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The urgency of viewing non-test assessments as humanistic assessment

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ABSTRACT

Assessing students with various characteristics is a challenge for teachers. The effort of being adaptable to each characteristic leads to joyful moments or even frustrating situations. How can we deal with the characteristics? Those characteristics are also crucial in deciding what kind of assessment should be given. This article is aimed at giving teachers preliminary discussion towards non-test assessments and how urgent they are that teachers should consider in facilitating students' characteristics. Since syllabus still require test admission as how to evaluate learning, non-test assessments can take position as students' supplementary records. To achieve the aim, a qualitative research was conducted to explain how non-test assessment can be an alternative to provide more information about students' performance. Briefly, this article is expected to help teachers cope with their students' characteristics by supplementing non-test activities in evaluating students' learning process.

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1. Introduction

EFL classrooms deal with big number of students in one class or in one subject. These numbers also bring different learning styles and various levels of English proficiency. In many cases, facing those differences among the students leads teacher to be frustrated in choosing kinds of assessments that are appropriate to achieve the learning goals. Allsopp (2002), Irwin & Happlestone (2012), and Pacharn, Bay, & Felton (2013) suggested that assessments should be flexible by using various methods to facilitate students' needs, abilities, and characteristics, then students can get involved in in deciding their own evaluation. The needs depend on the specific learning objectives that are expected to achieve (Gunn, 2010). Being so contrastive to teaching science, teaching language is tempted to achieve the mastery of knowledge and the ability to practice. It means the "tools" to assess the two different domains will also be different. The assessment related to knowledge, however, is much more difficult than skills since skills can be assessed through practices. It is due to understanding domain is more complex and beyond the practices. In fact, frequently, language learners are also required to show their proficiency in a test, not merely in communicative purposes in social life (Alderson & Banerjee, 2002; Kizlik, 2012). The two domains and distinctive purposes should be taken under teachers' consideration when deciding the way to assess and the issue of authenticity.

Discussing about appropriate assessments for all students has been still interesting. Regarding the students' characteristics, the kinds of assessment chosen have to be fair for all general traits. Unfortunately, traditional testing seems to be fair decision, mostly, among teachers. The concept arose since traditional testing offers the fairness in the opportunities owned by the students in doing the test independently to get the score at the end of learning (Baharloo, 2013). These product-oriented practices endanger students' learning results, ignoring the learning progress experienced. Then, such tests will be "cruel punishments" for those cannot accomplish the one-time tasks in certain test admissions. It misleads the function of assessment in facilitating students' different characteristics to achieve the same learning goals set (Derakshan, Razaeei, &

Elmi, 2011; Chirimbu, 2013).

In public general perception, tests have acquired an aura of infallibility in the culture of mass producing everything, including the education of school children. A test is demanded by every single person for everything, particularly if it has low economical consideration, quick administration, and easy or instant scoring system. However, a test is simply defined as one of assessment tools. It means that its use can be appropriate or inappropriate. From this point, clearly, tests are one of a number of possible assessment types. An assessment may include a test, but also include non-test methods such as observations, interviews, journals etc. Their function is to assemble additional measures of students' evaluation, in the effort to triangulate data about students' ability (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Besides, they can be used as the alternatives to overcome the problems raised from standardized testing and all problems found in such testing. Highlighting the issue of fairness in assessing language learners, this article comes to introduce language teachers to non-test assessments as the opposite to traditional testing. In this article, the term of non-test assessment will be used to replace the term of alternative and authentic assessment in order to make clear definition of kind of assessments which do not apply certain one-time test admissions and (some experts make similar definition of non-test assessment as alternative or authentic assessments). To build preliminary discussion, the article covers the characteristics and the types of non-test assessments, as well as the urgency to make them in use. Besides, problems and benefits of non-test assessments are revealed to give some insights and consideration for the teachers who are interested in applying non-test assessments.

2. The concept of non-test assessment

2.1. The nature of non-test assessment

Non-test assessment refers to assessing students' performances based on communicative purposes. Therefore, such assessments cover the issue of authenticity, communicative aspects, and process-oriented movements (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Chirimbu, 2013). Since the syllabus used in Indonesian contexts do not require non-test assessment to elicit students' ability in learning, thus non-test assessment takes a position as supplementary consideration to make final decision on students. In this case, non-test assessment provides flexible assessment with various methods that reveal not merely informational answer to cover students' level of abilities (Gunn, 2010; Massa, 1997). To clarify, the term of non-test, here, stands contrastively towards traditional testing which emphasize more on what scores students get rather than what performance students can do. Non-test assessment tends to be contextual and authentic in the implementation, not in the design. The implementation should be familiarized to avoid big question in their reliability because the fundamental obstacle of using non-test assessments lies on how reliable the results which are derived from the assessment (Gonzalez, 1996; Alderson & Banerjee, 2002).

The ultimate goal of language teaching requires both knowledge and performance. To take the goals into account, non-test assessments are assumed to be appropriate in taking their roles. In other words, non-test assessments focus on the learning progress as well as the learning products since they assess both students' linguistic competence and communicative competence. To meet deeper understanding on the nature of non-test assessments, Hamayan (1996) provides more concise explanation: firstly, Non-test assessments are locally developed and classroom-based, because the procedures represent language use and language behavior directly based on daily life situations. Secondly, Non-test assessments involve language components and language skills in integrated ways. Furthermore, they integrate also academic, social, and physical context in natural settings. Thirdly, in non-test assessments, linguistic knowledge is developed and extended to meaningful use. The procedures are based on personal needs and academic purposes. Lastly, since fulfillment of personal needs is met, non-test assessments provide more valid and insightful information and interpretation about students' abilities. Then, the decision towards students' learning can be responsibly taken.

2.2. The urgency of using non-test assessment

Non-test assessments facilitate students' different learning ability and individual progress. These kinds of assessments appreciate the efforts done by students during the struggling time till the end of learning. Due to being process-oriented and authentic contextualized, the assessments evaluate the factor that can influence achievement and relate the contents of classroom learning to specific goals and daily life activities. Besides, monitoring students' progress and maintaining continuous information of students' needs can be done indirectly by teachers or school administrators (Massa, 1997). Non-test assessments make it possible to maximize individual instruction and to compare the competences of the same individual without comparing

one student with another (Derakshan et al., 2011). It becomes so flexible when assessing students with various level of proficiency since non-test assessments offer variety of methods to be used in assessing certain characteristics.

Empowering students' consciousness in learning, motivating students' autonomous learning, and appreciating students' learning process is the core of non-test assessments viewing students as "human beings" that are always learning. This is the reason why Bastanfar (2009) labels non-test assessments as humanistic assessments. He also adds that implementing non-test assessments in class will help teachers to make more insightful choices to assess their students. To move the perception that test scores are the most powerful to tell students' competences, a new wave of describing and interpreting competences offered by non-test assessments is assumed to be needed.

The practice of non-testing is beneficial in evaluating both student and the instruction. The result of non-testing gives more chances for teachers to see their students deeper beyond what scores they have got in a test. Teachers can monitor how their students learn, how their students express themselves, and what their students think about the learning process they have. The relationship between teachers and students happens since they are indirectly communicating through written conversation, for instance. The presence of feedbacks in non-testing emerges students' confidence and internal motivation. Finally, self-directed learning and students' participation in learning increase gradually during the learning (Hamayan, 1996; Mansor, Shafie, Maesin, Nayan, & Osman, 2011).

The results of non-test assessments can be also used to evaluate the instruction given during the learning process. Birgin & Baki (2007) revealed that portfolio result, as an example of non-test assessment, can motivate teachers to revise the teaching instruction, and even the curriculum, so the learning process and product are displayed at the same time. Based on the results, judgments towards the instruction can be made and evaluated. Then, the decision can be made whether the instructions are effective or they need to be revised. By using non-test assessments, teachers can obtain information about entire learning environments. Of course, test scores cannot tell about those. Teachers' responses given to students' assignments can shape individual instruction because teachers have information about the weakness of the students (Hamayan, 1996)

2.3. Kinds of non-test assessment

There are numbers of non-test assessment that teachers can choose to assess their students. Schreiner (2010) suggested the decision should be based on students' needs, abilities, and characteristics. The followings are several kinds of non-test assessment that can be carried out in classroom (Hamayan, 1996; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Brown, 2004; Harmer, 2004; Tsagari, 2004; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Schreiner, 2010; Job, 2011; Chirimbu, 2013):

2.3.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaire is a list of questions that should be filled by the respondent. Generally, questionnaire is used to gain data about students' background as one of data sources to analyze students' behavior and learning process. Moreover, the data gathered from questionnaire may be the information about the difficulties faced by the students during the teaching and learning process, such as learning strategies, teacher and parents' assistance, etc. Questionnaire is usually used to assess learning outcome in affective domain. There are many kinds of questionnaire, such as close questionnaire, open questionnaire and the combination of open and close questionnaire.

2.3.2. Observations

Whether the teachers realize or not, they actually always do such kind of observation during the teaching and learning process. The teachers may unconsciously note the students' performance such as who is the one who always be active or who is always keep silent during the class. By doing observation, teacher may see not only the cognitive of the students but also the affective and psychomotor of the students. For example: the teacher not only can see whether the students get the point delivered or not but also how the students work in group when they are asked to do so, how the students interact each others, etc. Furthermore, in order to be more focus, an observation can be prepared well so that teacher can be more focus in seeing a particular aspects to be observed. It can be said that observation can be in the form of unsystematic in which teacher notes the students' behavior during the teaching and learning process, or in the form of systematic observation in which the teacher usually accompanied by checklist or guidance about what aspects which should be observed.

2.3.3. Portfolios

Portfolios can be defined as the collection of students' work/progress/activity during the teaching and learning process. Using portfolios as an alternative assessment demonstrate the students' creativity, critical-thinking ability, and problem solving ability that are comprehensive information to give more focus on the process than the product only (Demirel & Duman, 2015; Usadiati & Norahmi, 2018). The purpose of portfolios is to improve students' learning, to encourage students in the learning process, and to make the students responsible for their learning. It can be in the form of continuous tasks given by the teacher which are collected into one folder so that the teacher can see the students' progress in completing the tasks from the beginning of the lesson until the end of the lesson. It can be in form of essay, composition, poetry, prose, artwork, test score, homework, notes, lecture, etc. during the teaching and learning process. Portfolios is divided into developmental and showcase portfolio. Developmental portfolio is used to show the students' progress while showcase portfolio is used to indicate the students' final achievement.

2.3.4. Conferences and interviews

Conferences generally take the form of a conversation or discussion between the teacher and one or more than one student about school work. The conference is about work or tasks that the student performs in the presence of the teacher, such as the teacher gives direct questions to the student about the processes and strategies he or she is using to perform the task. For example in a reading conference, the teacher might ask the student which words were difficult, why they were difficult to read, and what strategies he or she used in order to figure out their meaning. Conferences can be conducted to complete work from portfolios, but students should feel under control during the entire process. The focus should be on student concerns and views of the various learning process that they have been involved in creating their portfolio work. It can also be used to reflect on instruction, focus on student self-image, or elicit performance on a specific task or skill that the teacher wants to review. Conferences can be occurred frequently but should not for grading purposes.

To know the student's needs in depth after implementing conferences is interview activity. This activity is conducted when a teacher interviews a student for a designated assessment purpose which has several goals. The goals are to assess the students' oral production, and certain students' needs before designing a course or curriculum, seek the student's learning styles and preferences, ask a student to assess his or her own performance, request an evaluation of a course. There are four stages to assess the students' oral production: firstly, Warm up: helping the test taker become comfortable, then is Level check: the test-taker respond using expected or predicted forms and functions, next is Probe: increasingly difficult questions which demands cognitive and linguistics demand, lastly is Wind-down: encouraging test taker to relax with some questions and it is not scored.

2.3.5. Journals

A journal is a log (account) of thoughts, feelings, responses, ideas, assessments, or progress in achieving goals. It is usually in the written form which does not really concern to the structure, form and correctness. Dialogue journals are well-known for the use in classroom, implying an interaction between teacher and students through written dialogues and responses. Through dialogue journals, teacher is expected to know more about the students' learning progress, affective states, and needs (McGee & Richgels, 2003). The teacher has opportunities in giving various kinds of feedback. The importance of journals is to serve writing as a thinking process, individualization, and communication through feedbacks and authentic use of language under non-threatening condition (Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2005; Haynes-Mays et al., 2011). The followings are some purposes of journals in educational consideration: (1) Language-learning logs: restricting journals on the number of skills, strategies, or language categories on which students give comment. (2) Grammar journals: focusing journals only on grammar acquisition, for example error logs. (3) Responses to readings: specifying journals for responding to material readings, such as lectures, presentations, films, or videos. (4) Strategies-based learning logs: focusing journals only on the strategies that students are seeking to be aware and use the strategies. (5) Self-assessment reflections: extending journals beyond the scope of simple one-word or one-sentence responses for stimulus questions. (6) Diaries of affective factors: reporting the journeys towards goal achievement. (7) Acculturation logs: reporting the process of acculturation stages, exclusively on difficult and painful ones.

2.3.6. Self-and peer-assessment

A number of advantages of self-and peer-assessment: 1) They can be done in short time; 2) Students can

involve directly in their learning; 3) Students are encouraged to have autonomy in their learning process; and 4) Students' motivation is increased due to students' self-involvement. The followings are some ways in which self-and peer-assessment can be implemented in the language classroom. Firstly, Oral production: completing students' self-checklists and/or peer checklist; offering and receiving a holistic rating of an oral presentation; listening to tape-recorded oral production to detect pronunciation or grammar error; in natural conversation, asking others for confirmation checks; setting goals for creating opportunities to speak. Second is Listening comprehension: listening to the TV or radio broadcasts and checking the comprehension with a partner; in pair or in a group work, asking when you don't understand something; listening to an academic lecture and checking yourself on a "quiz" of the content; setting goals for increasing opportunities for listening. Third is Writing: revising written work on your own, peer editing, proofreading, setting goals for increasing opportunities to write. Last is Reading: reading text book passages followed by self-check comprehension questions, reading and checking comprehension with a partner, taking vocabulary quizzes, self-assessing reading habit, and setting goal.

2.4. Merits and obstacles in using non-test assessment

Though non-test assessments seem so powerful in facilitating students' learning, the implementation of this "new approach of assessing", like other approaches, has both magnifying advantages and complicated problems. In one side teachers want the students to maximize their ability and competence in learning. In the other side, not few circumstances force both teachers and students to resist these new practices. The implementation of using those alternatives have to be carefully taken into consideration by involving many parties academically and socially. Hence, the resistance to have non-test assessment in classroom can be minimized.

Non-test assessments provide teacher more comprehensive description and interpretation on students' competences than test scores do. Since traditional testing focus merely on the product, non-test assessments involve both the process and product. Furthermore, students gain numerous benefits when participating in such ways of assessment. Since non-test assessments tend to be contextualized and authentic that they can adapt to classroom needs and can be connected to life activities, the implementation emerges students' autonomous learning and positive experiences involving linguistic and cultural differences. As the result, students can be independent and psychologically motivated in their learning (Tsagari, 2004; Janisch, Liu, & Akrofi, 2007; Liao & Wong, 2010; Chirimbu, 2013).

The implementation of non-test practices frequently faces both internal and external problems. Some practitioners view the implementation of non-test assessment is time-consuming and more subjective (Birgin & Baki, 2007). The statement goes along with more time should be spent to monitor students' progress and concerns how subjectivity can shadow the decision. The inhibition also comes from the students that cannot adapt with new practices and are accustomed to teacher-centered learning. This condition leads them to have lack of responsibility and motivation; the students are confused how to learn without direct intervention of the teachers.

The standards of validity, reliability, and practicality are mostly questioned in non-test designs. The consideration of authenticity, sometimes, neglects the aspect of difficulty level and linguistic complexity. More, non-test practices do not get much support from parents, teachers, and schools. They still insist the paradigm that test scores show the product of learning (Janisch et al., 2007; Tsagari, 2013). Those inhibitions, both internal and external, in the practices of non-test are needed to be minimized by promoting the practices to all parties involved in education process. Hence, the implementation of non-test assessments can be accepted and valued by education practitioners.

3. Conclusion and suggestions

Non-test assessments seem to provide opportunities for students to be more appreciated in the process of learning. They empower students' competences by facilitating different learning styles, strengthening best features of ability, and shaping awareness towards students' different characteristics. In teaching English, there are various kinds of non-test assessments that can be carried out depend on what skill is taught. To assess the students, teachers have their own freedom to choose what kind of assessment based on the needs as a tool to gain additional information of the learning process (Jones, 2005). Therefore, the final decisions made in the end of learning are felt as fair and reasonable evaluation for all parties.

As being discussed previously, non-test assessments are viewed as new practices in our education system

that they are not popular yet among teachers. Regarding the benefits offered by such assessments, it is suggested that teachers consider these new practices in their classrooms. Although assessing students in these ways is supposed to be time-consuming and quite tiring, teachers are suggested to implement certain non-test assessments in assessing certain skills, for example using dialogue journal in assessing writing or using reading logs in assessing reading. Before making decision to have non-test assessments, the possible obstacles should be taken into consideration to find the best solutions. It is also important to make parents, stakeholders and teachers familiar with the practices by conducting socialization on the importance and the procedure of non-test assessments. If the implementation of non-test practices gain great acceptance from all parties involved, the paradigm of “test scores tell everything” is expected to change.

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