

The Responses of Non-English Major Students with Visual Learning Style of Writing toward Oral English Test

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ABSTRACT

This research is conducted towards the students of non-English major with visual learning style and writing preference. There are 14 students, which are taken to be the respondents. Questionnaires are the instrument used to gather the data in this research. This research employs descriptive qualitative method in analyzing the data. The result portrays that 3 major findings: (1) most of the students find it difficult to accomplish the oral English test which is natural and normal due to their preference skill in writing, (2) in spite of the difficulty of the oral English test, the majority of the students consider the test to be challenging, accommodating and satisfying (3) a large number of the students get the benefit from the effectiveness of the feedback that they get in the form of rubrics.

Keywords: English language assessment, oral test, and writing skill preference

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the speeding up of technology and globalization in any aspects of life, people are positioned into a situation where they must use English language either passively or actively. In Indonesia, English is becoming foreign language, which is thought to students since they were in early childhood education. However, that kind of English learning existing in Indonesia is mostly conducted in the test-oriented system. The students' competences are determined by the assessment of final test, which is well known with the term National Examination test. That test is sometimes becomes a nightmare for both students and teachers because if the students do not pass it, they will be considered to be failed in that field of subject, despite of all learning process that they have undergone.

Fortunately that kind of alarming National Examination test does not exist in higher education level. Universities are having the autonomy in designing their own teaching and learning process, along with the assessment system. The lecturer him/herself are also having autonomy in conducting the classes. This is such a good point so that the university, to be more specific the lecturer may decide what is the best learning approach, learning materials and also assessment instruments, which is best appropriately applied for their students. The students also feel that their needs are being accommodated and they get what they want to learn through the learning process, which is not test-oriented.

In spite of it all, the issues dealing with English assessment are still debatable and dilemmatic. It is because the students' English skills are so diverse. In one class, it is found that some students are writing skills oriented, some others are speaking skills oriented, the others are reading skills oriented, and the rest are listening skills oriented. The fact shows that the learning condition becomes more complex in the English class of non-English major students. They have abundant reasons and motivation in learning English that differs one another. In spite of all those complexity and diversity, there must be one single assessment that must be applied to assess the students' English competence.

Oral test is believed to be the most effective test, which brings high validity towards the result. In addition, oral test is also considered as an appropriate tool to assess communicative

competence that is required to be mastered by people nowadays. The importance of communicative competence is supported by Bachman (1990) who confirmed that “communicative competence is as to the scenarios combining language knowledge and language use, ability to create and explain the significance of “a person’s language ability system included not only his knowledge, more depends on its specific language environment, using a variety of strategies to complete the task”. Moreover, the method in assessing communicative competence covers many things. Liu & Han (2000) elaborated that “language test not only focused on students’ language knowledge, but also examined at student’s ability to complete the task and the appropriateness of using language, which is the current trend of language testing”.

Thus, the practice and issues related to English communicative assessment in the form of oral test would be examined in this research. The interesting point in this research is that this kind of assessment is seen from the perspective of the visual learners students with writing preference. The result of their comments, complaints, appraisal and other responses would be elaborated further in research.

Students’ Learning Motivation and Learning Styles on English Subjects

The success of learning depends on many aspects. One of them is affected by the awareness of the teachers towards students’ learning style. Kierkegaard, 1843 as cited in (Reni Francis, 2016) defined learning style as characteristic “cognitive, affective, and psychological behavior with, and respond to the learning environment.” It is also stated that learning style is a preferable way of learning in which someone can learn the best. It is clearly explained, “it involves one’s preferred method of taking in, organizing, and making sense of information.

One of students’ learning styles is known as sensory preference. Francis (2016) elaborated that

“Sensory preferences refer to the physical, perceptual learning channels with which the student is the most comfortable. Visual students like to read and obtain a great deal from visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup can be very confusing. In contrast, auditory students are comfortable without visual input and therefore enjoy and profit from unembellished lectures, conversations, and oral directions.”

Sensory preferences learning styles includes visual learners. Miriam, 2007 as cited in (Reni Francis, 2016) stated that “visual learners: Students with this style are able to recall what they see and prefer written instructions. These students are sight-readers who enjoy reading silently. They learn by observing and enjoy working with maps, graphs, posters, diagrams, text with pictures.” Thus, the students with visual learning style of writing can be considered as a category of students who do not get any excitement and joy when they work with something with auditory English exposures. Conversation, interview and oral test will be something that may decrease their effectiveness in learning English.

Other aspect that may determine the success of learning is the students’ motivation. Hundreds of motivations underlie someone in learning English language. Being master and able to perform well are becoming general objectives of students in higher education in learning English. It is supported by the scientists’ argument, which says that “mastery goals and performance goals are in priority. They consider that students are more interested in becoming the best at one particular task or in their outcomes” (Molden & Dweck, 2000; Harackiewicz *et al.*, 1997; Elliot, 1997). Another motivation that may trigger students to be more engaged in English learning classes is due to the impact for their future. Bell (1973) proves that “educational credentials define people’s positions in the labor market. It is easier for them to compete and to get a higher social status, to take part in upward mobility” (Esping-Andersen,

1993).

English learning Assessment

The success of learning can be observed or noticed by students, teachers or even university institution by using a kind of assessment instrument. Unless, the result of learning whether it meets the objective or not could be not understood. Therefore it is important to employ such a valid and reliable assessment instrument to measure how far the teaching and learning process go and meet its objectives. “The instrument used to collect the data should be shown to be *reliable* which means having consistent results are obtained in repeated assessments and *valid* which means the instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Francis, 2016).

Several experts propose several definitions of assessment. In education, measurement is “the process of quantifying the observed performance of classroom learners” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010.). In addition, Brown and Abeywickrama also stated that “students’ performance can be described both quantitatively and qualitatively, or by assigning numbers such as rankings and letter grades or by providing written descriptions, oral feedback and narrative report” (2010).

However, the implementation of assessment is still dilemmatic and a bit tricky. Due to the diversity of students’ learning styles, students skill orientation and others aspects, a single assessment instruments mostly cannot fairly assess the students’ English competence and performance. A study shows that “for some persons, for example, sitting written examinations may be a stressful activity (Cheng, et al., 1999). For others, however, speaking in front of their peers in the classroom may cause a high level of anxiety” (Price, 1991; Phillips, 1992). Specifically, in this research the subject will be the student with visual learning style of writing. When the assessment does not meet their learning preference they will feel anxious about it. It is in line with what is stated by Aida (1994) that explains “people experience anxiety and reluctance in communicating with other people or in expressing themselves in a foreign language in which they do not have a full competence”. On the consequence, “there is a need to elaborate teaching approaches, practices, and materials that may help lessen the discomfort of students in their process of learning a foreign language” (Koch & Terrell, 1991)

One of the efforts to lessen the students anxiety towards the assessment, particularly the one which cannot accommodate their preferable competence is by giving feedback and also give the result in the form of rubrics. It is believed that “feedback was one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement” (Hattie & Timperley (2007). In a more recent study Akter, (2010) had proved that “giving feedback to learners on their performance was an important aspect of effective teaching.”

To be more specific, the feedback in the form of giving the students with the rubrics is considered to give positive impact towards the improvements of student’s performance and competence. Some studies show that “rubrics facilitate student awareness of learning goals as well as the application of feedback, both important in the assessment and learning cycle” (Brookhart, 2003; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Besides, “students indicated rubrics were helpful in completing assignments”, and as in Andreade and Du (2005), they have a belief that “rubrics gave them insight into teacher expectations”.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The data collecting technique in this research employs three techniques, which are observation, administering online questionnaire and crosschecking with students’ English

assignment and score. The first one was observation. The second technique used was administering online questionnaire that was given to 30 random students which is predicted to have visual learning style with writing skill preference. The first question in the questionnaire asks what types of learning style that they prefer along with the English skill preferences. For the students who answer other than writing skill, they were eliminated and their responses are not recorded. Using crosschecking towards the assignment result, daily performance scoring and any other important notes during the learning process, the researcher did the triangulation.

2.1 The Subject & Setting of the Research

The subjects of the research are non-English major university students of Sanata Dharma University. Their major are Psychology and Informatics Engineering. From the observation process, there are 30 students who are selected to have visual learning style with writing skill preferences. The result from the questionnaire shows that among those 30 students, there are only 14 students who are having visual learning style with writing preferences. Thus, the responses from those 14 students are becoming the recorded result. The setting of the research occurs through online platform. Online questionnaire by using Google form are employed. The link of the questionnaire are sent to the students' email and they are given 5 days to fill out that form. It was conducted on December 2017, after all the classes and final test end.

2.2 Data Analysis

In this research, the writer employed descriptive qualitative analysis. Having collected all the data needed, the writer classified the data into several categories. Then, the writer described each category. That analysis was conducted with the goal to dig out the nature of students' responses, which have visual learning style with writing preferences.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Responses about students' learning style and orientation of English skills

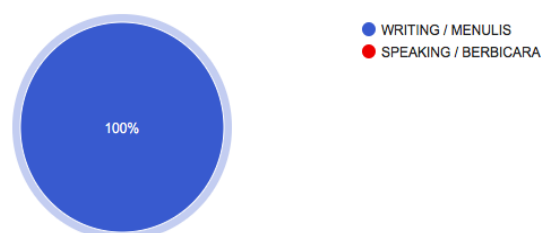
From the online questionnaires, which were distributed to 30 non-English major students, it appeared that there were only 14 students who have visual learning style with writing skills preference. It is presented in the result figure 1, as follows:

Figure 1

The question: What is the English skill (writing, reading, listening, speaking) that you can do the best? Or becoming your preference?

Kemampuan bahasa Inggris mana yang paling kalian anggap sesuai/terbaik dengan kemampuan kalian? (pilih 1 yang sesuai)

14 responses



All students stated that writing become the skills that they consider to be the best skill of their English competence and performance. Students with visual learning style tends to perform best when they are stimulated by visual media and also they will perform the best way when they are asked to do something in the form of visual output such as writing an essay, stories, poem, etc. It is in line with what has been said by Francis (2016) explaining, “visual students like to read and obtain a great deal from visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup can be very confusing.” Thus, when they face assignment or project or test, which is not in line with their skill, they will find it difficult to accomplish. It is what occurs in the English classes of non-English major students with visual learning style (writing skill preference). Those students perceive that the oral test is not fair to be administered towards them since they will perform not optimally. On the contrary, when they are asked to do a test in written form, they will find it so easy to accomplish it along with the optimal result.

However, the condition of non-English major students with writing skills oriented who are facing the oral test becomes so dilemmatic and debatable issue. Some of them feel envy towards the speaking oriented students who are more accommodated by the oral test and some others feel not satisfied with the method of assessment, which put them into anxiety. This situation is what is then captured and discussed further in this research.

3.2 Responses of difficulty level

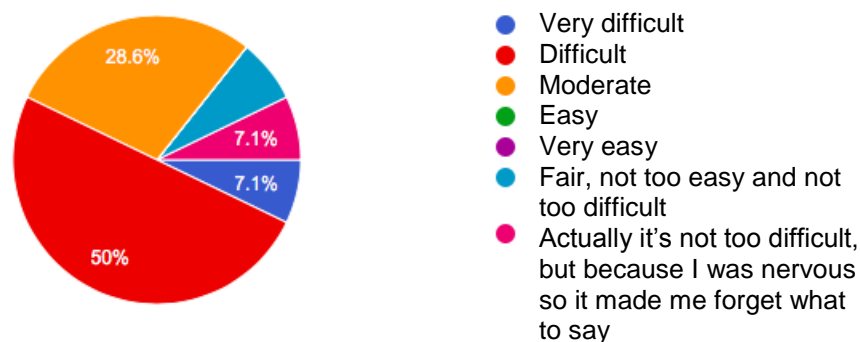
The non-English major students with the writing preference gave their responses towards the oral test that they passed when they join English class. They stated about the difficulty level of the oral test, which is portrayed in the figure 2, as follow:

Figure 2

The Question: How is the difficulty level of the oral test in General English Course?

Bagaimana tingkat kesulitan ujian lisan MKU Bahasa Inggris? (pilih 1 yang sesuai)

14 responses



From the figure above we can notice that half of the students who are shown in the percentage of 50% consider that the oral test is difficult (*sulit*) for them. It is in the same boat like what is proposed by Francis (2016) saying, “students with this style prefer written instructions”. Thus it is not surprising to find that 50% of the students perceive that the oral test is difficult to accomplish. Even worse, there is a category of students with the percentage of 7.1% who feel that the oral test is very difficult and very complicated to do. Those students are

the pictures on how if someone with certain English skill preferences is assessed with not suitable assessment instrument.

However, the second category of the students stated that the oral test was just like in the average level. It is shown in the percentage of 28.6%. Those students, although they have writing preferences, they feel that the oral test is still doable for them. Furthermore, there are 7.1% of students who perceive that the oral test is actually in the ideal average level for them. They find it hard but not too hard, they find it easy but not too easy.

The last category, in the percentage of 7.1%, shows that their speaking anxiety bother them in accomplishing the test. The result present that some students perceive that actually the oral test is not too difficult; however, due to the speaking anxiety, they cannot accomplish the test optimally. It is supported with what is believed by Aida (1994) stating “people experience anxiety and reluctance in communicating with other people or in expressing themselves in a foreign language in which they do not have a full competence”.

3.3 The satisfaction towards the oral test

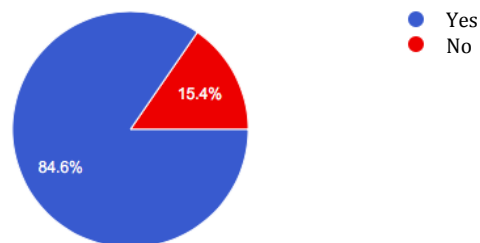
The results related to the satisfaction towards the oral test are presented to be so surprising. It is shown in the figure 3, as follow:

Figure 3

The Question: Does the oral test in General English course accommodate your English skill/proficiency?

Apakah ujian lisan MKU Bahasa Inggris mengakomodasi skill/kemampuan Bahasa Inggris yang kalian miliki?

13 responses



The figure above shows that most of the students feel that their skills have been already accommodated by the oral test that they passed. It is seen in the percentage of 84.6%, large number of the students shows their satisfaction towards the oral test by saying that their skills are already accommodated. The rest of them in the percentage of 15.4% say that they are not satisfied with the oral test system because it is not able to accommodate their skills. This becomes an interesting point to be highlighted because in spite of their English skill limitation, a large number of students get the satisfaction towards the oral test system. Their satisfactory is due to the result of the test, which is considered to be good. This fact proves that when the students' motivation is achieved, they will feel satisfied no matter the process is. It is in line with the motivational motives saying, “Mastery goals and performance goals are in priority. They consider that students are more interested in becoming the best at one particular task or in their outcomes” (Molden and Dweck, 2000; Harackiewicz *et al.*, 1997; Elliot, 1997).

3.4 Responses towards the oral test implementation

The oral tests were administered for the mid-term test and also the final test of English class for non-English major students. The oral test lasted for 5 minutes. In the first test, which was held in the mid-term test, the students are asked to respond to several questions asked by the teacher in the form of interview. In the second test, which was held in the final test, the students were asked to perform persuasive speech about certain topics individually. Those two oral tests are gaining some responses from the students with writing skill preference.

From the results, the researcher classified the responses into 5 categories, which is based on the keywords of the students' responses. The first category is classified into "challenging". This category consists of 1 response. It is indicated with the words "*menantang*". It can be seen that the students feel it challenging to do oral English test which only lasts for 5 minutes. They are challenged to perform their English ability well as well as managing the time.

The second category is classified as a category of "triggering the students to learn". It is indicated with the words "*membantu kita untuk bisa tepat waktu*" (learning to be on time), "make me learn", and "*bagus untuk melatih*" (good to train me). It appears in 4 responses. The students perceive that the type of the test enables them to learn something from it. They can learn the attitude of being on time in managing the presentation time and also make them train their skill especially their speaking skill, which is not becoming their preference. It is good to know the fact that those students find it exciting to join this kind of oral English test. Moreover, the next category describes that the student finds the test to be very good as an instrument of assessment. It can be observed from the responses with the keywords "*sangat bagus*" (very excellent).

The fourth category describes that the test was just in average level in accommodating the students' competence. It is indicated with the words "*cukup*" which mean enough in English. There are 4 responses that belong to this category. However, the last category describes that the oral English test that is held only in 5 minutes is failed in accommodating the students' English skill. There are 5 responses in the "failed" category. The words "*sangat sulit, sangat cepat, sangat kurang, terlalu singkat*" (very difficult, very fast, very limited, too short) indicate the negative responses towards the implementation of that oral English test. This may be due to the natural skill of the students which writing, which cannot be accommodated with this kind of test. Thus, they find it failed to assess their English skills. The problem dealing with the time becomes the most dominating problem faced by the students.

3.5 Responses towards the feedback in the form of rubric sheet

Having done the oral English test, the students are given rubric sheet which explain their score on their oral performance. This rubric assesses their English performance in terms of fluency, vocabulary, content, etc. The responses from the students towards the rubrics are analyzed in this section.

The researcher classified the 14 responses that is about the rubrics into 2 big categories. The first category is classified into the positive response towards the feedback in the form of rubric sheet. There are 11 students of all who felt that the feedback in the form of rubric sheet really is useful for them. They said that those rubrics are able to help them to know how good/how bad their skill are and also help them to know their strength and weakness so that they can decide the exact action to improve the specific skills. It is indicated with the words "*membantu untuk mengetahui*" (help us to know). Those results shows that although the students with writing preference are tested by using oral test, the feedback that they get in the form of rubric sheet is perceived to be useful for them in improving their skills, particularly in speaking. No matter the result is, the students are already satisfied with the detail feedback that they get. It is

in line with several theories saying “rubrics facilitate student awareness of learning goals as well as the application of feedback, both important in the assessment and learning cycle” (Brookhart, 2003; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Besides, “students indicated rubrics were helpful in completing assignments”, and as in Andrea and Du (2005), they have a belief that “rubrics gave them insight into teacher expectations”.

On the contrary the second category is classified into the negative responses. There are 3 responses, which belong to this. Those responses show that due to their bad result; the students consider that the feedback in the rubric sheet is not good enough to give them the feedback towards what they have performed in the oral English test. It is indicated with the words “*kurang memuaskan*” and “*nilai tidak bagus*” (it is not satisfying enough and the score is not so good). Those students with visual learning style of writing do not get any excitement and joy when they work with something with auditory English exposures. It is because the inappropriateness of the instrument of assessment with the English skill that they prefer.

4. CONCLUSION

From the result of this research, it can be summed up that there are 3 important points related to the implementation of oral English test towards the non-English major students who have visual learning style of writing preference. The first result shows the nature of students' competence towards the test difficulty level. It is found out that most of the students find it difficult to accomplish the oral English test. It is natural and normal due to their preference skill in writing. The second result shows that although the test is considered to be difficult, most of the students find it challenging, the test is already able to accommodate their competence and skills and they are satisfied with it and at least they find the test to be in the average / medium quality in being able to accommodate their skill. The last result shows the effectiveness of feedback in the form of rubrics. Most of the students take the benefits through the feedback they get from the rubrics. Thus, the students have a description of their strength and weaknesses, which is crucial for the future improvement.

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