

## ASSESSING WRITING OF EFL STUDENTS OF AKADEMI MARITIM NUSANTARA CILACAP

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### **Abstract**

*English as a foreign language is always be considered as a difficult language to be learned. There are four language skills that must be mastered, those are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Writing is the most difficult skill to be learned among those four. In order to know the mastery of writing ability, assessment should be done. Assessing writing sometimes difficult to be done because lecturer does not know what to be done and how to assess writing ability. This paper attempts to help the lecturer understand the key factors in assessing writing called validity and reliability. The goal of this paper is to enrich the knowledge of the lecturer about the technique of assessing writing.*

*Key words: writing ability, assessing writing, validity, reliability*

### **INTRODUCTION**

English is always been considered as a difficult language to achieved for English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. Unlike Mathematics or Physics, gaining accuracy and fluency in English takes a lot of time for the students. English has already been inserted in the curriculum of the education of Indonesia from 1<sup>st</sup> grade of elementary school to Bachelor grade. Even so, learning English is always difficult since English is a foreign language.

Learning English consists of receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills are listening and reading while productive skills are speaking and writing. Receptive skills meaning that students do not need to produce language to do these. They just have to receive and understand it. Productive skills are the hardest thing to do especially for EFL students. In Indonesia, writing skill probably the most difficult skill to learn. Cando-Guanoluisa et al (2017:905) said that students should pay attention to other things in order to achieve writing competence such as planning, organization, expressions, vocabulary, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Yi (2009:53) said that the importance of writing skills is growing in tandem with increasing international interactions/transactions and opportunities to study abroad. Working in port management area requires students to understand the English Correspondence. Students have to understand so many types of letter such as claim letter, adjustment letter, etc. they have to fill in certain information in the letter. The format of the letter has already been given in the book. Even so, students are still facing many difficulties in writing letter.

Lecturers of English Correspondence subject may also face many difficulties. First thing first is that they have to choose between grammatical accuracy or content accuracy. As we know that teaching grammar has already been given since grade 1 of elementary school. It means that students should have been understand with grammar. The fact is different. Students always consider grammar as the hardest thing to learn. The curriculum of English Correspondence subject says no grammar teaching. The truth is that many letters made by the students contain many

grammatical errors. When the grammar is error, the message of the letter may also error. Based on those problems, lecturer should choose whether he or she sacrifices writing ability or the curriculum.

## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1.1. The Definition of Writing**

Speaking and writing are two difficult skills in learning English since they must be produced correctly in order to make interlocutors understand the message. Among those two skills, empirically, speaking is easier than writing. When people speak, they can be supported by their surrounding and environment to help them deliver the message. They can even use sign to help them when they cannot find correct word.

Unlike speaking, to deliver message in written language is much more difficult. People must use at least readable utterances to deliver message. The system of written language is much more complex. People may misunderstand of a message because of a single mistake.

Writing according to Ghazi in Mashjari (2010:16) is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas, and make them visible and concrete. It means that writer should think and learn to motivate the communication in the written product. To be able to communicate using written language, people must also understand some skills such as vocabularies, generating ideas, and grammar.

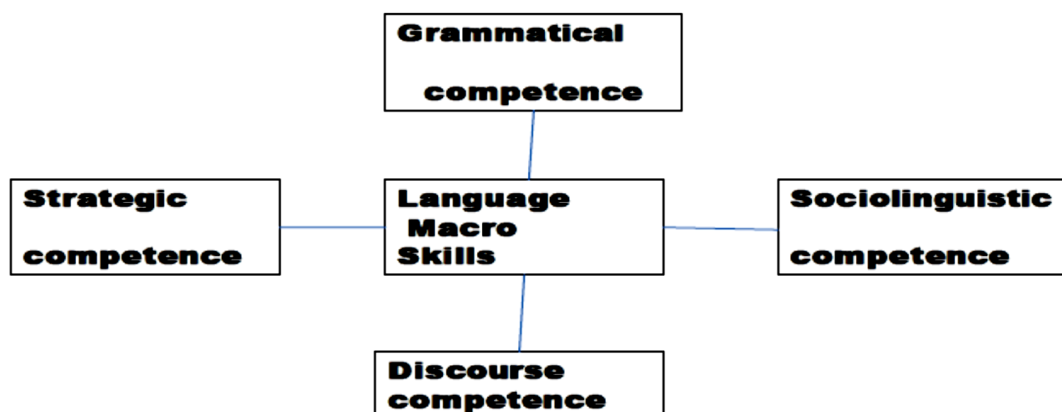
Writing needs a lot of learning and practice. Kitao (1996:2) defines 6 (six) components of writing, those are: (1) grammatical ability; (2) lexical ability; (3) mechanical ability; (4) stylistic skills; (5) organizational skills; and (6) judgments of appropriacy.

Grammatical ability deals with the ability to write English in grammatically correct utterances. Lexical ability meaning that people should choose appropriate words for certain use. Sometimes when people speak, interlocutor do not see the punctuation or even the capitalization of words. Having mechanical ability meaning people should have the ability to use punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and so on in proper way. Stylistic skills deal with the ability to use sentences and paragraph correctly. Organizational skill is the ability to organize written work according to the convention of English, including the order and selection of materials; while judgments of appropriacy is the ability to make judgment about what appropriate depending on the task, the purpose of writing, and the audience.

### **1.2. Communicative Competence**

Savignon (1972:8) defines that communicative competence is the ability to function in a truly communicative setting. Other same definition comes from Ahmed and Pawar. They (2018:302) divide the term of communicative competence into two words; communicative and competence. They pin point the word competence as the main idea of that term. Competence is about knowledge, ability, and capability while communicative deals with exchange or interaction.

It can be said that communicative competence is about a competence to communicate. It is the ability to deliver a message in a right way. the term '*communicative competence*' is the knowledge of the linguistic and not linguistic rules of communication and the skill to use such knowledge effectively and appropriately in real life situations for the purpose of fulfilling communicative goals



**Figure 1. Model of Communicative Competence**

Canale and Swain in Ahmed and Pawar (2018:307)

Grammatical competence is a knowledge of lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, grammar and phonology. Understanding the right message from what has been said or written need sociolinguistic competence. That competence is about interpreting and producing utterances in social context. Strategic competence is made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication. Discourse competence represents the ability to combine language structures and language functions into a coherent and cohesive text.

### 1.3. Assessment, Evaluation, and Testing

Ur in Drid (2018:293) differentiate between the term of assessment, evaluation, and testing. He said that assessment focuses on the learners while evaluation relates to courses and testing deals with the teacher. Ur said that assessment is an approach to collect information about a learner's development in learning. The source of evidence can come from formal tests, essays, and interview.

Harris and McCan in Drid (2018:293) define that evaluation is about embracing all factors affecting the learning process, including syllabus objectives, course design, materials, methodology and teacher performance. Drid (2018:294) said that testing focuses on gathering data to estimate learning. Shermis and Viesta (2011:2) defined that assessment is a set of procedures designed to provide information about students' development, growth, and achievement as compared with a standard.

Williams (2003:297) defined the difference between assessment and evaluation.

**Assessment designates four related processes: deciding what to measure, selecting or constructing appropriate measurement instruments, administering the instruments, and collecting information. Evaluation, on the other hand, designates the judgments we make about students and their progress toward achieving learning outcomes on the basis of assessment information.**

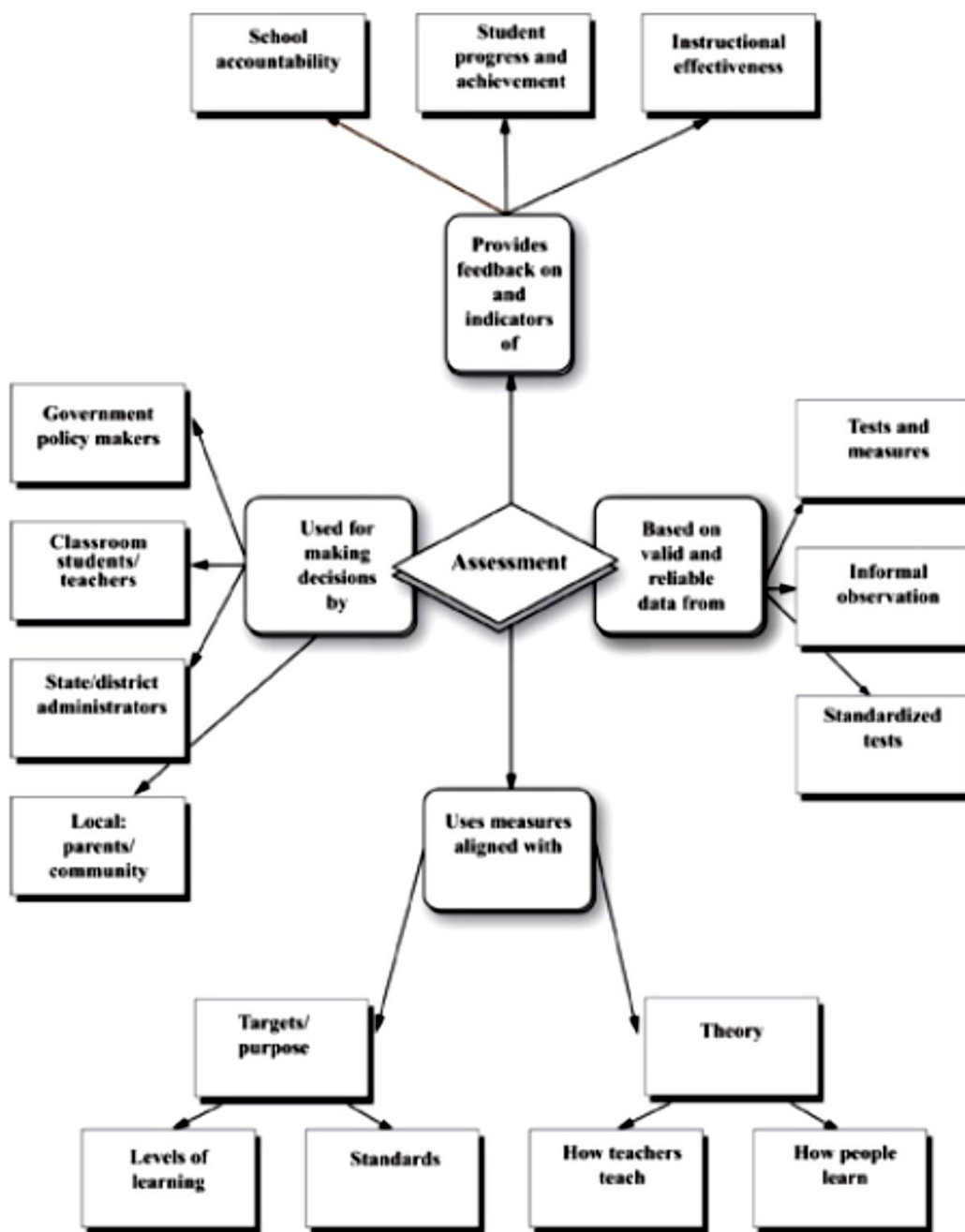


Figure 2. The components of assessment employed in education  
Shermis and Viesta (2011:5)

### 1.3.1. Types of Assessment

Lecturer should consider some things when he or she wants to assessing something. Lecturers should know when they have to measure something. After that, they have to know the method of assessment and the purpose of the assessment. Shermis and Viesta (2011:6) mentioned 3 (three) stages of assessment,

those are **before learning**, **during learning**, and **after learning**. **Before learning** means that lecturer assess students in order to know the readiness of the students. Understanding the knowledge known (or not) by the class is important for lecturer to plan the teaching and learning process including the level of material which can be given for the class.

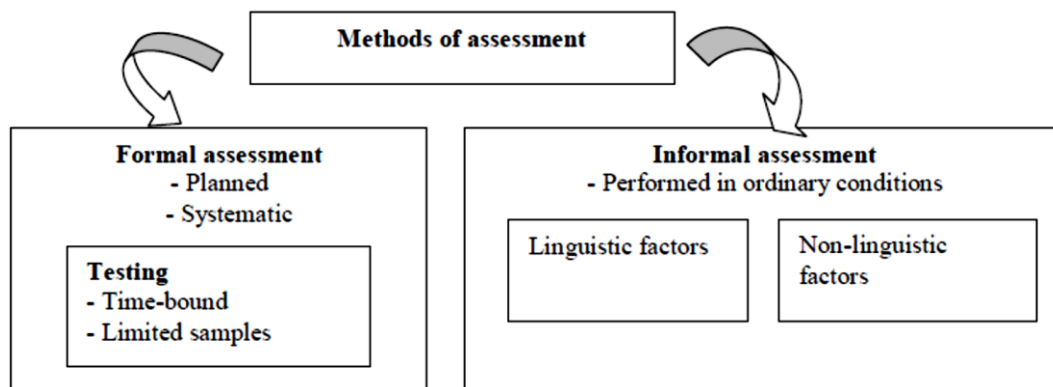
After lecturer understands the level of the class and the plan of teaching and learning process, lecturer can assess the student **during learning** process. This type of assessment helps the lecturer to know the progress of each student against the effectiveness of the teaching and learning method given for the students. This type of assessment is also important to evaluate the method, material, content, and skills used by lecturer. The result of this assessment may also help the lecturer to plan the next step of teaching and learning method.

**After learning** assessment is used to make a decision of each student. Lecturer can do grading for each student. This assessment can also be used to evaluate the curriculum and everything happened during the class.

Drid (2018:295) explained that there are two methods of assessment which can

be used by lecturer, those are formal assessment and informal assessment. Some researchers like Harris and McCann said that formal assessment is likely same with testing. Brown on the other hand said different idea. Brown (2004:6) said that formal assessment is systematic and planned in order to give lecturer a clear view of the student's achievement. He also said that the difference between formal assessment and test is that test is time-bound and gives only small samples of data.

Different way is shown in informal assessment. Brown (2004:5) explained that 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.



**Figure 3. Method of Assessment (Drid; 2018:295)**

According to Brown (2004:6), there are 2 (two) functions of assessment; those are formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment deals with forming the students' competency and skill. The goal is helping the students to nurture their competency and skill. On the other hand, summative assessment is used to measure the student's achievement. It usually occurs at the end of course.

#### **1.4. Assessing Writing**

Assessing writing is quite complicated. Weigle (2002:39-41) pointed out that there are two principles factor in assessing writing which make it complicated, those are the variety of writing purposes, styles, and genres and the bias of the judgments. There are so many purposes of writing such as essay, speech, and testing. Those purposes make writing ability is so extensive. Scoring or judging a written task is sometimes hard to be objective. Bias of the judgment means that the lecturer may show an inconsistency in scoring written task.

Drid (2018: 297-299) and Williams (2003:301) said that there are at least 2 (two) key factors in assessment, those are: **validity** and **reliability**. **Validity** is about what to measure. The lecturer should measure what was taught. To make the assessment valid, first thing is teach based on the curriculum. After that, assess based on what the lecturer taught.

**Reliability** deals with consistency and objectivity. Even sometimes to be consistent and objective is difficult, there is no other way. Standardized multiple choice test like National Examination is reliable because the government follows specific protocol for administration and scoring. There is only one way to make assessment more reliable. The lecturer should make an agreement with the student on what constitutes a good writing and what is not. When the standard has been agreed, both sides will stick to the agreement and the assessment will be reliable and objective.

Many techniques can be used for the assessment of writing ability for EFL students. Drid (2018:299-303) defined at least 2 (two) techniques of assessing writing for EFL students, those are **indirect assessment** and **direct assessment**. **Indirect assessment** is used to see the ability involved in the writing of the students such as grammars, usage, and punctuation. Some types can be used in the indirect assessment is multiple choice questions and error analysis. **Direct assessment** means that the writing ability is directly evaluated. Unlike indirect assessment which only spot the right answers without production, direct assessment shows student's competency in writing. It means that students should write something based on the instruction and curriculum.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

Writing is probably the most difficult skill than other three language skills. Teaching writing is sometimes difficult to be done because the lecturer should determine what to be taught, what to be assessed, and what the perfect technique to be used. This paper shows the way of assessing writing and the technique that can be used in assessing writing. Assessing writing is not as difficult as writing itself as long as the lecturer stick to two things called validity and reliability. Teaching writing does not mean that the lecturer should sacrifice one thing between curriculum and writing ability. Both of them can be assessed in the same time using direct and indirect assessment. Once again, as long as the lecturer understand about validity and reliability, there is nothing to be sacrificed.

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