasks given, like essays, stories, letters, reports, recounts, journals, many more. The genre choice follows the writing instruction given by the teacher (McKay, 2007).

Paragraph writing on descriptive text

Paragraph writing is a writing subject skill that aims to develop students' abilities to write paragraphs in different text types, such as expressive/narrative, descriptive/informative, and persuasive/expository types. The emphasis is on the correct use of idea development/organization, fluency/structure, word choice, and mechanics. This subject is given during the first semester students of English Programs in Indonesia (Kemenristekdikti, 2012). The performance design is based on the two essential parts of writing: they are the paragraph type as non-linguistic components, which are the thoughts/ideas of the paragraph, and the paragraph style as linguistics components, which consist of linguistics feature used.

Performance assessment

The teachers have given students the determining policy on their grades, contrary to the fact that students do not know how it becomes and the criteria of its grading. In recent years, however, a new approach to assessment has been enlarging and developing among educators and policymakers. It is called a performance assessment or performance task (Stecher, 2010). Both terms are used to describe the same substance. One side of students involved is needed in the process of cognitive enhancement; on the other hand, what has been understood by the students must be manifested in real situations (Palm, 2008). These two terms are stressed on the curriculum needs, especially on scoring and structured response requirements. A performance task can be understood as a measure of a students' ability to demonstrate a number of concepts that have been

learned. In carrying out this assessment, the teacher should have a standardized rubric that includes aspects of assessment, indicators, weights, scores, and descriptors of each score. This rubric is a form of transparency in the assessment so that both teachers and learners are motivated to revise and improve their learning outcomes. A performance assessment is a collection of a number of tasks that have been given to the learners (Stecher, 2010). In addition, (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996) defined performance assessment as one assessment that requires learners to demonstrate what they have mastered about specific skills and competencies by performing or producing something.

Performance assessment can promote students' language learning achievement due to 1) performance-based assessment is objective, according to the abilities and efforts of students, 2) provides opportunities for students to demonstrate what they understand about English, 3) students participate in the evaluation process, 4) involving multi-skills in completing a task, 5) encourage all learners to give their best of finishing tasks, 6) promotes cooperative learning, 7) improves problem-solving skill, 8) provides valuable, in-depth information for parents, administrators, and other policymakers (Qutaishat & Bataineh, 2014; Soto et al., 2017).

There are several broad pictures of the emergence of performance assessment on writing, such as the writer, the purposes and types of writing, and the writing instruction (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). From the writer's point of view, writing is a personal act in which the writer transforms the ideas or prompts into a specific topic. The writer needs to know it; they are the knowledge of content, the procedures to organize it, the principles of writing, and procedural required to apply the three other types of knowledge in composing a written product. The writing assessment should evaluate and capture more aspects of the writing process than just grammar and mechanics. The purpose of writing is also essential for making exact specifications on the writing product.

Research method

Design

In this study, the researchers used a descriptive quantitative design due to it aims to measure the effectiveness of using performance-based assessment in teaching writing descriptive text course. The course is a compulsory subject; two credits are designed to train students to be able to produce correct writing in the paragraph form, namely fulfilling all the writing assessment criteria. The concept of the correct paragraph criteria was introduced to students, such as the clarity of the main idea, clauses, and conclusions. A descriptive paragraph is the main focus of this study, considering that the main concern is to encourage students to describe their thoughts correctly, precisely, and acceptably in the English language. This subject was distributed in the first semester of students majoring in English at Udayana University. The rating scale is A from 80-100, B is from 70-79, C, 60-69, D, 50-59, and E is from 0 up to 49. This subject consists of 16 meetings, but for the current study, the writers cover eight meetings only, started on 13th September 2018, and ended on 15th November 2018.

Participants

This study was conducted among 28 English department students of the first semester of Udayana University in the Writing Descriptive Text course. The English writing lecturer selected these participants by using a purposive sampling technique based on the consideration of the lecturer himself.

Instruments

A questionnaire, interview, and test were used to collect data. The test was used to measure the participants' descriptive writing skills, whereas, questionnaire and interview were used to explore the percentage of the students' psychological impact on the use of performance-based assessment in the writing descriptive text course.

The procedure of data collection

Data were collected by three procedures, namely (1) test was given to all participants after eight meetings. Students' writing ability was measured by using writing scoring rubric; (2) the questionnaire was distributed simultaneously for all participants; (3) interview was done about one hundred minutes, one day after all the questionnaires were collected and it was recorded to support the accuracy of the analysis. In addition, interview was conducted based upon the agreement among writing lecturer and students. The participants were seated in a face-to-face seating arrangement and the writing lecturer proposed each question from the interview list.

Data analysis

Data in this research were analyzed by using the assistance of the excel chart data series software program, then well-narrated according to the data given by this software. Furthermore, data given by questionnaire were displayed in the form of a percentage, whereas interview data were well-described based upon the answers provided by the respondent.

Findings

Statistical analyses

The writing analytical scoring rubric result showed great differences between the pre-test and the post-test of 28 participants. Statistical analysis data, which is obtained from the pre-test and the post-test, can be more understood through Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Pre-Test Results

Writing Components	Organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanics	Total
Mean score in the pre-test	15	22	18	12	67

Based on the data in Table 1 above, it can be said that participants' mean score was at the Adequate to Fair level. This means that all aspects of writing evaluation should be developed.

Table 2. Post-Test Results

Writing Components	Organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanics	Total
Mean score in the pre-test	22	24	19	13	78

The mean post-test results (78) showed a difference with the pre-test mean score (67). This difference indicates an increase in the ability of students' English paragraph writing. The mean score of the post-test (78) can be categorized at the Good to Adequate level. The vocabulary and organization aspects were higher than the other aspects during the use of performance assessment in the writing learning process.

The use of performance assessment affects not only students' writing skills but also psychological factors, namely self-esteem, motivation to write English, the interest of English writing, and awareness of the importance of writing skills. The results of each of the mentioned factors are presented in Figure 1 below.

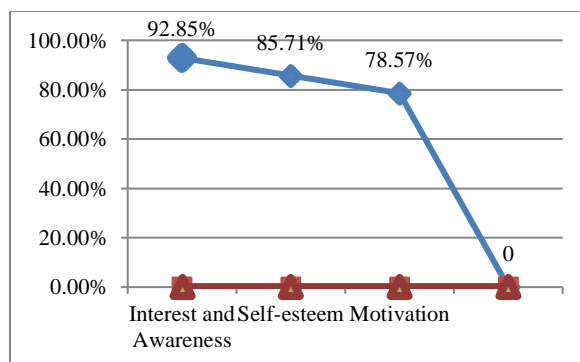


Figure 1. Psychological factors

Discussion

In this part, the steps of empowering students' writing skills in descriptive text and its impact on students' affective factors will be discussed. The holistic scoring rubric provides a description of the information of the teaching what the students should know and must do, while the analytic scoring rubric describes the elements of students' ability to increase their learning strategies.

Holistic scoring rubric

A holistic scoring rubric is viewed as a tool to evaluate students' writing performance. The usage of this rubric can 1) keep the consistency of judgment when assessing writing performance, 2) provide students with quality feedback, 3) guarantee teachers' uniformity and objective fairness in the assessment process, 4) save time, practical and applicable, and 5) specify the standard of students' performance in the descriptive paragraph writing which consist of content standards including declarative and procedural knowledge (Çetin, 2011; Ghalib & Al-Hattami, 2015; Veloo, Aziz, & Yaacob, 2018). Declarative knowledge can be classified into the knowledge of concept and facts in descriptive paragraphs, and procedural knowledge is considered the way to do or how to perform or learn the mechanism of the writing. Both of them are skills that must be applied by the students to do their project of paragraph writing. Additionally, the holistic scoring rubric has identified the four levels of performance in doing the task and scoring rubric that students must achieve to function at a score of 1, 2, 3, and 4. The score has shown the student position at what certain level they are in. Every score level has shown the criteria of declarative and procedural knowledge.

The criteria of each level have described the four dimensions of paragraph writing, they are: 1) organization, which focuses on elaborating and concluding the right ideas, 2) vocabulary that uses varied and precise word choice for purpose, 3) grammar applied to the appropriate with a variety of grammar and syntactic structure, and 4) mechanics related to the spelling, capitalization, and punctuations. This scoring system on the total quality as an integrated whole, and it traces the level that will be measured. The student's writing performance achievement indicates the level performance scored by 1, 2, 3, and 4 as a score rating.

Analytic scoring rubrics

The analytic scoring rubric provides a positive impact for both students and instructors (Al-jarf, 2011). It is easy to be used, provides students with constructive feedback, students learn to monitor their progress and make improvements, and instructors can plan instruction more effectively, be more consistent in scoring student work, and be more systematic in reporting student progress. This analytic scoring rubric provides the proficiency descriptions of descriptive paragraph writing, classified into specifics components separately. It would be scored each description independently and given different weights (Ghalib & Al-Hattami, 2015). The paragraph dimensions are divided into four: how to organize ideas, how to use vocabulary, how to choose grammar, and how to apply mechanics. Each descriptive paragraph writing feature has been generated into four different specific detail descriptions, scoring, which would be scored by 1, 2, 3, and 4. That differentiated scoring is for each sentence formation that is written on students' compositions.

The first scoring system is for the paragraph ideas organization, which has four proficiency descriptions, such as elaborating ideas, showing evidence, describing supporting ideas, and focusing on the main idea. *Second* is a scoring system for using the vocabulary on every sentence formation. It is also divided into four specific descriptors, including using voice to affect the reader, paraphrases (synonym or meaning), purposefully selected vocabulary, and basic and new vocabularies. *The third* is a scoring system for choosing grammar that is broken down into four specific descriptors; they are; mastering the sentence contraction rules, the effectiveness of using transitions, conjunctions, and many more., standard agreement, and applying standard inflections. Moreover, *last* is the mechanics scoring system. This system included some components; they are classified into indenting paragraphs, using punctuations mark standard (period, comma, questions mark, and many more.), using capitals and spelling words. Finally, these four features have also elaborated into four different scoring grades. The scoring for each component is based on the degree of sentence control, which performs on the students' compositions, and then it is graded.

Grading

An analytic scoring writing rubric has also shown the control degree on the paragraph writing. A separate score on the analytic scoring system is applied to the score scale for grading. The scale of 1 shows the little or no control of the components; the scale 2 shows some control of the components, the scale 3 indicates the most control of the components, and scale 4 indicates the high control of the component. The total weighted scores are then looked up in Table 3, which converts it into a rating on a scale of 1 - 4. The institution grades are A, B, C, and D. The conversion table is shown below.

Table 3. The Conversion Table

Rating	Score	Grading
80 - 100	4	A
70 - 79	3	B
60 - 69	2	C
25 - 59	1	D

Psychological factors

Besides that, the use of performance assessment also affects the psychological factors of learners, as given in Figure 1. Data from the result of the questionnaire analysis show that the implementation of performance assessment had a positive contribution up to 92.85%, boosting

learners' interest and awareness in English writing assignments. This data was taken from in-depth interview results with 28 students, who acknowledged that the usage of performance assessment was an effective way for students to push their interest and awareness in the development of English writing skills. This finding is in line with a research report conducted by (Aubrey, 2011; Menggo, Suastra, & Padmadewi, 2019), who claimed that students' interests could be a powerful teaching tool. It makes lessons exciting and can harness a student's latent in the language learning process.

Second, the use of performance assessment gave the contribution (85.71%) toward learners' self-esteem in English writing assignments. This finding was based on the interview results, with 28 participants who disclosed that the implementation of performance assessment was able to enhance their self-esteem in the learning of paragraph writing on descriptive text. The result of this analysis is in line with the findings of the research done by (Kalanzadeh, Mahnegar, Hassannejad, & Bakhtiarvand, 2013), who affirmed that students who have higher self-esteem would be more involved in the learning activities in or outside class.

Third, learners' English writing motivation developed until 78,57%. The questionnaire and interview results showed that the implementation of performance assessment contributes to learners' English writing motivation. Motivation plays an important role in learning English (Menggo, 2018). This finding is in line with the research finding done by (Genc & Aydin, 2017), who reported that motivation contributes to the students' academic performance.

Conclusion

This study examines the use of performance assessment in teaching writing. First, performance assessment enables students to develop their writing skills. Second, performance assessment develops English learners to be responsible for and capable of self-assessment in their English writing progress. Third, it promotes students' interest and awareness, self-esteem, and motivation in the writing course. Finally, it is recommended that ESL/EFL practitioners apply performance assessment in their writing instruction

Declaration of conflicting interest

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