

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR EFL STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the implementation of the alternative assessments for EFL student writing. To collect data for this study, information was obtained from an English teacher teaching at an A accredited Public Junior High School in Bondowoso. To make the process of data collection and analysis easier, some instruments were used, which were observation, interview, and documentation. The findings showed that there were some alternative assessments that the teacher applied. The alternative assessments applied were story telling, writing samples, portfolio, teacher observation, and conference. The portfolio assessment was no longer done since she found some difficulties and obstacles in applying it. There were two considerations of choosing certain language assessments. The first consideration was the language skills that were going to be assessed. The second consideration was the applicability of an alternative assessment. The applied alternative assessments gave positive effect to the students compared to the traditional ones, in term of gaining the students' mastery and participation.

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed a marked increase in the use of alternative assessments in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This trend has come at a time when the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)/English as a Second Language (ESL) is witnessing a notable shift from structural teaching approaches to communicative, humanistic, and learner centered approaches (Shaaban, 2001). It started from a disagreement to the concept that all people and all skills could be measured by traditional tests, a novel concept emerged and it was called "alternative assessment". At least, there are three factors that have contributed to the demands for assessment reform: the changing nature of educational goals, the

relationship between assessment and teaching and learning, and the limitations of the current-methods of recording performance and reporting credit (Marzano et al., 1993).

In Indonesia, the changing of English-teaching and learning goals also lead to the changing of evaluation process. It is stated that students of junior high school are expected to master language at the level of functional skills. In this case, they are expected to manage both to master not only English language components (grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary) but also the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and to be able to use them in their daily life (Depdiknas, 2004). These shortcomings make it clear that new approaches to assessment are needed if we are to satisfactorily assess students' ability to meet the lifelong learning standards and

demanding content standards and outcomes.

The second factor contributing to the need for assessment reform involves the relationship between the assessment and the processes of teaching and learning. Both learning and assessment are tied closely and intimately. The assessment given by teachers can measure students' progress and help teachers check whether the learning objectives have been achieved. Assessment should be a supportive good of teaching, and if necessary, exert a corrective influence on bad teaching (Hughes, 1989). In this case, assessment has both a direct and indirect effect on learning. Assessment directly affects learning in that instruction is commonly skewed toward what is assessed, and, obviously, what is taught affects what is learned. The task in the test situation must include the real-life situation. Therefore, the tasks must be made authentic. An authentic test is the one that reproduces a real-life situation in order to examine the students' ability to cope with it (Doye, 1991). The test must also integrate the activities of measuring learning outcomes with the whole learning process.

A third factor driving assessment reform is the manner in which achievement data are recorded and reported. Critics point out that the traditional methods do not provide meaningful feedback about students' performance. For example, at the classroom level, grades are the most common means of reporting a student's performance. Course grades are generally calculated by averaging the result of various measures. Unfortunately, this approach can too often result in a distorted picture of a student's true proficiency. An alternative approach to classroom reporting documents students' grasp of knowledge

and skills is needed because such a system is grounded by a specific performance criteria. One advantage of having such reports is that they are more informative and meaningful to students, teachers, parents, and the general school community (Marzano et al., 1993).

In using the terms of the alternatives, different experts have different terms, such as classroom-based assessment, students-centered assessment, process assessment, authentic assessment, and alternative assessment. Alternative assessment can be described as assessment that differs from the multiple-choice, timed, one-shot approaches that characterize most standardized testing (Marzano et al, 1993). Furthermore, these new assessments stress the importance of examining the processes as well as the product of learning. They encourage teachers and learners to move beyond the "one right answer" and to challenge students to explore the possibilities inherent in open-ended, complex problems, and to draw their own inferences

One of the characteristics of alternative assessment above is authentic. "The term authentic is to describe the multiple forms of assessments that reflect students' learning, achievement, motivation, and attitude on instructionally-relevant classroom activities" (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). Mueller (2003) in Oktifa (2005) states that "authentic assessment is multiple forms of assessment in which the students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills".

An assessment is authentic when it focuses on the students' analytical skill; ability to integrate what they have learned; creativity; ability to work collaboratively

in written and oral expression skills. It values the learning process as much as the finished product. “In authentic assessments, students do science experiments, conduct social-science research, write stories and report, read and interpret literature, and solve problems that have real world application” (Kerka, 1995 in Oktifa, 2005). In other words, the students learn how to apply their skills to authentic tasks and projects that are related with their daily lives.

From the explanation of alternative assessment, it can be concluded that it has some differences from traditional assessment. The differences can be seen in the following table (Brown, 2004)

Table 2.1 Traditional and alternative assessment

Traditional assessment	Alternative assessment
One shot, standardized exams	Continuous long-term assessment
Timed, multiple-choice format	Untimed, free-response format
Decontextualized test items	Contextualized communicative tasks
Scores suffice feedback	Individualized feedback and washable alternative assessments applied, the
Focus on the “right” answer	Criterion-referenced scores
Summative	Open-ended, creative answers
Oriented to product	Oriented to process
Non-interactive performance	Interactive performance
Foster intrinsic motivation	Fosters intrinsic motivation

In the language teaching field, the alternative assessment is needed to help teachers and administrators make decisions about students’ linguistic abilities, their level of proficiency, and their achievement. It can also be an effective means of improving the teaching process. In other words, it provides some benefits, both for the teachers and the learners. Knowing that the alternative assessments play important roles in the teaching and learning process, the English teachers have to know the way

of preparing, implementing, and reflecting the alternative assessments to measure the students’ success in learning. In addition, the English teachers not only need to assess the students’ by using pen and paper tests but also by using some alternative assessments to measure students’ progress since the students’ success in learning a language is not measured by their final test score, but by their progress on day-to-day learning

It is important to know whether the English teachers really have good preparation and implementation of the alternative assessments in the classroom well. When the teachers have made the right way of assessing the students’ performance, they will directly know the students’ language mastery, including their strengths and weaknesses during their learning. Finally, she/he can find the best

way to make the students able to master the language. A study on how the alternative assessment is implemented is essential to consider the kinds/format of alternative assessments applied, the considerations of implementing certain alternative assessments, and the effect of its implementation on the students’ learning process.

METHOD

The design of this study was descriptive qualitative since it attempted to describe the present condition of a phenomenon systematically, factually, and accurately. This study was designed to obtain information and description concerning with how the alternative assessments were implemented at SMPN 13 Malang in terms of kinds/format of alternative assessments used by the

teacher, the teacher's considerations of choosing certain alternative assessments, and the effect of its implementation on the students' learning process.

In order to collect sufficient data for this study, the information was obtained from one source. One of English teachers teaching at a public junior high school in Malang who taught at four classes in grade 8 was chosen as the source of information. She was chosen for several considerations as found out in the preliminary study. First, she implemented alternative assessment in her classrooms and knew well on how to implement several kinds of the assessment. Second, her students had average and poor language proficiency but she tried to make them enjoy learning English and created good language environment for learning English. Third, she had taught English for more than 10 years. And fourth, she had sufficient knowledge about the recent development of language teaching.

The information collected from the teacher consisted of kinds/format of alternative assessments used by the teacher, the teacher's considerations of choosing certain alternative assessments, and the effect of its implementation on the students' learning process. Since this study employed descriptive-qualitative design, the main instrument used in this research was human instrument, which meant that the researcher herself, who collected the data, interpreted the data, reduced the data, organized the data, analyzed the data, and drew the conclusion or the result of the research. To make the process of data collection and analysis easier, the researcher used some supporting instruments, which were observation, interview, and documentation.

The first was observation. Observation took a very important role in

this study since the researcher wanted to figure out the real activities in the classroom when the teacher was implementing the alternative assessment. Through observation, the researcher would observe and take notes on the process of the implementation of the alternative assessments and the activities took place in the classrooms. By doing observation, the researcher could check whether the alternative assessments stated by the teacher during the interview were really implemented or not. Observation sheets were used during observation process. These observation sheets contained the report of teacher's and students' action and other events happened during the study. The researcher sat at the back row of the classroom and wrote down the activities going on in the classroom during on the observation sheets.

The second was interview. In this study, the interviewees were the English teacher and some students. From the teacher, the interview was intended to get more detailed information on kinds/format of the alternative assessments applied, the considerations of implementing certain alternative assessments, and the effect of its implementation on the students' learning process. The researcher also asked her attitude towards the process assessment. From the students, the researcher wanted to get more information about their attitude toward language assessment. The interview was done before and after the teaching activities. An interview guide was used to help the process of the interview so that the intended purpose and information of the interview could be obtained.

The last was documentation. Documentation was the last instrument used in this study. This documentation was

in the form of the teacher's syllabus, lesson plan, the alternative assessment rubric, the students' work, and the students' scores. The researcher borrowed them from the teacher and analyzed them directly. The process of data collection was conducted by employing all instruments used.

The relevant data were organized in such a way to describe kinds/format of the alternative assessments applied, the considerations of implementing certain alternative assessments, and the effect of its implementation on the students' learning process, while non-relevant data were discarded. The data collection process used data redundancy theory. Data redundancy was also known as data saturation. It meant that the process of data collection ended whenever there was no new phenomenon/events found. If the researcher still found new phenomenon/events during the study, s/he should keep on continuing the study.

The data were then analyzed descriptively since the research design was descriptive and the data were in the form of verbal data. The analysis was done while collecting the data. Before being analyzed, the data were classified based on the topics of discussion. Those topics were kinds/format of the alternative assessments applied, the considerations of implementing certain alternative assessments, and the effect of its implementation on the students' learning process. After the data analysis process had been done, the data were used to describe the implementation of alternative assessment for EFL students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Kinds of Alternative Assessments Used by the Teacher

There are twelve alternative assessment summed up from several sources. They are oral interview, story or text retelling, role-play, writing samples, projects or exhibitions, experiment and demonstrations, students-teacher conference, performance-based assessment, English teacher observation, portfolio, journals, self and peer-assessment (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Brown, 2004; Herman et al, 1992). From these twelve alternative assessments, the teacher applied five of them, namely story telling, writing samples, portfolio, teacher observation, and conference. However, she did not implement portfolio anymore because of several considerations. She did not apply any assessments that required group work or collaboration among students since she found that the work was dominated by only one or two students which had higher level of language proficiency than the other members of their group. She could apply more alternative assessments if she wants to improve her student's language proficiency. She should have given more chances to her students if she wanted to find more challenging assessments to make her students to be more actively participated in the discussion.

In implementing the chosen alternative assessment, the teacher did not directly scored the activities occurred in the classroom. From the interview, the teacher said that she usually told the student that they would be assessed prior to the intended assessing time. She also told her students that every answer, question, and active participation would be

scored. From the observation, it could be seen that whenever she entered the classroom and would assess the students' active participation, she reminded the students that if they wanted to get good grade, they should participate actively in the classroom. The interviewed students also said that they were happy being assessed by using that method since they did not feel afraid and nervous. They also found it challenging.

The first implemented alternative assessment was story telling. This kind of assessment is based on or closely resembles the actual classroom activities. Story or text retelling can be in the form of oral or written activities and can be rated on how they describe the event in the story, their response to the story or text, and/or the language used. "The English teacher and the students can ask probing questions about the text or the story. The students can also be asked to create different ending of the story" (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996).

From the interview and observation, it was found then that the students were asked to tell a certain story or retell their experience in the past. The theme was based on the genres that had been taught before. For example, when they have learned about a recount text, the teacher said, "Well, we have not seen for a long time. Can you please tell me what you did during your holiday?", when she had taught a descriptive text, she would ask the student to describe their friends'/teachers' physical appearance, et cetera.

She gave ten minutes to the students to prepare for the assessment process. After the allocated time was over, she asked whoever was ready to have the first opportunity to speak in front of the

class. If the assessment process could not be finished that day, she continued to the next meeting until all students got their chance to be scored. She said that even the most silent student did the job well although they only spoke in two or three sentences. She found that by doing this assessment, she could see her students' real speaking ability. Three of the students also found that they were encouraged to do their best performance since they would be scored. One of them said that since he was not good in English, he only made a short story telling.

The second was writing samples. According to O' Malley and Pierce (1996), writing samples may include expressive or narrative writing (a personal experience, story, or poem), expository or informative writing (writing to explain or clarify a concept of a process, often in content area), and persuasive reports (to convince others). In this type of assessment, students are asked to write in different genres, such as: letter, essay, a newspaper report, etc. The teacher used this assessment to measure her students' writing skill. From the interview, the teacher told a lot about the implementation of writing samples in her classroom. In implementing it, she considered what genre she would use to decide what theme and topic that the students had to write. She also told the student that she would assess her students' writing one meeting before.

One example of the implementation of writing sample was when they had learned a recount text. The teacher directly asked the students to write a composition about their unforgettable event or experience in the past. During the interview, the teacher said that actually, before asking them to write the

composition, she had to guide them by giving some leading questions, such as “Do you have an unforgettable event?”, “When was it?”, “what was it?”, “What happened at that time?”.

The third alternative assessment was portfolio. Genesee and Upshur (1996) in Brown (2004:254) defines “portfolio as a purposeful collection of students’ work that demonstrates.... their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas”. A portfolio that is based on a systematic assessment procedure can provide accurate information about the depth and breadth of a student’s capabilities in many domains of learning.

The teacher herself thought that portfolio was a way of documenting the students’ work. From the interview, she mentioned that she selected the students’ best work. It showed that the teacher had already had a right understanding about the concept of portfolio. Successful portfolio development will depend on number of steps. A synthesis of the steps is (Brown, 2004; Kemp and Toperof, 1998 in Oktifa, 2005; Nitko, 2001): 1) identifying teaching goals to assess through the portfolio, 2) introducing the idea of portfolio to the class, 3) specifying portfolio content, 4) giving clear and detailed guidelines for portfolio presentation, 5) notifying other interested parties, 6) preparation period, 7) assessing the portfolio and giving feedback, 8) student-teacher conferences, and 9) follow up.

From the interview, the teacher said that when she implemented portfolio assessment, the steps she used were 1) telling the class about the idea of portfolio. In this step, she also informed the students how much weigh the portfolio will have in determining the final grade, 2) communicating teaching goals to assess

through the portfolio so that both the teacher and students knew what to achieve, 3) specifying the content of the portfolio, 4) giving feedback by returning the students’ work to the owner, and 5) follow up. After the portfolio was completed, she had an exhibition of the students’ best work.

There are several different stages obtained by comparing the stages of what the experts suggest and what used by the teacher. First, the teacher did not give clear and detailed guidelines for portfolio presentation. Giving clear and detailed guideline is important since unfamiliar ways of teaching and assessment are potentially make the students confused. Some students may have different understanding about what they should do. Therefore, it is important to present the portfolio guidelines clearly, and to go over the guidelines. There should also be written guidelines to back-up the point discussed and for references in preparing the portfolio. It is helpful to prepare these guidelines in question-and answer form. These can be written in the students’ mother tongue if necessary (Brown, 2004).

Second, before posting the students’ work around the classroom wall, the teacher did not notify other interested parties, such as school principal, other teachers, and other students from other classes. The teacher admitted that the portfolio assessment was no longer done since she got some difficulties and obstacles in applying it. For instance, when she returned the work to her students to study her feedback on their work, she could not get the papers back since most of her students lost it. This caused some difficulties to document the students’ work. Therefore, when she was finally able to display the students’ work, they were very

happy. Others, whose work was not chosen, were also motivated to do better to get good grade and the possibility to be chosen to be displayed. However, it did not last long since some days after the students' works were posted on the wall, the vice-headmaster called her. She was not allowed to post anything on the wall since the building was just newly renovated. Other teachers also complained and said that the display made the wall of the classroom looked dirty.

Third, she did not have any "preparation period". She did not allocate any devotion-class-time (schedule) to reflection and self-assessment practice and to portfolio preparation due to the large number of her students. If she could make the schedule prior to the student-teacher conference, she would know the students' difficulties and progress in doing their assessment.

Forth, she did not hold a student-teacher conference. Since the teacher did not have any preparation period, it affected the next stages, students-teacher conferences. An important element of the portfolio is that the teacher should have short individual meetings with each student, in which the students' progress is discussed and goals are set up for a future meeting. The teacher and the students should document these meeting and keep the goals in mind when choosing the topics for future meeting. This is the chance for the students to negotiate the portfolio grade using evidence of achievement according to agreed goals.

The fourth alternative assessment was observation. A teacher observation is a systematic, planned procedure for real time, almost surreptitious recording of student verbal and nonverbal behavior. Virtually, a teacher notices every question,

every response, and almost every nonverbal behavior at some level of perception. Without administering a test or a quiz, a teacher is able to know a lot about his/her students (Brown, 2004).

The teacher conducted teacher observation everyday during the teaching and learning activities. From the observation, the teacher observed every answer, question and active participation that the students did. She gave one point for each student's participation. If she found a student never took part in classroom activities, she asked the student to answer the question and gave him/her one point. She reminded the students that if they took part in classroom activities, she would give them points.

While the students were writing their answer on the whiteboard, the teacher took notes and scored the students. She used this method to make the students active although it sometimes was only a pretend. By making notes on all the students' participation, she found that they were more active than before. The students admitted that they were both highly encouraged and motivated since they had the opportunity to get the points. They usually tried very hard to be the first to answer the question or to raise their hands.

Face validity and content validity are likely to get high marks since observations are likely to be integrated into the ongoing process of a course. If an observation goes relatively unnoticed by the student, the authenticity of the observation will be high since the students will do little play-acting. They will show their real language ability and attitude in the classroom (Brown, 2004).

The last alternative assessment was conference. In conferences, we must assume that the teacher plays the role of a

facilitator and a guide, not of an administrator of a formal assessment. In this intrinsically motivating atmosphere, the students need to understand that the teacher is a guide who is encouraging self-reflection and improvement to them. "Conferences are, by nature, formative not summative and their primary purpose is to offer positive washback" (Brown, 2004).

Actually, conferences are not limited to drafts of the written work. The teacher can also do conferences for reviewing portfolios, responding to journals, advising on a students' plan for an oral presentation, assessing a proposal for a project, giving feedback on the result of a performance on a test, clarifying understanding of a reading, exploring strategy-based options for enhancement or compensation, focusing on aspects of oral production, checking students' self assessment of a performance, setting personal goals for the near future, and assessing general progress in a course (Brown, 2004).

From the interview, the teacher made one-on-one meeting with the students but it was only limited to several students due to the great number of the class members. The teacher did the conference with those whose achievement was low or did not fulfill the minimum passing level. Those whose average final score was lower or less than the minimum standard criteria of success were called by the teacher.

The Consideration of Choosing Certain Alternative Assessment and The Effect of the Implementation on the Students' Language Learning

When a teacher is using only one assessment tool, such as multiple-choice test, she/he cannot meet all the purpose of assessment and measure the students' progress and ability. Conventional summative and formative evaluation cannot provide information about the students' growth in learning (Parlet & Cronbach in William, 1994 in Oktifa, 2005). A teacher needs an assessment tool that can provide more information about his or her students' learning progress. Wiggins (1992) in Zainul (2001) mentioned that "authentic assessment is an alternative way to assess student's ability since the traditional assessment cannot show the students' progress in learning accurately".

From the observation and interview, the teacher implied that in addition to test, she applied alternative assessment since alternative assessment could show the students' real language proficiency. There were two considerations why she applied certain alternative assessments.

The first consideration was the language skills to be assessed. She mentioned that there were four skills to be assessed. They were speaking, listening, reading, and writing and each language skill had different kind of assessment. Before assessing her students, she made sure that they have mastered the materials to be assessed. Each language skill was assessed after the students had learned and reached certain materials of one language competence.

The teacher mentioned that she usually told her students that she would assess one of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) a week before the assessing day without giving them the topic. For example, one language competency had twelve hours or six

meetings time allotment. Therefore, after the fifth meeting, she would assess one of the language skills. All of the students who were interviewed said that the teacher usually told them every time she would assess them a week or several days before. It has the same way like what Yunian and Ness (1999) suggested about ongoing program evaluation. They implied that formal ongoing program evaluations may be at one-month intervals or at each stage of the courses while informal evaluation may be carried out whenever the teacher and students think it is necessary.

For listening, she usually planned and constructed the questions in order that she would gain maximal result from the assessment process. When she would assess her students' speaking ability, the speaking assessment was also planned carefully, including the kinds/activities, form, and scoring criteria. The same things were also done for reading and writing.

According to Yunian and Ness (1999), in the preparation period of the language assessment program, the teacher will need to have complete program documents including the curriculum, syllabus, and any other related materials. The teaching materials should be evaluated to see that they correspond with the program's requirement and teaching methodology. The learners' data, like personal information, language proficiencies, language learning strategies, and other psychological factors, should also be collected. From the data collected and studied, the teacher should have a thorough knowledge of the program and the learners. Then a detailed teaching plan can be written.

The second consideration was the applicability of an alternative assessment. The teacher admitted that not all of the

alternative assessments that she planned worked well in the classroom due to several factors, such as the students' ability, students' sense of belonging, and other parties' different attitude toward alternative assessments in the school. Once, she applied portfolio to measure students' writing ability. She had planned what task that the students had to be done and submitted. In the classroom, she mentioned the principle of portfolio assessment, including its goals. At first, it worked but after she returned the work to her students to study her feedback, she could not get the papers or work back since most of her students lost their work or torn by other students.

She did several ways to overcome the problems. First, to gain the students' motivation, she displayed her students' works on the wall of the classroom. The students were very happy, especially those whose works were displayed. Others were also motivated to do better in order to get good grade. However, it did not last long since some days later, the vice-headmaster called her. She was not allowed to post anything on the wall since the building was just newly renovated. Other teachers also complained and said that the works made the wall of the classroom looked dirty. Second, she asked her students to laminate their works but in order that their work were not torn by their friends. However, she did not continue doing this assessment because it cost a lot of money. These cases drove the teacher sad and made her reluctant to apply portfolio assessment. It is a good idea to have it applied again in the classroom by finding a way to overcome them. She can invite all school faculties to give them the clear perception toward the intended assessment. She can also encourage the students by giving them

more independent studies. Finally, she decided to apply simple assessments to be applied in the classroom, both by her and her students, such as dictation, question and answer, comprehension questions, dialogue, story retelling, writing samples, conference, and teacher observation.

The implementation of the alternative assessment gave positive effect on the students' process of learning and their learning outcomes. Prior to being given any alternative assessment, the students only did some pen and paper activities and tests to measure their language mastery. When they were exposed to different kinds of assessment, they highly participated during the teaching and learning process. From the interview, she stated that the activities applied by the teacher encourage them to be active in every classroom activity and avoid boredom in the classroom. Their language mastery also increased significantly as shown by their gained score of their daily task and final score. It was shown by the result of the students' final report of academic achievement conducted at the end of a semester. 87 percent of the students passed the standard of criteria of success.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In measuring the students' progress, in addition to test, the teacher used several kinds of alternative assessments. The alternative assessments that the teacher applied were story telling, writing samples, portfolio, teacher observation, and conference. The portfolio assessment was no longer done since she found some difficulties and obstacles in applying it. There were two considerations of choosing certain language assessments. The first

consideration was the language skills that were going to be assessed. The second consideration was the applicability of an alternative assessment. The applied alternative assessments gave positive effect to the students compared to the traditional ones, in term of gaining the students' mastery and participation.

Based on the findings of this study, some suggestions are recommended. The first is for the English teachers in general and specifically for the observed English teacher. The teacher should not give up easily when she found obstacles in implementing the alternative assessment. It is suggested that the teacher have them applied again in the classroom by finding a way to overcome them, such as inviting all school faculties and giving them the clear and correct perception toward the portfolio assessment.

This research only focuses on one English teacher in a Junior High School in Malang. Other further research which involves more teachers and schools is suggested to find out the implementation the alternative assessment.

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