

## *Toward Authentic Language Assessment: A Case in Indonesian EFL Classrooms*

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### **Abstract**

Meaningful assessment in Indonesian newly-instituted curriculum (the 2013 curriculum) of EFL now shares a more central position as the curriculum requires that the classroom instruction and learning has to be conducted in thematic integrative approach where authentic assessment is a core; while assessment practice has long been widely traditional where quantitatively-oriented tests are dominant, mostly knowledge-based, and depending largely on the results of product assessment but neglecting process assessment. Policies regarding such problem need to be made which mainly aim at helping English teachers prepared for the new curriculum. In EFL context, a need analysis has been done involving English teachers from 23 junior high schools in three regencies in Bali in 2013. Data were collected through questionnaire, interview, and document study. Focus of the analysis was teachers' readiness to implement authentic assessment, and challenges of implementing authentic assessment. Results of analysis show that teachers' readiness to implement authentic assessment is moderate. Most teachers consider that authentic language assessment is applicable to productive language skills only. Of all kinds of authentic assessment, the teachers mostly practice performance assessment (73.91%), essay (52.17%), and project (47.83%). Portfolio, product, and self assessment are very rarely used. Most teachers say that practicing authentic assessment is not new, but they just do not have enough knowledge which can support their practice. The analysis concluded some challenges to the use of authentic assessment in EFL such as authentic language materials, authentic tasks and rubrics, scheduling of English lesson, class size, student motivation, and teachers' readiness. Supports to EFL teachers such as at-hand authentic assessment tools and instruments, and training will help achieving the goals of the new English curriculum.

**Keywords:** authentic assessment, EFL curriculum

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Critics towards the use of formal assessment in classrooms have been heard for over two decades. Most teachers and educators are not happy with classroom assessment practice which have been very quantitatively oriented with over reliance to objective type tests. In the context of classroom assessment, the use of objective type tests, especially the primadonna multiple choice type, is not appropriate for at least two reasons. *First*, classroom assessment is formative in nature. It gives information about the day-to-day learning progress of a student including his/her strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles faced during learning. For this function, results of classroom assessment have to fulfill the reflective power of assessment through feedback provided by the assessment. Objective type tests fail to fulfill this function because of its orientation to assess just product of learning. Assessment in process cannot be done by using objective type tests because they just provide scores but not description of learning. *Second*, objective type tests are powerful only to assess cognitive aspects of learning. In the context of competency which involves knowledge, attitudes, and skills, daily assessment which emphasizes only on cognitive tests will not able to display the nature of competency itself. In many cases, skills and attitudes are assessed in cognitive ways. This, for sure, is not good for development of competency.

The trend to have comprehensive assessment practice, then, grows very rapidly along with an improved understanding on the importance of life skill learning. Our children will be able to survive in life if they grow in competencies and ways as expected by the global era. Over emphasis of learning on cognitive aspects may fail to support life. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes must evolve out as a whole within every individual student, so that he or she can function well in problem solvings of life challenges.

This trend also influences subject-matter curriculums in all levels of schools. In Indonesia, this trend has been instituted in the new curriculum of 2013 for elementary and secondary school levels. It is clearly stated in the process standard and assessment standard of Indonesian education that to help our students grow well with good problem solving abilities, assessment of learning must be authentic. This philosophy of assessment has also been instituted as the assessment approach in the new curriculum.

This institution of authentic assessment in the curriculum, however, has brought a big question on the readiness of teachers to implement it. Being very accustomed to using multiple choice type tests in classroom assessment has made teachers becoming anxious. As a matter of fact, despite the certification which requires four teaching competencies reflected in the three main tasks namely planning the teaching, executing the plan, and assessing learning progress. Actually, most teachers focus only on the executing the plan (teaching) phase. They rarely work on writing syllabus, lesson plan, and assessment. It is not just a rumour that most teachers use tests from item banks like national examination tests for formative assessment. This makes teachers rarely practice in writing test items, and almost never have exercise in designing authentic assessment.

To bring success to the new curriculum, Indonesian education has to improve perspective in teaching, especially in assessing. Assessing has to become one important task of teachers which has to be done correctly and well in order to improve quality of learning (the effect of assessment on learning). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) subject matter, assessment of language skills, especially

productive skills like speaking and writing is mostly performance. Up to this point, there is no discrepancy of assessment practice of EFL with the mandate of the new curriculum. However, there are some questions about the practice of authentic assessment of EFL which need to be addressed in order to promote quality EFL learning assessment especially in junior high schools. Based on those questions, there were three purposes of the study, namely the authenticity of assessment practice by EFL teachers, EFL teachers' readiness in implementing authentic assessment, and challenges of authentic assessment implementation. This analysis can give significant input for school policy regarding how authentic assessment can be well-implemented in classrooms.

Authentic assessment is an alternative (to objective type tests) assessment which has the capacity of providing students with the opportunity to explore life-like situations by having problem solving tasks. Most authentic assessment is integrated in instruction, therefore, it can be used as process and product assessment as well. It is on-going, so that there is ample opportunity for students to reflect on their own learning by having feedback from his/her own and peers, and teacher as well. As feedback is immediate and also personal, improvement can be done right away. This way, optimal learning can be obtained. Authentic assessment is also humane, in the sense that it supports the argument that mistake is natural and it indicates learning. Through making mistakes then students can think about making better learning to avoid further mistakes.

Kinds of authentic assessment involved in this study were portfolio assessment, performance assessment, project assessment, and self-assessment. Altogether are considered authentic assessment, the four kinds of authentic assessment above have different characteristics. Portfolio assessment is associated with a process of learning through continuous collection of works called a folder and reflection through self-assessment. Works in the folder show the growth of the student learning over time and how he/she grows as a learner. Portfolio assessment is considered the primadonna of authentic assessment because all good characteristics of authentic assessment can be found in portfolio assessment.

Performance assessment is a name which is often misleading. Many writers use the term performance assessment as another name of authentic assessment; while in many cases, performance assessment is a term used to refer to assessment to any performance made by the students, like drama performance. Performance assessment is the tracing of process in the performance. By assessing a drama performance students, the teacher can trace back the effort the students have done to make such performance.

Project assessment is typical with its phases. Related to project instruction which has been popular earlier, project assessment is used especially for a long-term assignment which may last for several days or weeks depending on the assignment. Project assessment is properly used to assess product done through steps or phases. Drama performance in EFL is appropriate for project assessment because it takes a long time to prepare and practice before execution in a performance.

Self-assessment gains growing attention because of the trend in education which manages to give more autonomy for the students to pursue their own progress in

learning. Self-assessment helps teachers understand that every student has his/her own strengths and weaknesses, has typical strategy to problem solving and learning from the past. Culturally, self-assessment is difficult to do because naturally a person will concentrate on strengths only, but not ready to reflect on weaknesses. Many students think that failure is external while success is internal and external. Without self-assessment, a student will submit an assignment without proofreading. With self-assessment, feedback will be obtained through proofreading. Self-assessment is effective if it is made formal with some checklist, rating scales, and systematic description.

The study was a need analysis regarding authentic assessment implementation in EFL learning by teachers of English in Bali Province, Central Indonesia. The study involved 23 junior high schools in three regencies in 2013. Data were collected through questionnaire, interview, and document study. Analysis of data was done descriptively. The study was focused on the four kinds of authentic assessment described above which were used in the four EFL skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Object studied was EFL teachers' readiness in implementing authentic assessment in EFL instruction and teachers' challenges and expectation toward the implementation of authentic assessment in EFL classroom as mandated by the 2013 Indonesian curriculum.

### **Teachers' Readiness in Implementing Authentic Assessment in EFL Instruction**

Teachers' readiness in implementing authentic assessment were assessed in four aspects namely knowledge in the nature of language skills, knowledge in the nature of assessment of language skills, and readiness to implement authentic assessment.

### **Teachers' knowledge of the Nature of English Language Skills**

Results of data analysis show that the teachers have good knowledge in the nature of language skills. The average score was 91.05 which is categorized as very good; in which speaking and reading are being the skills obtaining highest score (95) while listening is a bit below (93.5) and writing is the least (79.3). It can be seen that the teachers have least knowledge in writing skills. Further investigation through interviews reveals that the teachers consider writing is the most difficult skills to teach and for the students to learn. They say that they often are not sure what to start teaching writing with. Knowing that students find it difficult to write grammatical sentences, most teachers start teaching with sentence writing. Other teachers teach vocabulary before teaching writing, assuming that vocabulary will help much in writing because learning new vocabulary is relatively much easier than learning to write. The teachers, however, find it difficult to describe the process of writing. Marhaeni (2005) said that in the process of writing the students demonstrate knowledge and creativity in such a way which is typical for every student. Most teachers, however, emphasize on the use of grammar and vocabulary in writing, allowing students to use grammar and vocabulary without first emphasizing on the importance of topic, development of the topic in ideas, and organization of ideas.

## **Teachers' Knowledge in the Nature of Assessment of Language Skills**

Results of data analysis show that teachers knowledge in the nature of assessment of language skills is not as good as their knowledge about the nature of English language skills. Despite knowledge in writing which is moderate, teachers' knowledge in writing assessment obtained highest score among the four skills (score 85), while listening assessment and reading assessment obtained the same score (70), and speaking assessment obtained the lowest score (score 60). This is an interesting fact about writing skills. The teachers admitted that they understand that writing skills cannot be assessed using objective type tests like the multiple choice type. They know that they have to assess complex, productive skills which consist of several aspects; but through follow-up interviews it was found that writing assessment was not properly done. Most teachers assess writing product in a single score (holistically) but they failed to describe where the score came from. It is not clear about the aspects assessed in the piece of writing. ....(.....) argue that in assessing writing, holistic scoring is better than analytic scoring provided that writing skills reflect wholeness of knowledge and talent demonstrated in a piece of writing. However ..... emphasized that in context of learning to write at school, it was suggested to assess every single aspects of writing both in process and product of writing. This strategy of of assessment will give ample opportunity for feedback, reflection, and improvement a long the process.

In assessment of speaking skills, it was found that the category of teachers' knowledge in speaking assessment is moderate. It was found that the teachers have a quite premature knowledge in terms of speaking assessment. A major problem was found in their assessment of different speaking skills. They thought the aspects to assess in the skills are the same, therefore, they consider, for example, story telling task is the same with conversation task; while actually in story telling students use a ready-to-tell story, in this case, they do not demonstrate ability in finding topic and ideas, therefore not worth assessed; while in conversation, the students have to generate ideas based on the topic, and this is an important ability to assess.

Teachers' knowledge of assessment in listening skills and reading skills score 70 which is categorized moderate. Listening and reading skills are receptive skills which are mostly cognitive in nature. Most assessment astrategy used by the teachers is objective type tests. Considering listening and writing are cognitive, this strategy is appropriate. However, it was found that assessment strategies like summarizing, putting-it-in-another way etc. Which require higher level of cognitive abilities are rarely practiced.

## **Teachers' Readiness to Implement Authentic Assessment**

There were four kinds of authentic assessment which were investigated in the study, namely portfolio assessment, performance assessment, project assessment, and self-assessment. Results of data analysis of the teachers's readiness to implement authentic assessment show that across language skills, the average score of the teachers' readiness to implement portfolio assessment was 52.25 which was categorized as below average. Readiness average score to implement performance assessment was 69 which was categorized as moderate, readiness average score to implement project

assessment was 36.15 which was categorized poor, and readiness average score to implement self-assessment was categorized as 30 which was categorized as poor.

When analyzed across kinds of authentic assessment, it was found that the average score of the teachers' readiness to implement authentic assessment in teaching listening skills was 22.50 which was categorized as poor; in teaching speaking skills was 35.45 which was categorized as poor; in teaching reading skills was 68 which was categorized as moderate; and in teaching writing skills was 58.13 which was categorized as below average.

Based on the results of data analysis above, it is evident that, in general, the teachers are not ready yet to implement authentic assessment. Despite a better result in teachers' knowledge, it is clear that they are not ready to take action, that is, to systematically integrate assessment with teaching. This implies that up to this era of reform in instructional practice (which adores the constructivism perspective of teaching and learning) teachers still have a clear cut between teaching and assessing. This clear cut is not in line with the philosophy of authentic assessment which is integrated in the teaching and learning process, assessing product and process of learning, and contextual. Authentic assessment provides ample opportunities for students to explore knowledge and progress in accord of his/her own pace in learning. From the results above, it can be seen that the average teachers were not ready to implement authentic assessment. This implies a warning for Indonesian education. If teachers are not ready to implement authentic assessment, it will challenge the effort to achieve the goals of the curriculum.

### **Teachers' Expectation toward the Implementation of Authentic Assessment**

As mandated by the 2013 curriculum for classroom assessment using authentic assessment, EFL teachers have to be ready to implement authentic assessment. Interviews conducted after questionnaire administration revealed some challenges the teachers faced in implementing authentic assessment. The analysis of data of this point revealed some challenges to the use of authentic assessment in the 2013 curriculum, mostly caused by the requirement of implementing the assessment which may not be available at school; namely authentic language materials, authentic tasks and rubrics, scheduling of English lesson, class size, student motivation, and teachers' readiness.

In EFL context, learning material is a problem especially the authentic one. Most EFL learning materials available in Indonesian classrooms are dominated by textbooks which may have been used for some years after publication. In this era of information technology, it is relatively easy to access cyber authentic materials and tasks, but this may be challenged by the readiness of teachers in using technology which is not supportive as reported by Cahyani and Cahyono (2012).

Another notable challenge is availability of assessment rubrics which are very important in authentic assessment implementation. Results of data analysis suggested that, when assessing productive language skills, the teachers just holistically give a score to the performance without clear criteria and scoring guides. Further analysis shows that rubrics are rarely available in the textbooks used by the teachers. Being not very familiar with the internet, then it is difficult for them to have rubrics at hand.

Another challenge in this case is the traditional dichotomous quantitative-oriented scoring which is still dominant in classroom assessment. Teachers tend to give a single (holistic) score, while this is not in all cases effective. Hout (1990) said that holistic scoring of a language performance can only be done by an experienced evaluator. Hout further suggested for teachers to use analytic scoring rubrics. Beside an assumption that a teacher is not as skillful as an expert, analytic scoring is also very helpful in formative assessment because the information about every aspects assessed can be a powerful feedback for analyzing strengths and weaknesses of every aspects involved in the performance.

Technical arrangement of classes such as English lesson scheduling and class size also contributes to poor implementation of authentic assessment. In most schools in Bali, morning schedules are plotted for math and science while other subjects including English is plotted in the afternoon when most students have been tired. English is a foreign language in Indonesia. This language is used only in formal setting, not in daily life, therefore, it is a difficult subject for most students. Learning a difficult subject in an unconducive classroom hinders students' motivation and concentration.

Class-size is another challenge. While authentic assessment is highly individualized which requires teachers to allocate sufficient time to supervise each student, most classes in Indonesian junior and senior high schools contain of forty students and more. With four credit hours (180 minutes) per week for English lesson, the teachers find it very challenging to conduct proper authentic assessment.

### **Teachers Expectation toward the Mandate to Conduct Authentic Assessment in EFL Classes**

Based on analysis of data obtained through interviews with the teachers, it was evident that the teachers are actually willing to learn more and implement authentic assessment properly. As has been explained above, the teachers are ready to implement authentic assessment. However, with the limited knowledge, experience, and materials, they actually need instructional and technical supports. First, they expect professional training programs in which they can improve knowledge and practice of authentic assessment. With the beginning of 2013 curriculum implementation this school year, the Indonesian government through the unit of curriculum implementation of the Ministry of Education and Culture has conducted a massive training to teachers of all levels. However, Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported early this year, that despite the excellent mission of the 2013 curriculum, it is a fear of implementation because of less training provided to teachers. Second, the teachers admitted that using assessment tasks and assessment rubrics to assess students performance is a special problem. It was uncovered in this study that most teachers do not have clear pictures about the aspects which need to be assessed in a particular performance. AS has been stated previously, the teachers cannot identify the different aspects which must be assessed between, say a story telling and a conversation. They have a common sense that both are speaking performance. While actually, content aspects and linguistic aspects which need to be assessed in both kinds of performance are different. For this reason, the teachers expect to have at-hand assessment rubrics with scoring guides for each characteristics of language performance.

## **A Prospect of Authentic Assessment in EFL in Indonesia**

The results of the study as described above indicate that there is a need to support EFL teachers in implementing the 2013 curriculum. In terms of instructional effectiveness to achieve the curriculum goals, authentic assessment plays a crucial role. A good teaching and learning strategy will not be optimal if assessment is apart from it. As illustrated earlier in this paper, authentic assessment is not just a strategy of assessing English proficiency, but authentic assessment can also be said, at least in Indonesian classroom context, to be a paradigm shift of assessment. The traditional over reliance to objective type tests must be revisited as the curriculum requires. Authentic assessment also, seen from its nature, is a way to improve affective aspects of learning. With portfolio assessment, for example, students are exercised to self-assess, which, according to Salvia and Ysseldyke (1996) will improve students ownership of learning and risk taking. For the future of Indonesian education, this autonomy must be facilitated so that the next generation will have the capacity to win life in the global era which is very competitive.

The results of this study also implies that to bring the 2013 curriculum implementation to a success, teachers needs. as described above, must be responded. The team in this study has concluded that instructional support would be provided. The next year project will be development of authentic assessment instruments and teachers' assessment guides which are expected to be teachers' at-hand materials to support the teachers; teaching and students' learning.



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