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Teachers' Perception towards the Quality of Writing Assessment

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Abstract:

Writing assessment becomes an interesting issue lately since it is not a simple task for the teachers and English intructors. There are some important considerations for the teachers in conducting writing assessment such as time limitation for the students to write, and how to give a score. Previous research had discussed the issue of validity and reliability, yet it did not discuss the other main principles that build a good writing assessment. For this reason, this study examined senior high school English teachers' perception toward the quality of writing assessment. It was analized using five criteria from Brown and Abeywickrama (2010): practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback factor. There were 16 senior high school English teachers participated in this study. They were chosen by using random sampling technique. Open ended questionnaire was used in this descriptive research. The result showed that the writing assessment that usually used by the teachers were reliable, valid, and had washback. But, it had was not practical and authentic yet.

Keywords: teachers' perception, writing, assessment

1. Introduction

Conducting writing assessment is not a simple task for teachers since it is hard to measure the students' writing ability. Based on Hughes (2004), it is hard to measure writing ability accurately even it is constructed by a professional testing institutions. The fact that writing assessment in school is held by teachers, means that the teachers should construct a good writing assessment that can measure the students's writing skill. For this reason, conducting writing assessment become an interesting and an important issue among the teachers.

Some perceptions from the teachers toward writing assessment come up and need to be considered. For some of the teachers, assessing students' writing will take time and need an effort from the teacher to prepare the test, understand how to assess, and how to give a score. However, the important things that the teachers should know is the importance of giving feedback in the students' writing (Bataineh & Obeiah, 2016). Giving one-by-one conference is believed can give an effective feedback for the students rather than giving a kind of indirect feedback in the students' paper. Both teacher and students can discuss the students' writing directly. The advantages of one-by-one conference is that this kind of feedback is time-consuming. In the other hand, another study from Eslami (2014) proved that indirect feedback is better than indirect feedback. Besides direct and indirect feedback, the other way also offered by other researcher in giving a feeback, such as by using automated scoring which has an accpetable level of accuracy (Williamson, 2011). However, automated scoring will make a gap between the teachers and students since it is done by computer (Deane, Williams , Weng, & Trapani, 2013).

Actually, there are some reasons why writing assessment is important for both students and also the teachers. Besides conducting writing assessment is to get what the curriculum requires, for the teachers and students, writing assessment can show them the improvement of the students' skill. The teachers can get a draw about how far the students' skill has been developed. Writing assessment can also motivate the students to give their best performance in order to get a good score in writing. The study showed that when the students are given more test, they will strive more to perform better in every test (Park, 2004).

In Indonesian senior high school curriculum, curriculum 2006 (KTSP) and the latest curriculum 2013, the goal that should be achieved by the students is to produce a written text in various genre of text. Students are supposed to produce a written product through the writing process. Based on Brown (2000), the writing process itself including the process of thinking, drafting, and revising that involved some specialized skills. While Broad and Boyd (2011) said the writing process consist of the process of drafting, response, research, revision, editing, and publication.

Some issues relating to the process of writing above appear among the teachers and also the researchers. One of the issue is about the length of time that is needed by the students to finish their writing in writing test since the writing process is quiet time consuming and complex (Khongput, 2010). Besides that, to prepare the writing test, the teachers also need time and some consideration (Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015).

The time that is needed by the teachers and also the students to conduct the writing test in order to assess the students writing skill should also adjust to the time that is provided by the curriculum and syllabus. Since that, it need the creativity of the teachers to create and simplify the writing assessment. One of the way is to ask the students to write in a group. Writing in a group can provide the students the opportunity to do interaction, negotiation, and communication among the member of the group yet it also has control, power, and autonomy from one or more dominant students in the group (Al-Maamari, 2016). However, if this activity do not arrange well, it can lost some characteristics of a good assessment such as its practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback effect.

To design a good writing assessment, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) suggested five principles that should be considered. A good test should practical, reliable, valid, authentic, and has a washback effect. The practicality of the assessment can be seen from the time of the assessment including the length of the time, the cost, the administrative stuff, and things that might happen before and after the assessment is done. Then, the test is reliable when it is accurate, dependent, and consistent. While the validity requires the assessment that is appropriate, meaningful, and useful in the way it is in line with the purpose of the assessment. Next is authenticity in which the assessment similar to the target language task. The last is washback that is related to the effect of the assessment to the students.

From all of those principles in conducting writing assessment, reliability and validity of the assessment have become an interesting issue to be observed. Some research related to reliability and validity of the test have been done. The research that had been done by Abu Kassim et al (2018) found that two important sub-skills should be provided in writing, they were organization of the text, and language use. Related to the validity of the test, it was found that it is important to make sure the validation of writing scale in writing assessment. Then, the study about reliability was done by O'Neill (2011). He found that reliability has been seen through the statistical method or by the calculation. Due to this fact, he suggested that teacher and researchers should reframe reliability by developing the method to support writing assessment.

However, from the previous studies it was known that most of the researchers focus on one aspect of writing assessment. In fact, to conduct an appropriate writing assessment, the five principles that has been mentioned before should be taken into account. There should be practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. The research to study all of the principles is still needed. So, this study is supposed to find out the teachers' perception toward the writing assessment's quality and the quality of the writing assessment used by the teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Principles in Designing Writing Assessment.

Based on Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), there are five principles that should be followed in order to design writing assessment which are practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback.

The assessment can be called as pratical if it is simple in its procedure, administrative and also in the scoring process. The more simple these three elements, the more practical the assessment will be. So, practicality the practicality is much more emphasize on the test implementation and procedure rather than the importance of the test scores (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Farhady (2012) om Coombe et al. (2012) said that practicality of the test refers to the facilities that can be used by the test developer in conducting a writing test, including the facilities in preparing the test and in the implementation of the test itself. Different point of view also offered by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) that said practicality can be determined from everythings that involved in the test such as teachers as the test developers, and students as the test takers, cost, administrative stuffs and and the other things that happen before and after the assessment was done. They also defined some considerations in designing a practical test such as fits into the budget, can be completed within the specified time, has a clear instruction, uses an available human resources appropriately, uses the material resources that are available; consider the time for designing and scoring process.

The second principle is reliability of the test which is related to the assessment's accuracy, dependability, and consistency. Low reliability of the test shows that construct-irrelevant variance can reduce the precision of the test scores and its dependability (Slomp, 2016). One of the way to increased the reliability of the test is by stating a clear instructions to describe the criteria and avoiding ambigous terms (Nimehchisalem, 2010). The important things to be considered to get the reliability of the test are consistency among two or more administrations, clear instruction for the assessing process, the test has the same rubrics for scoring process, rely on those rubrics and should be used by the scorer, should have a clear instruction.

After reliability, the next principles that should be considered is validity of the test. The assessment is valid if it requires the students to perform a task that had been learned in the previous classroom lessons and also it should directly represent the aims of the lesson in which the assessment will be based (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). It is supported by the statement from Nimehchisalem (2010) that validity also related to the relevance of the content in the assessment to the concepts that had been taught by the teacher. Based on Farhady in his article in Coombe et al (2012), validity can also defined as to what degree the teast measures what it is supposed to be measured. Some principles to construct a valid test are measures what should be measured on that test, does not measure the topics that are not relevant, relies on empirical evidence as much as possible (performance), the result should be objective, gives information about ability of the test takers, and supported by a theoretical rationale or agreement.

The next principle is authenticity of the assessment. The authentic assessment should have a natural language; the items are contextualized, have an interesting, enjoyable, and humorous topic, and represent the real-world tasks (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). However, teachers can also use an alternative assessment to provide an authentic assessment (Mussawy, 2009). Base on Herrera et al (2007) in Mussawy (2009), this alternative assessment sometimes can be more authentic rather than the traditional one since it can assess the students' learning and development that invests

the quantitative and qualitative features. Some principles for authentic test such as uses a natural language, has contextualized items, has meaningful, relevant, interesting topics, has thematic organization to items, such as through a storyline or episode, provides kind of real-world tasks.

The fifth principles is washback which also known as backwash. It is kind of the effect of the test for both teachers and learners (Hughes, 2004). According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), the test will have a washback if the teachers give feeback and teachers and students discuss the result of the test together. Moreover, Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene (2012) said that feedback could help the students to improve their writing performance. The way to give feedback such as through sharing observations, concerns, and suggestions in direct and written form. A test that provides beneficial washback if it can affect what and how teachers teach, affect positively what and how learners learn, gives learners a chance to do preparation, there is a feedback for the learners, formative, and provides conditions for peak performance.

2.2 Related Research

Some research has been done related to this topic. First is research entitled *Changing Teachers' Attitude towards Writing, Teaching of Writing and Assessment of Writing* from Uusen (2009). The study was conducted in order to convince the teachers that to make a good writing, students need a complex process and numerous factors such as choice of words, syntax, message, text forms, language usage, etc. This paper also suggest the teacher to give an analytical assessment more systematically and consciously. At the end, the writer emphasized that there are many aspects in writing that should be assessed, not only assessing spelling and content.

The second research is from Crusan et al (2016) that tried to find out how the second language writing teachers from US and Egypt obtained the assessment knowledge, the teachers belief about assessing writing, what kind of assessment practices, and what is the impact of linguistic background and teaching experience on that assessment. This research found that some of the teachers got some training about writing the assessment while the others did not get any training related to writing assessment. But, the teachers said that they still confused about writing assessment even they had got training. Relative effects of linguistic background and teaching experience of the teachers have a relative effect on writing assessment that had been done.

3. Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design to identify the senior high school teachers' perception towards the quality of writing the assessment and to show the quality of the writing assessment used by the teachers. Qualitative research is a research to identify or to study the issue from the participants' perspective (Hamied, 2017).

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 16 senior high school English teachers which were chosen by using purposive sampling technique. The criteria for the participants were

an English teacher in senior high school and had an experience in conducting writing assessment in the class.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a set of open ended questionnaire to find out the teachers' perception toward the quality of writing assessment. There were six main questions which were developed from the research questions and also from the theory about the principles of good assessment that were offered by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010). Before this open ended questionnaire was given to the teachers, it was checked whether it had been appropriate and could answer the research questions. The printed questionnaire was delivered since the participants preferred to answer the printed one rather than an online form.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data was analized using descriptive analysis that thee data from the open ended questionnaire were coded based on the teachers' perspective and principles in designing writing assessments (practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback). Coding is the an initial activity of data analysis by labelling data before the data was analized (Hamied, 2017). Then, data were reported and discussed in findings and discussion sections. Some representative answers were also quoted in findings sections to show the actual answers from participants.

4. Findings

The findings were presented based on the sixteen teachers answer in the open-ended questionnaire. There were six questions in the questionnaire that had been answered. These findings answered two research questions, they are; how are the teachers' perception toward the quality of writing assessment and how is the quality of the writing assessment used by the teacher.

4.1 Teachers' Perception

The first question in the questionnaire was asked about the teachers' perception toward the quality of writing assessment in senior high school. The teachers agree that a good writing assessment will help the students in the future since a good writing assessment can assess the students writing skill and at the end, they would know how well they are in writing.

Participant 6: In writing assessment, the students can develop their ideas and use their knowledge related to writing skill such as grammar, vocabulary, organization of the text, etc.

Participant 8: It is very important since the students can express their ideas and opinions. Besides that, the students can make a kind of writing that can be useful for them in the future (university).

Participant 9: It is very important to improve the students' writing skill. And for the teachers, they can assess the students' writing skill development

Participant 12: Important, because by using writing assessment, teachers can assess the students' ability in using grammar.

All of the teachers said that writing assessment was important to consider the quality of writing assessment since it will be used as an instrument to measure the development and the also the improvement of the students' writing skill. Besides that, through a good writing assessment, teachers could see the students' skill in doing a written communication by taking a look into the writing aspects – such as ideas, grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, and organization of the text – that was used by the students in writing.

4.2 Quality of Writing Assessment

The second research question would be answered in this second finding. It was about the quality of writing assessment that was usually used by senior high school teachers to assess the students' ability and skill development in writing class.

Based on the teachers' answer, the assessment that they had usually done was practical enough in the writing class (participant 1, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, and 16).

Participant 6: *The writing assessment is practical, but the problem is in the students' ability in using vocabulary and grammar.*

Participant 12: Practical because the students understand about what they should do in writing assessment. The students and teachers can follow the phases of writing assessment well.

While the others said that it was not practical. There were some problems that were faced by teachers related to the practicality of the assessment.

Participant 15: It was hard for the teachers to fit the assessment to the curriculum requirements.

Participant 10: Complicated!

Participant 2: Need some revision and innovation to make it simple.

Participant 14: The assessment was not practical since the time allocation for doing the assessment was not enough. The students cannot finish the assessment within the time that was given since the teachers followed the time allocation in the syllabus and curriculum that was limited.

Participant 4: The number of students in one class was too much. So that the teacher could not give a maximal attention and give an appropriate feedback to the students' writing.

The reliability and validity of the assessment could be seen from the process of writing assessment that had been done by the teachers. So the next question in the open-ended questionnaire was asking about the process of writing assessment. All of the teachers agreed that before doing the assessment, the teachers told the students about the aim of the lessons and taught the students about what kind of text that they were going to write. They taught it in form of lecture or explanation, discussion, etc. These explanations were followed by discussing some examples.

Simply, the writing assessment process could be divided into three steps, they were preparation, writing, and scoring process. In pre-writing stages, there were various ways that had been done by the teachers in the classroom to trigger the students in doing the assessment.

Participant 5 and 15: Writing assessment was started by decided how much time that would be given to the students to finish the assessment and when to do the assessment, within the class hours or it could be finished by the students at home.

Most of the teachers agreed that before doing the writing assessment, they let the students knew what they were going to do and what was the aim of the assessment. Another thing that should be taken into account according to the teachers' answer was the way they do the scoring and giving a feedback. Then, to help the students in gaining the idea, sample number 16 gave kind of pictures related to the topic that they wanted to write.

Participant 16: I give the picture that were related to the topic for the writing assessment and then the students will write base on the pictures.

Besides pictures, there was an example as a guide for the students in writing.

Participant 12: I give some examples that can help the students to understand the assessment.

For some teachers, the topic of the students' writing was decided by the teachers (Participant 6, 8, 9).

Participant 8: I provide some topics for the students, and then they choose one of them as their topic for writing assessment.

While some others (Participant 7 and 15) said that they let the students decide their own topic with an assumption that it would be easy for the students to gain the idea since they have the background knowledge about the topic that they chose.

Participant 8: I let the students to choose their own topic, so they have a background knowledge about it.

The way teachers did the assessment and the scoring / giving feedback was also various. Sample number 9 and 10 said that they asked the students to write an outline or draft before started to write to help them in arranging their writing.

Participant 9: The students make an outline for their writing before they start to write.

This draft and outline, according to teachers was very helpful to keep the students' writing in line with the topic that they had already chosen. While sample number 14 said that the students were asked to do writing in a group.

Participant 14: The students write in a group. It would help the students in developing the idea with their friends in the same group.

In giving feedback, some the teachers (sample number 7 and 13) said that they give some revision in form of written feedback that was related to the coherencies of the paragraph, grammar, choice of words, and also the cleanliness of the students works.

Participant 13: I give some revision to let the students know the mistakes, so that they can learn from it.

After that, sample number 9 agreed that they need to do an evaluation of the test.

Participant 9: We need to do an evaluation in the students writing.

In the other hand, sample number 11 and 14 said that the scoring process was started since the beginning of the activity which the students decide what they were going to write, making the outline and draft, until the end of the writing process.

Participant 14: I start the assessing process (giving a score) since the beginning (when the students start to choose a topic.

Briefly, the assessment process based on the teachers' answer can be seen in table 1 below.

No	Stages	Activities
1.	Preparation	• Decide the length of time to do the assessment.
		• Giving a picture and explanation about the assessment.
		• Decide the method to give score and feedback.
		• Selected the topic (from the teachers or from the students)
2.	Writing process	• Write an outline or draft.
		• Develop the outline into a text.
		• Write in a group.
3.	Scoring process	• Give revision (written feedback).
		• Evaluate the test.
		• Giving a score.

Table 1. Writing Process based on Teachers' Answers

In order to check the authenticity of the assessment that had been done by the teachers, the next question was related to the authenticity whether the assessment could be useful in the students' everyday life and whether the sources and the topics for the assessment were authentic or not. From the teachers' answer, they agreed that the assessment should be related and useful in students' everyday life. For example, the students were asked to write a descriptive text that could be used to describe something. The topics for the writing assessment based on the answer from sample number 3, 7, and 14 were from the students.

Participant 7: I let the students choose the newest issue that they have already know.

The students could choose their own topic based on their interest so it was easy for them to develop the idea since they had enough background knowledge about that topic. The teachers assumed that the students know about the latest and interesting topics since it was being talked by many people.

Participant 13: The students know the newest issue since many people talk about it.

The sources for the writing assessment were also various.

Participant 1: The source for writing assessment was taken from a textbook.

In the other hand, sample number 11 and 16 said that the source could be from magazines, newspaper, and the internet.

Participant 11: I search the topic in the magazine, newspaper, and internet.

After the teachers gave the assessment, the follow-up activity was called washback. Most of the teacher said that they discussed the students' writing after the assessment was done. Sample number 7 and 8 said that they discussed the students' writing in general.

Participant 7: We discuss about the students' writing after the assessment was done. For example, we discussed the errors and difficulties that were faced by the students in doing writing assessment.

In the other hand, sample number 1 and 14 said that sometimes they had a general discussion after the assessment if they still have time in the class.

Participant 14: Sometimes, we discuss about the students' writing if we still have time.

So, most of the teachers have a positive washback effect in assessing writing.

5. Discussion

Writing assessment according to the teachers were important. It can be seen from the teachers' effort in doing writing assessment in the classroom. Actually, the teachers' positive perspective toward the writing assessment can lead to good achievements of the students. Based on the teachers, writing skill was one of the important skills that should be mastered by foreign language students that can help them in their education. It is in line with the statement from Hosseini et al (2013) that say that writing skills can be said as the main indication of the better academic position and greater educational success. Another important thing that should be taken into account to support this positive perspective from the teachers was the main objective of the assessment. This objective should be clear for the teachers and also for the students. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) state that when teachers consider about writing assessment, they should define clear objectives and criterion, what is it you want to test. Based on Klimova (2011), a good perspective and assessment objective from teachers should be followed by good assessment methods that are varied and challenging. It was hoped that the method can lead the students to achieve the goal of learning.

In determining the quality standard of writing assessment that was usually used by the teachers in senior high school, this research used a theory about the principles in conducting writing assessment that were provided by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010). Those principles are practicality, related to the implementation of writing assessment in the classroom such as times for doing the assessment, the ease for the teachers to give a score and feedback, etc; reliability, whether the test is consistent

and dependable or not; validity, whether the result of the assessment is appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of purpose of the assessment or not; authenticity, related to the characteristic of the language use in the assessment toward the features of the target language; and washback, the event or effect that is happened after the test.

First is about the practicality of the test. White (1985) in his research finds that writing assessment can support teaching, both conceptually and practically. It can be said that writing assessment should be designed as practical as possible to assist the learning process. While most of the teachers said that the writing assessment that they were usually used were complicated and not practical enough. The first problem that was faced by the teachers related to the practicality was the students could not finish the assessment within the time given. The solution that was given by the teachers were the students can finish their writing assessment at home. The second problem according to the teacher was the scoring process was not simple. While they should check all of the students' writing and give a score. It is in line with the statement from Pujianto et al (2014) which state that in big classes, it is hard to do the correction to the students' writing even the teachers ask to do peer correction. In this situation, teachers should be creative and also careful in doing an effective correction. However, based on Jamalinesari (2015), the problems in the practicality of writing assessment was in the capability and willingness of the teachers to give and the students to receive the correction. Ozdemir (2015) offers a recommendation to deal with the problems related to the practicality of writing assessment. They say that teachers should organize the writing assessment activities as appropriate as possible in accordance with the dynamics of process-based approach to increase the writing achievement among the students.

Secondly is about the reliability of the writing assessment. From the teachers' answer, it can be seen that the assessment that had been given to the students were reliable. The fact was before they started, the teachers explained about what should the students do about the assessment so that all of the students did not feel confuse in doing the assessment. Nimehchisalem (2010) states that using clear is important in order to support the reliability of the writing test. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) state that in order to get the reliability of the test, teachers should make sure that all of the students could receive the same quality of input before the assessment, whether written or auditory. The teachers also knew how to assess and give the score to the students' writing. Hughes (2004) states that a detail and understandable assessing and scoring process can make the test more reliable.

Another important principle after the reliability is validity. The result of the analysis showed that the assessment that had been given by the teachers were valid. The teachers explained about the text that they want to write in the assessment such as by discussing the examples, lecturing activity, etc. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) states that the assessment that asks the students to perform tasks that had been learned before can be said as a valid assessment. It is in line with the statement from Nimehchisalem (2010) that says that the validity was related to the relevance of the content in the assessment to the concepts that had been taught. Farhady in Coombe et

al (2012) also defines the validity as the extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to be measured.

The next principle is the authenticity of the writing assessment. From the teachers' answer, it can be said that the assessment that had been given by the teachers had not authentic yet. Authentic means that the use natural language, the items are contextualized, has an interesting, enjoyable, and humorous topic, and represent the real-world tasks (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). But, the teachers could also use alternative assessment if it is more authentic rather than the traditional one (Mussawy, 2009).

The last principle is washback that was related more to the feedback in writing test. Based on Kavaliauskiene and Anusiene (2012), feedback is a way to improve and developthe students' performance in writing by sharing, observations, and giving suggestions in direct or written form. From the teachers' answer, it can be concluded that the writing assessment that were usually used by the teachers had have a washback since they gave a feedback to the students' writing and also they did a discussion after the result of the assessment were given to the students. After the teachers gave the feedback to the students' writing, teachers and students in the classroom discussed the students' error in general such as discussed the errors that most of the students had done it. While according to Septiana et al (2016) students that are treated with direct feedback significantly have better writing accuracy. Besides that, Bataineh and Obeiah (2016) also states that feedback that is given by one-by-one conference or also said as direct feedback, is more effective rather than giving a written feedback in the students writing even it is time consuming.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Most of the teachers have a positive perception toward the quality of the assessment that they gave to the students. There are five criteria of a good assessment are practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. The assessment that was usually used by the teachers in writing class was not practical yet since the assessment that was usually used was complicated, especially in scoring process. But it had been fulfilling the criteria of reliability and validity of the assessment. The teachers explained about the text that the students would write later as an assessment, and also the teachers explained about what should the students do in the assessment, so they will not feel confuse. It can be said that the assessment were valid and reliable. Then is the authenticity. The assessment were not authentic yet since the assessment had not fulfilled the criteria for an authentic assessment which require the teachers to do an assessment that can be useful for the students in their everyday life and the materials should be taken from an authentic material. The last but not least is washback. The assessment had a positive washback effect since the teachers and the students done the follow-up activity after the assessment. So it can be concluded that the assessment that were usually used by teachers in writing class were reliable, valid and had washback effects. However, those assessment had not practical and authentic yet.

Based on the result, it is suggested to the teachers to consider about all of the criteria of a good assessment. While in the practicality and authenticity of the assessment, the teachers should do some improvisation in the assessment method that they were usually used, to make the assessment become more practical and authentic. For further research, it is good to find out a good method in doing assessment since a good assessment can show the students about the development of the students' skill in learning English. The method should be based on the criteria of a good assessment that are practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback.

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