

Formative Assessment as an Innovative Strategies to Develop ESP Students' Writing Skills

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Abstract

Most undergraduate students experience summative assessment more than formative. In fact, formative assessment is more constructive than summative assessment, which impacts students' development. Notwithstanding the benefits, research about the incorporation of formative assessment in the ESP class is somehow rare. This recent research focuses on enacting formative assessment in ESP classes regarding students' writing skills in Indonesia. The researchers employed a case study research design to investigate how ESP teachers implement formative assessment in their classes. The participants are two EFL teachers who teach Business English subjects and forty students majoring in Economics. The researchers gathered the data from close-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and class observation. This study revealed that ESP learners were provided with multiple chances to enhance myriad facets of their writing skills and establish a good attitude regarding Business English subjects and formative assessment. Thus, educators are required to implement the formative assessment concept in their classes since the educators' and learners' involvement can achieve teaching and learning improvement and reflection. Future research should focus on the more particular aspects of formative evaluation, like how to give feedback and classroom discourse, which are equally useful in teaching writing.

Keywords: Formative assessment, writing skills, ESP, teachers' experience.

INTRODUCTION

One of the essential tasks of an educator is in the assessment stage. In the last 25 to 30 years, there has been unprecedented attentiveness in, as well as increasing controversy, on the arrangement of learning and assessment, which is also known as "formative assessment" or scholars mentioned as "Assessment for Learning" (AfL) (Black & Wiliam,

1998; Gardner, 2012). By and large, summative assessment is used to track and evaluate students' current performance and provided the accountability objectives, whether it be the needs of the learners, the expectations of their parents, and the institution's requirements. On the flip side, formative assessment is not focused on the result at the end of the course. Instead, it is specifically characterized by educators' feedback on the learners' works (Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2012; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2004). Compared to the traditional assessment system, formative assessment can accomplish and even fully substitute summative assessment practice in which summative assessment has failed to attract learners in the assessment process (Guo & Xu, 2020; Rachmawati & Purwati, 2021). Moreover, formative assessment can contribute to the students' learning process because the assessment focuses on the learner's improvement (Guo & Xu, 2020; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Nowadays, formative assessment is being widely acknowledged as pivotal to foreign language assessment (Estaji & Mirzaii, 2018; Lee & Coniam, 2013) since educators and students can utilize data derived from the assessment to better tailor their teaching practices and learning strategies (Black, 2016; Cauley & McMillan, 2010; Rahimi, 2009). Specifically, in an EFL setting like Indonesia, where the traditional approach to foreign language teaching is still dominant, the elicited data can be used to strengthen teachers' pedagogy and assessment in writing courses (Naghdipour, 2017; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012).

The integration of formative assessment in classrooms is still underexplored in ESP class, particularly to develop ESP students' writing skills (Mauludin, 2018; Rachmawati et al., 2020). While EFL students are demanded to have four primary language skills, namely speaking, writing, listening, and speaking (Burner, 2016; Naghdipour, 2017), ESP students are expected to master English related to their specific field (Basturkamen, 2013; Lebedev et al., 2020; Salmani-nodoushan, 2020). From all of the main language skills, writing is the most complex skill because students have to integrate many interlinked language skills (Liu & Hu, 2021; Sabarun, 2018). In the context of ESP classrooms, the obstacles are tremendous because ESP class is designed to identify particular skills required to utilize more language varieties. The real obstacle of teaching language skills in the ESP class is that English is only a course to support their general skills, means that they do not have much exposure to an English learning environment. ESP students' English class time is shorter than those who learn English as their major (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Nimasari, 2018).

Looking at the crucial use of formative assessment during the teaching and learning process, this study concentrated on enacting formative assessment in the ESP context, especially to develop students' writing skills in the Business English course. To the researchers' best knowledge, research conducted in the Indonesian ESP context that aims to identify the detail of formative assessment incorporation of ESP class teachers to teach writing skills is still rare. Owing to the lack of studies on the formative assessment implementation in ESP writing classes (Estaji & Mirzaii, 2018; Khodabakhshzadeh et al., 2018; Lee & Coniam, 2013), this research aimed to give a contribution to the existence of knowledge by investigating the power of the kind of assessment to enhance higher education

learners' writing skills. Thus, there are two research objectives of this study, namely, to examine the integration of formative assessment in ESP writing skills; and to know the students' attitude toward the use of formative assessment in ESP writing class.

METHOD

The researchers employed a case study research design. In addition, the researchers used various approaches to gather quantitative and qualitative data (Stake, 1995), including semi-structured interviews and close-ended questionnaires. This study's primary purpose is to gather in-depth comprehension of the integration of formative assessment and the learner's belief and attitude toward formative assessment.

Participant and the Contextual Background

The participants were two EFL teachers teaching Business English and forty first-year Economics undergraduate students from one of the private universities in Indonesia. This research was carried out in a private University where the English educators used formative assessment strategies in the ESP writing lesson, and it was discovered that the instructors used formative assessment to examine the learners' work. The sample size of 2 teachers and 40 students allowed the investigators to collect in-depth and saturated data (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). The researchers utilized a pseudonym to ensure the research was ethical. Hereafter, the teachers' and students' names will be coded to keep their identities confidential. The researchers contacted the teachers by email, then sent a consent letter, and interviewed them online. The teachers explained that they have already taught at the University for 10 and 14 years, respectively.

Data Collection and Instrument

At first, the researchers designed a close-ended questionnaire, especially dichotomous questions in which the researchers provided a set of predetermined statements and the participants were required to choose a "yes or no" answer based on the statements (Creswell, 2012). The questionnaires utilized in this research were adapted and modified to the idea of attitude and beliefs proposed by Lee (2011) to measure the students' attitudes and beliefs of formative assessment enactment in ESP class. Then, the survey was distributed via *google form* (<https://bit.ly/formative-assessment-ESP>) to the respondents since this method could gather a large amount of data in a short time from many participants. The data obtained were used to confirm the interviews and class observation data. There are 25 items in the survey to get the data about students' attitudes and beliefs adapted and modified from Lee (2011).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data gained from the questionnaire was calculated statistically to know the percentage of the students' attitudes. As for the interview data, the researchers wrote the transcription and then interpreted them. The researchers coded the categories through an

inductive analysis approach. Moreover, the issue of trustworthiness had been resolved by taking a way to enhance the consistency of data analysis. Ultimately, the researchers gave the teachers a summary of the research for authenticating the result.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Integration of Formative Assessment in the Writing Subject

When the researchers asked about the way Mr. X and Ms. Y implement formative assessment in their classrooms, they mentioned five ways as summarized in the following descriptions:

Conduct Peer-Review

Mr. X and Ms. Y demanded the learners to write a draft that they must consult, present, and discuss with friends and teachers before they submitted it, rather than merely submitting their draft at the end of the class. Mr. X explained:

“All learners require to write an initial draft before the fix one. Moreover, I conduct peer-review so that they can discuss their initial drafts with classmates and teachers. They also have to present it to gain more insight, so that they can learn more and have better business letters writing at the end.”

From the result of this study, Mr. X often invited the learners to do peer-review for their classmates' work or performance. The instructor claimed that he often asked the students to critique each other's work. The data from classroom observation presented below corroborated the result from the interview phase. It can be seen in the excerpt below.

“Now, please exchange your result with the other groups. Then, check your friends' results. Check the topic first. Then, please check the generic structures or the components of the text... Please give mark if there is something wrong or something that makes you confused in reading the text.”

From the data presented in the illustration above, Mr. X encouraged the students to give responses to their friends' writing products based on the criteria of writing the text. It can be assumed that the teacher asked the students to do peer assessment since it requires the students to give criticism or remark. It was aimed to enhance the learners' writing skills and gain positive feedback so that the learning goal can be achieved.

Give Implicit Feedback in the Form of Scaffolding

In relation to teachers' feedback, Mr. X and Ms. Y intended to give implicit comments instead of simply correcting students' mistakes, as recommended by Ferris (2014). It aims to push students to think more deeply about their errors, to learn from their mistakes, and finally to know their students' original ideas, as Ms. Y described:

“In giving my students feedback, I will only write a question mark next to incorrect sentences or underline it. Sometimes, I also use the comment's bubble or track changes features in MS Word and write implicit comments. I want my students to think about it and see their thought.”

The data from classroom observation corroborated the data gathered from the interview above. The strategy to implement formative assessment in ESP writing class is to provide feedback to the students. It also can be seen in the teaching and learning process. Based on the data from the classroom observation, the teacher provided such feedback in the form of models under the topic being discussed in the classroom. This feedback provision occurred in the context of giving a model as shown in the following excerpt.

“So, in the Curriculum Vitae you have to include several information, such as your contact information, the summary of your CV or goals, your work experience, your skills, and educational background. Please look at this example.”

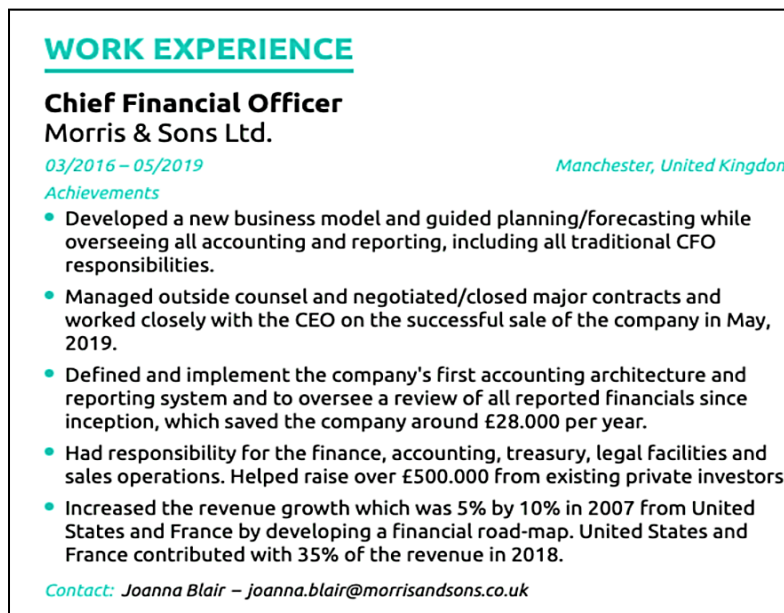


Figure 1. The Model of Business Letter Presented by the Teacher

From figure 1 above, the teacher gave the students model of the business letter so that the students clearly understand the teacher’s explanation. The teacher provided models (example) under the topic being discussed in the teaching and learning process. The teacher gave the students an example of the “work experience” part of Curriculum Vitae that can be seen in the illustration above. From the excerpt above, it can be concluded that the teacher served the students’ feedback in the form of scaffolding that benefits the students to understand more about how to write the “work experience” part in their CV.

Conduct Pre-Writing Activities

Mr. X's motivation to conduct a formative assessment in his class led him to devote greater effort to spend more time teaching and less time giving a score. He believed it was pivotal that learners prepare for more pre-writing activities. From the data of classroom observation, it was found that Mr. X employed various activities in the pre-writing stage. For instance, learners are required to brainstorm their thoughts or write a mind map.

Sometimes, Mr. X also gives them worksheets to collect thoughts they could use in their future writing. He also ensures that all students have the opportunity to express their thoughts verbally in a group with classmates and teachers to gather insight. He believed that those activities are essential, as he commented:

"I attempted to embark them to present, discuss, give comments or insight with peers and me."

The data from classroom observation corroborated the data gathered from the interview above. The strategy to implement formative assessment in ESP writing class is to conduct pre-writing activities in the classroom. This strategy can be shown in the following excerpt of classroom observation.

"Before you write a text, it will be better for you to do listing writing techniques first, which means that you can write words, ideas, or phrases that come up in your mind."

From the excerpt of the classroom observation above, it can be seen that the teacher conducted pre-writing activities in the classroom. The teacher asked the students to do listing techniques first before the students write a text. It can be seen that the teacher asked the students to write related terms, ideas, or phrases in the pre-writing activities.

Show Task-Specific Criteria to Learners (Assessment Rubric)

Ms. Y employed a specific assessment rubric to define the writing assessment criteria before learners began to write, and she communicated the assignment-specific requirements with the learners transparently. She claimed:

"Successful learning phase will take place only if learners grasp the expectations they are attempting to achieve."

The data from classroom observation corroborated the data gathered from the interview above. The strategy to implement formative assessment in ESP writing class is to show to the learners the assessment rubric to the students. It also can be seen in the teaching and learning process. Based on the data from the classroom observation, the teacher provided such a rubric so that the learners can grasp the learning expectation they have to achieve. This strategy can be shown in the following excerpt of classroom observation.

"Please look at this rubric. Here, I provide you the rubric as the guidelines to write your own CV. There are 5 dimensions here, namely contact information, the summary or your CV, work experience, required skills, and educational background. Please follow these points to write your CV."

It can be seen from the excerpt above that the teacher gives a specific assessment rubric for the students. The assessment rubric provides the guidelines for students to write their own Curriculum Vitae. Moreover, the students can follow the points served in the rubric to achieve the learning goals.

Mr. X and Ms. Y implanted teaching innovation that is led to significant reform of the old assessment practices in Indonesian culture. By focusing on formative assessment, they succeeded in bringing innovation and reform to their classroom practices.

The Learners' Attitudes towards the Integration of Formative Assessment in ESP Writing Class

It is critical to understand how ESP learners viewed formative assessment as the creative and innovative practice of language teaching. The evidence from the questionnaire for learners and interviews with learners and teachers is used to throw some light on the effect of formative assessment on the learner's beliefs and attitude toward the Business English subject. The following table presents some findings gained from the questionnaire.

Table 1. Students' Attitude towards Formative Assessment

No.	Statement	%	n	Level of Attitude
1.	It is a pleasure for me to write business correspondences in English	90	36	Positive
2.	My concern is more on the writing process rather than at the end of the course	85	34	Positive
3.	I can generate a great piece of writing when I put effort into it	72.5	29	Positive
4.	It is entirely within my control whether or not I can write properly	72.5	29	Positive
5.	Writing Business Letters in English is something I am good at	77.5	31	Positive
6.	When the teacher asked me to write, I am capable of executing it successfully	75	30	Positive
7.	I have figured out how to make my works better	72.5	29	Positive
8.	I entirely responsible for my writing skill improvement	70	28	Positive
9.	I write with some effort to make my writing well	82.5	33	Positive
10.	I am ready to put forth the effort necessary to mitigate my writing problems	75	30	Positive
11.	The assessment objective is to determine how well or poorly I do	75	30	Positive
12.	The assessment objective is to assist me in improving my business writing skills	80	32	Positive
13.	The assessment objective is to assist English educator in improving and modifying his or her classroom instruction	75	30	Positive
14.	Feedbacks are beneficial in assisting me in improving my writing skills	92.5	37	Positive
15.	Scores or grades (e.g., 100, 90, 60... or A, B, C...) help enhance my writing skills	37.5	15	Uncertain
16.	In my opinion, any piece of writing I finished should be evaluated by the English educator	75	30	Positive
17.	When grading and assessing my writing, I believe that the educator should only concentrate on the accuracy of the grammar	45	18	Negative
18.	All of my written inconsistencies and errors, I believe should be addressed by my English educator	35	14	Uncertain

19.	To evaluate students' writing, I believe my English instructor should apply broad parameters (such as substance, organization, grammar, and language)	72.5	29	Positive
20.	In my opinion, the educator should have written feedback on my work	72.5	29	Positive
21.	I believe that educator should use various assessment standards for different assignments in the ESP course	70	28	Positive
22.	Meetings with my English educator are beneficial to explore ways I can do better in my writing	85	34	Positive
23.	Having chances to do self-evaluation in my writing is beneficial	75	30	Positive
24.	It is helpful to be able to evaluate the work of my peers.	75	30	Positive
25.	It is beneficial to have the option to revise my writing in response to my instructor's suggestions rather than merely correcting errors.	82.5	33	Positive

Note: n = total number of participants who answered "yes"; % = percentage

From the overall result of the above questionnaire, it can be seen that ESP learners have positive attitudes toward the integration of formative assessment in the Business English course. It is shown that the students really enjoyed the formative assessment activities that are applied by the teachers. The results are supported by the information from interview sessions with the learners, which show that the learners were satisfied with the experience in the formative assessment-oriented Business English course innovated and conducted by their teacher. When the researchers asked about the student's attitude toward the ESP course, especially in the writing process, many students stated that they were afraid of joining the ESP class because they thought their teachers would request them to write something without guidance. But further, they said that they enjoy the ESP course because the teacher had conducted innovative teaching strategies. Firstly, five interviewed learners stated that they enjoyed the course. One learner commented:

"I was frustrated and hesitant once I thought about writing part in ESP class. I imagined that I should pay attention to many aspects or elements. Yet, I am wrong. My perspective has shifted when I enter this class. I enjoy the course, especially in writing business letters writing process."

Based on the data above, it can be disclosed that the employment of formative assessment in ESP classes also can make them enjoy learning because formative assessment activities implemented in the class focus on the students' learning progress rather than the grades. According to the results, the formative assessment had a rewarding and motivating impact on the learners' learning process.

Moreover, according to one learner, the classroom instruction conducted by the educator is activity-focused teaching and learning phase. Therefore, it was an enjoyable

academic experience rather than a product-based teaching method where the students' performance was only measured by the product at the end of the course as the following statement.

"At first, I thought that the educator would say, 'Please write an order letter ...,' and the students have to do so without any example. But Mr. X can, however, demonstrate the way to compose first. When he instructed the students to write one type of business letter, he would provide us with a prototype and elements that should be written in the letter. He had guidance for the students to study, even particularly concerned with word choice and the use of grammar."

Moreover, based on the result of the questionnaire above, it can be stated that the students can improve their writing by revising their writing from the teachers' and classmates' feedback. The data from the questionnaire strengthen by the result of the interview below.

"The educator engagingly demonstrates writing business letters process. For instance, when he asked the students to write inquiry letters, he wrote one clear example for us and guidance. So, the students have a good quality writing as a model."

Based on the excerpt above, it can be indicated that the educator provides chances to discuss or interact with the educator as well as with the classmates in the classroom. It can be stated that the students can write good quality works because the teachers provided models or examples before they are asked to write a text.

Furthermore, according to the result of the questionnaire above, it can be shown that most of the learners mentioned that they had improved their writing skills significantly. The students responded that they had made more incredible progress in their writing abilities. They also know about their strengths and weaknesses. Once the researchers asked them to do self-evaluation, they could identify ways they believed they were excellent and poor. The students attributed the progress to Mr. X's feedback for their writing, which focused on particular aspects of various works. It can be showed in the following excerpt.

"There is something you did exceptionally well in any piece of writing."

The students also valued the opportunity to participate in self-and peer review and considered the process advantageous. Based on the learners, the primary reasons are:

"If I find several errors in my classmates' works, I can tell them, and if there is something positive and strong, I can benefit from their works. I can also enhance my work by reviewing other students' work."

Thus, it can be concluded that the students have a positive attitude toward the use of formative assessment in ESP writing courses. It is in line with the study of Mauludin (2018) and Saliu-Abdulahi et al. (2017) that formative assessment can accelerate students' learning. The findings showed that the assessment enabled learners to reduce their inaccuracies and difficulties in various writing aspects from one draft to the next (Lee & Coniam, 2013). This research revealed that the strategies in formative assessment developed learners' abilities

by helping classmates with potentials support and by highlighting what learners have achieved well as well as equipped them with ongoing knowledge and feedback to find obstacles in writing. The result of this research could be promising for the state of writing pedagogy in the context of Indonesia in which more conservative approaches of instruction to pedagogy and assessment in writing courses are still prominent (Bennet, 2014; Naghdipour, 2017; Rahimi, 2013). In contrast, the conventional instructional method fails to provide learners with appropriate linguistic and rhetorical materials to overcome current difficulties in academic writing or recent demands on literacy skill acquisition, such as the need to write in various genres (Bennett, 2011; Guo & Xu, 2020). In particular, corresponding to Ferris's (2014) list of the best practice to give response to the literature, formative assessment strategies used in this research explored the most essential facets of learners' writing, presented them with input from various resources on at least two iterations of the work, and prepared them to measure their works and their classmates' works.

CONCLUSION

Since the solicitation for knowledgeable academic and disciplinary writers grows, educators must rethink the teaching and appraisal methods to address learners' actual requirements. The findings showed that integrating formative assessment strategies into writing classes will help learners improve various facets of writing. The results further show that promoting an eclectic approach in writing courses, like the process genre method, can help educators build an educational framework in which formative assessment can be more easily integrated into writing courses. Nevertheless, since formative assessment is still in its early stages, its satisfactory application is dependent on a variety of intervening variables, involving, though not restricted to, situational cues, learner cohort, the stage of English proficiency, and impetus attributes, which may be taken into consideration in future research in a related learning context.

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