

Assessment for Learning Impacts on Students' Responsive Writing Skills

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Abstract—An adept writer must be able to convey message, idea or even criticism to get involved in real life problem solving. A writer commonly has been through some steps (drafting, revising, editing) to finally publish their final work to the public. It also counts to secondary students in Indonesia who are required to be able to write some texts with communicative purposes. Actually, students need teacher's guidance and feedback provided to help them in the process of building competence to improve their performance, but in fact, teacher tends to appraise students' performance by looking at their final product and rarely follows their progress in the classroom. This study aims to discover the impact of assessment for learning in learning activity on students' responsive writing skill. To fulfill this aim, 10 students and an English teacher in Tangerang participate in this study. The researcher applies qualitative case study method and the data will be obtained by using three instruments: questionnaires for students, interview with the teacher, and students' work as related document. The results indicate that by applying assessment for learning may help students to develop their knowledge of writing a description in responsive writing skill after practicing and obtaining feedback from the teacher.

Keywords—assessment for learning; responsive writing skill; performance; competence

I. INTRODUCTION

Every person may convey their insights through writings in order to be partaking in social interaction, solving the issues or responding to phenomena occur in society as writings are included as means of communication. Hugley et al as cited in Husna et al. state that writing is a communicative act, so it may develop social relationship and expectation since it is one tool of communication [1]. An adept writer considered as someone of being capable to write in an appropriate structure attuned with the text types, select proper diction and correct grammar, convey the purpose of writing effectively, and is able to connect numbers of ideas into cohesive and coherent paragraphs. The researcher takes one writing assessment rubric from Glencoe Literature that in fact comprises ideas, organization, voice, word choice & sentence fluency, and conventions [2]. Hence, in accordance with Harmer, students need to know how to write properly by considering the paragraph construction, punctuation, and other writing's special conventions they need to keep in mind [3]. This circumstance also counts to foreign language learners.

In Indonesia, English is still considered as foreign language. This language is not used as daily language by large groups of its people and turns it is only applied for certain consequences (i.e. for academic purposes, business, or international affairs). That happens because of the Regulation in National Education System 2013 subsection 77I paragraph 1 (c) stated that official language in Indonesia is Bahasa but foreign language is also the urgency to be mastered for global communication. Therefore, mostly Indonesian people are demanded to be competent in four English major skills, one of them is writing.

To compose a writing, it is common that the writer is required to be able to convey the message of it through five aspects prior mentioned, also considering who the readers are, so that the purpose of communication is reached. Nonetheless, foreign language learners then get two tasks: they need to demonstrate their writing competence within the aspects and their language competence to compose writings (i.e English) in order to make their message well-delivered. In secondary school, students are acquainted with various types of texts which hold communicative purpose, one of them is descriptive text. Students are explained about what the text is and its function and the reasons why they need to learn about it. A text considered descriptive is a writing consists of pictures of objects through words. As Tompkins states that descriptive text is like painting pictures with words so we can look into objects more detail [4]. So, clearly the purpose of this text is to inform the readers about objects by inviting them picture those objects. In this phase, students are building their knowledge or competence to support sufficiency in composing the writings. It is because they will be asked to write a descriptive text as the realization of their actual understanding and competence as a language user of English and of course finally that writing will be assessed by the teacher. This writing composition can be included in responsive writing type of writing performance by Brown in which they are required to follow expected conventions for type of writing, convey purpose or main idea, use effective writing strategies, and demonstrate syntactic variety and rhetorical fluency [5]. Otherwise, some students still find difficulties in composing responsive writing due to the confusion of the structure and limited vocabularies, so that they feel demotivated to continue writing instead.

Thus, roles of teachers are needed to monitor students' progress and determine whether their comprehension is

sufficient or which part they should modify their work or even they need to learn over again. Teachers should act as facilitator, offering guidance in helping students to engage in the thinking process of writing, but not imposing own thought on students writing. In addition, teachers should act as a feedback provider who gives honest professional judgements that clearly articulate to learners at the appropriate level. "It (feedback) should be a commendation for what they have done well, coupled with constructive advice and guidance on how to improve areas of their work that need developing (p.13)." says Jones [6]. Moreover, one way of supporting students in their learning is by providing them with the adequate forms of assessment that will stimulate students in developing their different learning processes [7]. Johnsson and Nilsson also state that, "assessment should not be the end-product but rather an ongoing process where students continuously can use the assessment in order to make progress in their learning" [7]. To support students' learning in writing, teachers may implement the Assessment for Learning (AfL) in which feedback appertains.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is the way to inform learners of their progress to empower them to take the necessary action to improve their performance in learning process [6]. AfL is also called as Formative Assessment conducted by the teacher to collect information of students' learning progress, misconception, understanding, and interest [8]. There are various strategies in AfL, such as questioning, feedback, peer and self-assessment. They can give the great impact on students' comprehension and performance in learning process, particularly in every session. Jones explains that, AfL is needed to be implemented in such a way to promote the weaker learners attain level of achievement and challenge more the able learners [6]. However, Cameron states that teachers usually adapt their teaching towards larger summative assessments [9]. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of AfL implementation has great impact on students' achievement in doing tasks for Assessment of Learning (AoL) or also called summative assessment Indonesia, teachers are mandated to assess students' work in form of test, observation, and/or assignments to measure and examine students' learning achievement, revise learning process, and report students' learning progress in daily, middle term, final term, and/or grade passing (conformable to *Permendikbud Republik Indonesia No. 23 Tahun 2016 Subject V Subsection 6*). Indonesian teachers are familiar to formative assessment instead of assessment for learning. They are required to effectuate that kind of assessment as a liaison of students' achievement in AoL or summative assessment.

Johnsson and Nilsson did a collaborative research entitled *Feedback as Formative Assessment on EFL Students' Writing* [7]. The study aimed to research how teachers perceive writing as a process and give feedback on students' written tasks in a primary EFL classroom, and the reasons behind their chosen strategies. The findings show that the two researched teachers give oral and informal feedback on students' writing once or twice on students' written tasks, often in the middle of the task due to time restraints during a lesson.

Mak and Lee conducted the research entitled *Implementing Assessment for Learning in L2 Writing: An Activity Theory*

Perspective of which the purpose is to investigate how elementary teachers attempt to implement AfL in writing in their teaching context and what contradictions arise from teachers' introduction of AfL in the writing classroom [10]. The findings show that the teacher implemented peer feedback and teacher's feedback during the writing stages.

Beside promoting students to have a valuable chance to learn and build their competence adequately, AfL can also begin a good rapport between teachers and their students. AfL as an everyday practice whereby learners work in partnership with their teachers and peers as together they seek, reflect upon and respond to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that promote student autonomy and enhance ongoing learning [11]. Thereof, the researcher aims to investigate the impacts of Assessment for Learning (AfL) implementation on the first year of secondary school students' competence in responsive writing skill in descriptive genre. The significances are addressed to: 1) teachers, as the input used to evaluate teaching technique and procedure in every session; 2) students, as the motivation to sustain long-life learning especially in improving writing skills; and 3) vice principal in curriculum subdivision, as the input to consider AfL to take part in higher portion than AoL.

A. Research Question

- What Assessment for Learning strategies applied by teacher in teaching responsive writing? And why?
- What are the impacts of Assessment for Learning on students' competence in responsive writing?

B. Definition of Terms

- Assessment for Learning: "the way to inform learners of their progress to empower them to take the necessary action to improve their performance in learning process [6]"
- Competence: "the knowledge that enables a person to speak and understand a language" [12].
- Responsive writing: one writing performance that requires the writers to perform at a limited discourse level, connecting sentences with logical sequences into paragraph, approximately two or three [6].
- Feedback: information to an individual which focuses on their performance or behavior [6].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Responsive Writing

Brown proposes that there are four categories of written performance that capture the range of written production: imitative, intensive, responsive, and extensive [5]. This research focuses on responsive writing. So, responsive writing is one writing performance that requires the writers to perform at a limited discourse level, connecting sentences with logical sequences into paragraph, approximately two or three. The writers are considered have excelled the mechanics of writing

or the form, contextualization, and meaning and focus on the discourse conventions that will achieve the purposes of the written text.

To assess the responsive writings, we may look at the taxonomy of macro skills of writing. The criteria are [5]:

- Use the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse
- Appropriately accomplish the communicative function of written texts' according to form and purpose
- Convey links and connections between events, and communicate such relation as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification
- Distinguish between literal and implied meanings when writing
- Correctly convey culturally specific references in the context of the written text
- Develop and use a battery of writing strategies, such as accurately assessing the audience's interpretation, using prewriting devices, writing with fluency in the first drafts, using paraphrases and synonyms, soliciting peer and instructor feedback, and using feedback for revising and editing.

In addition, responsive writing offers the opportunity to the writers are to show their possible creative responses into the task within pedagogical or assessment framework [5]. The writers may choose vocabulary, grammar, and discourse with the suitable conditions as the criteria comprise the discourse and rhetorical conventions of paragraph structure and logical sequences of each paragraph. The genres included are narratives, descriptions, short reports, lab reports, summaries, brief responses to reading, and interpretations of charts or graphs. The researcher brings about descriptive genre to be discussed in this research.

B. Writing a Descriptive Text

Descriptive text is a text which pictures a person, thing, place, and certain circumstances in detail. Tompkins, descriptive text is like painting pictures with words [4]. Oshima and Hogue add that, "descriptive writing appeals to the senses, so it tells how something looks, smells, tastes, and or sounds [13]." The communicative purpose of descriptive text is to show the readers what the writer sees, hears, or feels about a person, place, or things. Therefore, descriptive contains details which enable readers to visualize the text [14]. A good description is a word picture which seemingly invites the readers to imagine some things in their mind [15].

A description is also commonly following the pattern of organization called spatial order – the arrangement of things in space – to organize their ideas. There are two generic structures in descriptive text: identification, in which the writer introduces and identify the object, and description, the part of describing the object at its parts, qualities, or characteristics more detail [1]. The language features for descriptive text are focus on specific object (person, thing, animal, etc.), Simple Present

Tense usage, adjective usage, use of attributive and identifying process [1].

In accordance with Glencoe Literature Writing Assessment for High School, there are five components in descriptive writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice & sentence fluency, and conventions [2].

C. Teacher's Roles in Writing Process

Teacher may act as feedback provider to help students achieving learning objectives. When feedback provides correction or improvement in a piece of work, it is valued by learners and acts as an incredible motivator. Remember, teachers must genuinely demonstrate that they believe that all learners can learn and improve, but the improvements must be measured against their own previous performance, not that of others. Learners need to be able to trust the teacher/assessor. Publishing and explaining the assessment criteria before the work is undertaken will demonstrate that there is no hidden agenda. Moving the goalposts after work has been set only serves to promote an atmosphere of mistrust. Feedback should be something that learners look forward to receiving – not because it gives praise and offers false hope of success, but because it contains honest, professional judgments that clearly articulate to learners at the appropriate level. It should be a commendation for what they have done well, coupled with constructive advice and guidance on how to improve areas of their work that need developing.

D. Assessment for Learning to Promote Students' Competence in Descriptive Writing

A fundamental requirement of Assessment for Learning is for learners to know what they have to learn, why it is required (how it fits into the course of study and which unit it is part of) and how it is to be assessed. There are four strategies in Assessment for Learning that teacher may use to promote learning process.

1) *Questioning*: Testing learning is an important part of classroom practice, and questioning is one of the most common methods of checking learner understanding [6]. Teachers question learners to involve learners in the session through thinking and provide the teacher with an insight into the level of learning.

2) *Feedback*: According to Jones, feedback is information to an individual which focuses on their performance or behavior which should be delivered in a positive manner and lead to action to affirm or develop an individual's performance or behavior [6]. There are two kinds of feedback: oral and written. Oral feedback is widely believed has a greater impact on learners' work than written feedback, possibly because most oral feedback is provided instantly or within a very short period of time of an activity taking place or a piece of work being generated. However, written feedback is as important as oral feedback as teacher should focus on feeding back on the quality of work and not on the person to minimize the possibility of personality issues coming into play.

3) *Peer assessment*: Peer assessment using the predefined assessment criteria is the next stage to evaluate learner understanding and consolidating learning. Learners may clarify their own ideas and understanding of the learning intention and check their understanding of the assessment criteria and how it is to be applied to learners' work [6].

4) *Self-assessment*: Self-assessment is a very powerful teaching tool and crucial to the Assessment for Learning process [6]. Once learners can engage in peer-assessment activities, they will be more able to apply their new skills to undertaking 'objective' assessment of their individual work. Self-assessment is believed to promote learning as the learners are able to identify their own gap in learning progress and support their self-management of learning.

III. METHOD

The researcher uses qualitative research approach. In accordance with Creswell, qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning individuals or group ascribe to a social or human problem in which its process involves emerging questions and procedures, collecting data typically obtained in participants' setting, building data analysis inductively, and finally the researcher making interpretations from the data obtained [16]. Qualitative researchers prefer study the world as it occurs naturally, without prior expectation and or manipulation [17]. The researcher uses the intrinsic case study design because the researcher aims to describe one case particularly about how well the teacher promotes Assessment for Learning in teaching responsive writing in descriptive genre, so the researcher may find out the impact on students' competence in writing descriptive text [17].

The researcher used purposive sampling technique in which the participants are specified for those who have some characteristics that relevant to the study in order to help the researcher understand the problems and research questions [16,17]. The researcher invited ten students (5 males and 5 female) from the 10th grade at one senior high school in Margasari, Tangerang and their English teacher as the participants in this study. All participants' names are confidential. The researcher uses code student 1 until student 10 and teacher to protect their privacy [17]. Based on preliminary conversation, the teacher said that she taught descriptive text to the students. Then, researcher asked teacher's recommendation about who well-informed students with different proficiency level are to be participants in this study.

The researcher collected the data through questionnaires, interview, and related document. The researcher distributed mixed questionnaires to students with 8 open-ended questions and 7 close-ended questions to the students to gather the information about their understanding of descriptive text and how well afl promote their learning process in descriptive writing. All questions are in participants' native language to make them be more open to express their opinions thoroughly so the language barrier and miscommunication are avoided. The researcher also uses natural and familiar language to question the students based on Johnson and Christensen's

suggestion in order to make it easier for participants to fill out the questionnaires [17]. Then, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview with the teacher by extending 9 related question to gather the information on how the teacher promotes AfL in teaching writing. Afterwards, the researcher also uses the related document i.e. students' descriptive writings to clarify how well their understanding of how to write descriptive text after their teacher implemented AfL in learning process as Creswell stated that the researcher may collect qualitative document to enable him/her to obtain the language or words of participant [16].

The researcher followed some steps in conducting this study. Firstly, the researcher visited the school, met the teacher and discussed about the research topic. Secondly, researcher asked teacher's recommendation to select participants from various level of proficiency but are well-informed people. Thirdly, in the next meeting with participants, researcher conducted an interview with the teacher and it lasted for about 20 minutes. Then, the researcher met the students distributed the questionnaires to them without time limit, but mostly they answered those questions in fifteen minutes and the teacher extended students' writings to the researcher. Next, researcher obtained the data and analyze them to find out the how teacher applied AfL in teaching writing and the impact to students' competence in responsive writing in descriptive genre. After that, researcher interpreted the findings descriptively. Finally, researcher drew a conclusion based on the findings.

In data analysis stage, researcher simplifies the data by focusing on main data tabulation that contains information about the strategies teacher used in implementing AfL and students' competence in writing. Then, researcher presents the data to describe the fact occurred in the field and the result of questionnaires also interview. Researcher also verifies students' answers on questionnaires through the related document. Lastly, researcher draws a conclusion based on the data described to answer the research questions and to discover new findings in object description.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher clarifies teacher and students' responses to answer the research questions.

A. *RQ 1: How does the Teacher Apply Assessment for Learning Atrategy(ies) in Teaching Responsive Writing?*

Question 7: How do you acquaint the students with new material (e.g.: descriptive text)?

Answer: I asked the students to prepare some stuffs related to the new discussion or material. For instance, for descriptive text, I asked them to make a group and bring the picture of a person, place, etc. before the discussion. During the discussion, firstly, I had them describing the object in the picture they brought in a group. Afterwards, I explained about the material, the definition, purpose, generic structure, and linguistics features of the text and implicitly extend the learning objectives.

Most students confirmed that the teacher communicated the learning objective in the beginning of the session. Well, Jones agrees with that by stating “It is crucial that the learning goals are communicated to the learner, and of equal importance is that the teacher checks to ensure that the learner not only understands the learning goals, but also appreciates the assessment criteria which will be used to assess the work [6]”

Question 11: Do you assign the students with some tasks related to that material? What kind of task and explain the reason?

Answer: I assign them to write a descriptive text in group because in Curriculum of 2013, it gives the students chance to do collaborative work. Besides, it also helps the students to improve their writing skill, develop idea or imagination in illustrating a picture through words.

The researcher clarifies that all students confirmed having a task to write descriptive text both in group and individually. It is part of AfL as Jones stated that, “learners respond to the tasks, activities and questions, and the teachers make judgements on the learners’ knowledge, understanding and skills acquisition as evidenced in the learners’ responses [6]”

Question 12: Do you suggest the students to do peer assessment while working on their task? If so or not, why?

Answer: Yes, I ask them to switch the text they’ve written in group to another group then they need to make three queries based on the text. After that, the text is switched again to another group then they need to answer those queries. So, from that activity, students can perceive the clarity of the text by looking at the queries that can be answered or not, or the text whether it is logical or not. I also monitor to help if there’s anything to be corrected. This hopefully may lead them to find out their competence, correct each other’s work, and give the suggestion to each other.

From the questionnaires, 7 out of 10 students confirmed that they did peer assessment while working on their group task, but 2 of them (student 1 and 4) claimed that they didn’t do peer assessment and student 7 didn’t answer the question. Jones believes that peer assessment using the predefined assessment criteria is the next stage to evaluate learner understanding and consolidating learning [6].

Question 13: Do you provide feedback to the students while they work on their task? What kind of feedback (oral, written, both) and explain the reason?

Answer: Yes. I provide both oral and written feedbacks. However, I often give them oral feedback directly in order to help them correct their mistakes immediately and I can see their responses when I give them feedback (because it’s pertinent to their attitude). For written feedback, I usually give it at the end of the session when they submit the writing task, because if it goes during the class, I’m afraid it will take much time to just give them correction and the classroom environment becomes inefficient and not conducive.

All students confirmed that their teacher provided mostly oral feedback in the classroom. The teacher’s statement is similar to what Jones expressed too, “oral feedback can often

be the most valuable form of information where hints and tips for improvement are shared with learners [6]”

B. RQ 2: What are the Impacts of Assessment for Learning on Students’ Competence in Responsive Writing

Question 14: Is there any change on students’ work after getting a feedback from the teacher?

Answer: Yes, I think there’s a bit and various. It depends on their ability to memorize. There’s some who really understand and demonstrate it well, and the rest of them have a good writing during the discussion but it doesn’t guarantee on the other day they perform well.

All of the students claimed that feedback provided helped them in writing process.

“from the feedback given by my teacher, I have new insight and motivation in correcting my writing” said Student 8.

“I understand more about the material after getting feedback from my teacher” Said Student 10.

“My writing is getting better.” Said Student 1

In questionnaire for the students no. 15: After doing peer assessment and getting feedback from the teacher, are you enable to know your strengths and weaknesses in understanding the material (self-assessment)?

The researcher finds out that 9 out of 10 students believed that they may do self-assessment after doing peer assessment and getting feedback from teacher.

The researcher analyzed students’ writing by adapting the rubric from Glencoe Literature Writing Assessment for High School: Descriptive Essay and encode their performance in scale 1-6 as 6: excellent, 5: very good, 4: good, 3: Adequate, 2: fair, and 1: poor [2].

Most of them wrote about people and place description. The researcher finds out 5 out of 10 students demonstrated their performance in responsive writing in descriptive genre quite well. Then, the rest 5 students haven’t fulfilled the criteria from Glencoe’s rubric yet due to lack of description which is also unclear so the communicative purpose of the text can’t be extended appropriately. There’s also a lot of misspellings and punctuation errors which are supposed to be excelled by secondary school students.

TABLE I. RESULTS OF STUDENT ANALYSIS

Student	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word choice and sentence fluency	Conventions
1	4	4	5	4	4
2	4	3	4	3	4
3	3	2	2	2	3
4	3	3	4	2	5
5	5	5	5	4	4
6	3	2	2	2	4
7	3	3	3	3	3
8	3	3	3	3	2
9	4	3	5	3	3
10	4	3	3	4	3

V. CONCLUSION

From the data presented, the researcher concludes that teacher implemented AfL in learning process by providing feedback, mostly oral, and giving students opportunity to do peer assessment. However, the teacher argued that the significance of students' improvement in their writing is based on their own memorizing ability. Some of them really understand and demonstrate it well, and the rest of them have a good writing during the discussion but it doesn't guarantee on the other day they perform well.

The students confirmed that they did peer assessment and got feedback from the teacher while working on their writing. Most of them claimed that feedback from teacher had helped them in understanding more about descriptive text and correcting their writing. But, the researcher also found that 5 out of 10 students still haven't performed well in responsive writing in descriptive genre.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The researcher recommends the teachers, as the input used to evaluate teaching technique and procedure in every session and of course to promote AfL in the classroom. Then, this study may be the motivation for students to sustain long-life learning especially in improving writing skills. Afterwards, this study is addressed to vice principal in curriculum subdivision as the input to consider AfL to take part in higher portion than AoL. The researcher also hopes that this study maybe the reference for other researchers who are to research particularly about AfL.

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