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

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Abstract

The majority of undergraduate students experience summative assessment more than formative, which offers limited insight to enable learners to enhance the outcomes. In fact, formative assessment is more insightful and constructive than summative assessment, which impacts students' development as well as gives educators information to modify and adapt their teaching technique to the learners' needs appropriately. 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 the ESP class regarding students' writing skills in Indonesia. The researchers used a case study research design to investigate how ESP teachers implement formative assessment in their classes. The participants are two teachers who teach Business English subject and their 40 students. The researchers gathered the data from class observation, teachers' lesson plans, close-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. This study revealed that ESP learners were provided chances to enhance myriad facets of their writing skills and establish a good attitude regarding Business English subject and formative assessment. Nevertheless, learners also showed some obstacles which could have ramifications for the future formative assessment application in identical situations.

Keywords: Formative assessment, writing skills, ESP, teachers' experience, opportunities and challenges

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 also known as “formative assessment” or scholars mentioned it 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 requirement. 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’ feedbacks to 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, which has failed to attract learners in the assessment process and contribute to their learning process (Guo & Xu, 2020; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Nowadays, formative assessment is being widely acknowledged as pivotal to the 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 (Naghdi-pour, 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). While EFL students are demanded to have four primary language skills, they are speaking, writing, listening, and speaking (Burner, 2016; Naghdipour, 2017), ESP students are expected to master English related to their specific field (Basturkamen, 2013). From all of the main language skills, writing is the most complex skills because students have to integrate many interlinked language skills. In the context of ESP, 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. Hence, particular treatment should be used to guide them acquire the important language skills.

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, there is no research conducted in the Indonesian EFL context that aims to identify the detail of formative assessment incorporation of ESP class teachers. As mentioned previously, in the ESP context, students are experienced difficulty to understand English since English course is only taught in a shorter time. Thus, the learners' competence to write business correspondence is obstructed. To solve the problem, teachers need to use specific classroom instruction that actively promotes the learners' learning cycle. Hence, this recent research reported the ESP teachers' enactment of formative assessment in ESP class, especially to enhance their writing business letters skills in Indonesia. This study conducted to fill the gap and contribute to expand the literature on the formative assessment in the ESP class. Specifically, this research examines how the teachers integrate formative assessment in the class and how formative assessment impacts their learners' writing skills as well as their perceptions toward writing and its assessment. Furthermore, this research also explores the learners' opportunities and challenges in integrating the formative assessment into classroom instruction.

Many scholars have been defined formative assessment in various ways (Bennett, 2011). The definition given by Black & Wiliam (1998, p. 140) was one of the most frequently cited definitions. They stated that "all activities undertaken by teachers and their students in assessing themselves, that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities, are called formative assessment." The definition explained that in the formative assessment situation, students are given adequate feedback, insight, as well as subsequent acts to enhance the learning process (Fernando, 2020; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). Even though various tools can be employed in a formative way (Bennett, 2011; Lee, 2011; Lee & Coniam, 2013), some related literature on this type of assessment reviews several different strategies related to formative assessment. For instance, Black & Wiliam (2009) proposed five backbone of techniques in formative assessment as the assessment intervention foundation:

- a) Describing and communicating instructional goals and performance parameters,
- b) Generating potential classroom discussion and other learning experiences that evoke details of learners' comprehension,
- c) Offering suggestions and feedback which help students to improve their learning,
- d) Triggering learners as resources in the teaching and learning activities,
- e) Motivating learners as the owners in the learning process.

According to Bennett (2011), these strategies are guided by the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the knowledge co-construction and social interaction in classroom instruction activities. The progress-oriented assessment is also related to Vygotsky's zone proximal development theory focused on learners' next stage of performance development. It has been done through scaffolding activities conditioned in a less authoritarian and stress-free instructional atmosphere (Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012).

Furthermore, integrating those five strategies into writing courses adheres to the strategies-oriented teaching model (Bennett, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007), which encourages students to participate in the learning cycle by explicitly teaching-learning strategies actively. The critical strategy advocated by formative assessment is giving students feedback from the educators, classmates, and the students themselves. The strategy is beneficial to involve learners in a substantive assessment practice that will help them become more independent learners (Mak & Lee, 2014; McDowell et al., 2011) as well as enhance their enthusiasm and motivation to revise their work further (Cauley & McMillan, 2010). Formative feedback strategy is one of the essential components of formative assessment because they advise learners "where students are going, where students have been, and how students can fill in the gaps" in the writing knowledge, as well as give information to educators to modify their future instructional activities (Chappuis et al., 2013; Ziegler & Lehner, 2021). Implementing assessment for formative objectives depends on both the educators' and the learners' knowledge of assessment. Mutual comprehension is essential for assessment to be effective and beneficial (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Havnes et al., 2012) and completely leverage formative assessment as a learning tool (Havnes et al., 2012).

In Indonesia, writing course assessment still uses a product-oriented tradition in which the educators rely on learners' final products. Teachers give little or no follow-up process. They also do not involve students in the assessment process (Nurhayati, 2020; Prastikawati et al., 2020). While the application of formative assessment seems to have been underused and understudied, more current studies have shown proposing several particular elements of this assessment in writing courses. For instance, Lee (2007) conducted research about formative assessment and related it to the writing course. He analyzed educators' written input activities in the EFL writing classroom concerning their summative and formative roles. The result of this study showed that educators' feedbacks mainly contribute to the function of summative assessment. Other research about formative assessment in

writing class in EFL context conducted by Lee (2011) was a case study in which the investigator observed the systematic application of one EFL writing teacher's formative assessment. The study revealed that learners were more enthusiastic and motivated for the formative assessment of writing lesson. The third research conducted by Burner (2016) and Lee & Coniam (2013) revealed that students became more motivated and enthusiastic about writing course after the teachers implemented formative assessment in writing class. The researchers demonstrated the development and improvement in writing skills.

After researching tertiary school level students' application of various strategies in writing, Abdollahzadeh (2010) suggested that educators incorporate reading-writing exercises, writing journals or portfolios, conducting explicit instructional activities, and writing multi-draft to improve writing abilities and enhance autonomous learning. Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid (2012) investigated some assessment strategies with third-year undergraduate students. They discovered that self-and peer-assessment substantially affected learners' success in writing an essay and learning autonomy. Moreover, Rahimi (2013) conducted training for one group of second-semester university learners to criticize classmates' works. In contrast, the trained group of students concentrating more on global problems and made considerable improvement in writing paragraphs, the untrained group of students focusing more on local topics in their peers' work. The researcher required the learners to revise their drafts after getting feedback and invited them to join the online conference for feedback confirmation that could be considered another successful integration of the formative assessment approach.

Although the results of the prior research, as mentioned earlier, are potential since they concentrated on integrating progress-oriented aspects like working collaboratively, revising, and attending a conference in a general writing class, the formative assessment systematic application in the ESP context has yet to be studied. Thus, to fill the gap, this recent research emphasizes the integration of formative assessment in ESP class, especially to develop students' business letters writing skills. The following are the research questions addressed in this research:

- 1) How is the integration of formative assessment in the ESP writing skills?
- 2) How did formative assessment affect learner's belief and attitude towards writing and its assessment?
- 3) What specific opportunities and obstacles, is any, do the teachers and students experience when participating in the formative assessment during ESP class?

METHOD

The researchers used a case study research design. In addition, the researchers used various approaches to gather quantitative and qualitative data (Stake, 1995), including educators and learners semi-structured interviews, close-ended questionnaires for students, class observation, educators' lesson plans, and the researchers' field notes. This study's primary purpose is to gather in-depth comprehension of the integration of formative assessment, the learner's belief and attitude of formative assessment, and their opportunities and obstacles of the formative assessment enactment in ESP course.

Participant and the Contextual Background

The participants were two educators of the Business English course and their 40 first-year undergraduate students majoring in Economics in one of the private universities in Indonesia. The sample size of 2 teachers and 40 students allowed the investigators to collect in-depth data and achieved saturated data (Patton, 2015). Data saturation means that the authors gathered no additional information from the participants' responses to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researchers utilized a pseudonym to ensure the research ethically. Hereafter, the teachers' and students' name will be coded to keep their identity. The researchers contacted the teachers (Mr. X and Ms. Y) by email, then offered a consent letter to review and interview them online. Mr. X and Ms. Y explained that they have already taught at the University for 10 and 14 years, respectively. Mr. X accepted a Master's degree in English Education from an outstanding public University in Indonesia. His area of research involved language assessment. While Ms. Y received a Doctoral degree in English Education from a great University in Australia. Her area of research included TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and language assessment.

Data Collection and Instrument

At first, the researchers gave the learners questionnaires to investigate their attitudes and beliefs of formative assessment enactment in ESP class. Then, the survey was distributed via *google form* to the respondents since using this method, a large amount of data can be gathered in a short time from many participants. It took less than 30 minutes to finish the questionnaires and submitted them back in a few days. The data obtained were used to confirm the interviews data. There are 25 items in the survey to get the data about students' attitudes and beliefs adapted and modified from Lee (2011). Besides, in the present research, it must be known that to examine if there are any modifications required in the questionnaire's statements and to ensure that all of the questionnaire statements were easy

enough for respondents to comprehend, the questionnaires were consulted to the advanced colleagues to provide more valid, reliable, and credible data.

In terms of the educators' detailed information, the researchers obtained lesson plans from the teachers to shed some lights on the research's context (specifically instructional and assessment practice). The researchers interviewed the teachers three times to further explore their practice with formative assessment in ESP class. The researchers attended their classes and conducted a short interview with them shortly after teaching to confirm the experiences. The researchers have videotaped the meetings and wrote field notes to be analysed. The information from class observations provided the researchers with first-hand data of the teachers' teaching strategies to supplement the self-evaluated data in the interview sessions.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The questionnaires for students were calculated to know about the percentage of the students' attitudes and beliefs. For the interview data, the researchers wrote the transcription, then interpreted them. The researchers frequently read the transcribed data to find out the emerging trends and themes as well as the relationship among the categories. The researchers coded the categories through an inductive analysis approach. The researchers retrieved relevant points gathered from the field notes and teachers' lesson plans to shed some lights on the analysis from various data sources.

Moreover, the problem 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. The researchers begin with the teachers' background information about the motivation for adopting formative assessment in their classes. Then, the researchers provide the results following the research questions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Integration of Formative Assessment in the Writing Subject

The researchers describe Mr. X and Ms. Y's reasons for integrating formative assessment in their classes. The data gathered from interviews sessions with Mr. X and Ms. Y. They were well-realized of the inappropriate use of teaching approach culture in Indonesia, which only focused on the learning phase and the product at the end of the meeting rather than assessment procedures. They also disagreed with the predominant use

of summative-based teaching activity where the teachers are only taught students for the test. Ms. Y stated:

"Teachers should provide time for students on pre-writing activities and clarify more about formative assessment requirements."

Learners who were provided little feedback to assist them in writing will experience puzzled by the assessment requirements. Ms. Y recognized that a mismatch of instruction and appraisal had a detrimental effect on learners' performance and that formative assessment needed to be improved in order to bring classroom instruction, learning phase, and assessment cycle together. Second, Ms. Y also disagreed with the practice of "teaching for the test" in which assessment was conducted mostly only to "accommodate the requirement of the reporting scenario". According to Ms. Y:

"The practice of scoring learners' works is consuming too much time for educators and frustrating for learners, who simply duplicate the correction without learn from the mistakes."

Ms. Y stated that with conducting the practice in the classroom, teachers will never see their students' progress because it is just a piece of work in which standalone, and there is nothing that continues to indicate development.

Mr. X's intention to use formative assessment in his ESP class was also motivated by the fact that traditional assessment practices had resulted in completely passive and reliant students. Therefore, learners have to be taught how to become less reliant on their instructors. According to Mr. X:

"Present innovative assessment implementation has to bring out the learners' potentials. I also believe that if the teachers can integrate formative assessment well, they will realize that students understand more than the teachers are preparing for."

In the preliminary interview, Mr. X stated that he decided to vigorously engage his learners in evaluating their works and their classmates' works to create a more interactive and dynamic experience than relying solely on the educator. Furthermore, by focusing on formative assessment, Mr. X expected to improve his students' performance and confidence and enhance instructors' satisfaction and productivity in conducting classroom instruction and evaluating ESP course. 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:

1. Conduct Peer-Review

Mr. X and Ms. Y demanded the learners to write a draft that they have to consult, present, and discuss with friends and teachers before they submitted it, rather than merely the product 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."

2. Give Implicit Comment

In giving feedback for students, 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 deeper about their errors, to learn from their mistakes, and finally to know their students' original idea, 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."

3. Conduct Pre-Writing Activities

Mr. X's motivation to conduct formative assessment in his class led him to devote greater effort to spend more time teaching and less time to give a score. He believed it was pivotal for learners to prepare more for pre-writing activities. From the data of classroom observation, the researchers knew that Mr. X had 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."

4. Show Task-Specific Criteria to Learners (Assessment Rubric)

Ms. Y used 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."

5. Avoid Put Emphasize on Grades or Scores

Mr. X avoided focusing on grades or scores. As a result, the emphasis is concentrated on giving suggestions and feedback rather than giving scores, which many scholars consider an excellent procedure for conducting formative assessment in the classroom (David Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006).

Mr. X and Ms. Y implanted teaching innovation that is led to significant reform of the old assessment practices in Indonesian culture. For example, they conducted peer-review, gave implicit comments, conducted pre-writing activities, discussed rubric that contained assessment standards with the learners, and avoided emphasizing giving grades or scores. By focusing on formative assessment, they succeeded in bringing innovation and reform to their classroom practices.

The Effect of Formative Assessment Implementation on Learners' Attitudes and Beliefs towards ESP Writing Skills

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 lights on the effect of formative assessment on the learner's belief and attitude toward Business English subject. The following table offers the information about the questionnaire finding.

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	96	24	Positive
2.	My concern is more on the writing process rather than at the end of the course	80	20	Positive
3.	I can generate a great piece of writing when I put effort into it	64	16	Positive
4.	It is entirely within my control whether or not I can write properly	64	16	Positive
5.	Writing Business Letters in English is something I am good at	84	21	Positive
6.	When the teacher asked me to write, I am capable of executing it successfully	72	18	Positive
7.	I have figured out how to make my works better	68	17	Positive
8.	I entirely responsible for my writing skill improvement	72	18	Positive

9.	I write with some effort to make my writing well	84	21	Positive
10.	I am ready to put forth the effort necessary to mitigate my writing problems	76	19	Positive
11.	The assessment objective is to determine how well or poorly I do	60	15	Positive
12.	The assessment objective is to assist me in improving my business writing skills	76	19	Positive
13.	The assessment objective is to assist English educator in improving and modifying his or her classroom instruction	80	20	Positive
14.	Grades are beneficial in assisting me in improving my writing skills	68	17	Positive
15.	Scores or grades (e.g., 100, 90, 60... or A, B, C...) help enhance my writing skills	56	14	Uncertain
16.	In my opinion, any piece of writing I finished should be evaluated by the English educator	80	20	Positive
17.	When grading and assessing my writing, I believe that the educator should only concentrate on the accuracy of the grammar	32	8	Negative
18.	All of my written inconsistencies and errors, I believe should be addressed by my English educator	48	12	Uncertain
19.	To evaluate students' writing, I believe my English instructor should apply broad parameters (such as substance, organization, grammar, and language)	76	19	Positive
20.	In my opinion, the educator should have written feedback on my work	76	19	Positive
21.	I believe that educator should use various assessment standards for different assignments in the ESP course	72	18	Positive
22.	Meetings with my English educator are beneficial to explore ways I can do better in my writing	96	24	Positive
23.	Having chances to do self-evaluation in my writing is beneficial	76	19	Positive
24.	It is helpful to be able to evaluate the work of my peers.	72	18	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.	92	23	Positive

Note: N = total number of participants; % = percentage

From the questionnaire results, it can be explained that ESP learners have positive attitudes regarding Business English course, improved encouragement as authors (item 1, 5, and 9), and became more persuaded of the importance of strategies in formative assessment,

especially in Business English subject, like a conference (item 22) and write multiple drafts (item 25).

The results are supported by the information from an interview with the learners, which shows that the learners were satisfied with the experience in the formative assessment-oriented Business English course innovated and conducted by the teacher. Firstly, five interviewed learners stated that they enjoy 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."*

The arguments raised involve: the educator provides chances to conduct pre-writing activities, like to read, discuss or interact with the educator (also give feedback to the text), ask questions before writing the draft, improve motivation, and educator's teaching strategies. According to one learner:

"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."

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 only measured by the product at the end of the course. According to one learner:

"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."

When the researchers asked about the student's attitude towards the ESP course, especially in the writing process, many students stated that they were afraid to join ESP class because they thought they would request them to write something without guidance. But further, they said that they enjoy the ESP course because the teacher has been conducted innovative teaching strategies. According to the results, the formative assessment had a rewarding and motivating impact on the learners' learning process.

Besides considerable motivation in the ESP course, five learners mentioned that they had improved their writing skills significantly (Table 1 item 5). 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 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. One student stated:

"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:

"We may learn from other classmates about the way they write."

"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."

They all mentioned that writing multiple drafts was beneficial to them and preferred single drafting (Table 1 item 25).

"It lets me more time ponder what I want to write."

"If I do not have drafts, I will not understand what went wrong."

"I will also address the errors from the previous draft that I have written."

Mr. X's effort to integrate formative assessment in his Business English class, particularly his effort in withholding grades from the learners, has magically shifted learners' perspectives of the essential of scores.

"All students do not have to be afraid regarding the score; all they have to do is write earnestly."

"If students are only focused on the grades, they can only concentrate on having a good score and will not take their studies seriously."

"If the emphasis is solely on the score, and the individual receives a poor score, he or she may suffer from low self-esteem."

"For me, scores or grades are just superficial and unrealistic things. They cannot represent the shortcomings and abilities in reality."

The responses show that formative assessment helped ESP learners understand the significance of the learning development overwriting as final products measured by scores (Table 1, item 11, and 12). Moreover, amid the widespread focus that learners are primarily encouraged by grades or marks, the research's results indicate that learners'

entrenched attitudes toward scores can be shifted through consistent educator attempts and that disengaging feedback from scores can promote better students' encouragement and participation with the process of assessment (Wiliam et al., 2003).

The Opportunities and Obstacles of Formative Assessment Implementation

The interview data and observation illuminated the results of the students' writing tasks and questionnaires. Several themes about the potentials and obstacles of applying several strategies in formative assessment in this context emerged from the data analysis. Most learners vividly shared enthusiasm with the researchers about the progress they had achieved when they give response to the first interview question, as reflected in the following quote:

"In this ESP course, especially in the writing process, I studied the way to compose various kinds of business letters. We also understood the importance of multiple elements. I feel that this class was an open-ended course, which means that the students can learn and write the provided topics using a range of sources rather than relying on a textbook."

When the researchers asked about the effect of formative assessment, the learners expressed acceptance of the various forms of feedback that they have gained during the semester. One undergraduate student, for instance, made the following assertion:

"The strategies served in this course for providing feedback were creative and innovative. For example, as I composed my works, I realized that I did not understand how to spell certain words like "inquire" and "assume." Other students give comments helped me refine grammar or vocabulary as well. However, the educator's feedback encouraged me to compose better writing."

When the researchers asked the learners about the peer-assessment usefulness, one student pointed to the practice of working together, like reviewing other classmates' work as well as collaborating with other learners. One student commented:

"In the ESP course, I think share ideas and experiences in class are what we need. Furthermore, reading other classmates' business letters taught me many new things and inspired me to do more."

Learners recognized the importance of discussion sessions in the classroom, particularly in the pre-writing phase as well as the whole class review sessions in improving students' writing quality and boosting the motivation in other aspects of learning the language. For instance, one learner gives the following response:

"In this class, the teacher always gives us opportunities to communicate or to discuss with the teacher and classmates, express our ideas and difficulties, and ask any questions. In this session, I found how to address a problem from various perspectives in my work. It was also valuable for improving our speaking skills since learners have to express their thoughts."

Besides serving as a database for various authentic input examples, assembling portfolios was a beneficial task that helped learners take responsibility for the learning phase. In addition, portfolio writing was used as a means for practising writing and enhancing their vocabularies and world insight, all of which are essential components of writing good business letters or resumes, as the following quote:

"I realized it was confusing at first, but I appreciated the concept once I found the advantages. For example, I used to stick to my views in writing business letters. Yet, I have to think on the theme and take notes in the portfolios about various thoughts and vocabularies that I can include in the business letters later."

When the researchers asked about the effectiveness of writing a portfolio for Indonesian learners, one learner thought that it was a valuable strategy that was different from the notebooks they have held as a student, in terms of objective and intention, as on students responded:

"That has differed from the notebooks that high school students have used, such as science or math. My portfolios, in particular, contained a variety of stuff, including tasks, reading texts, vocabularies, and essays."

Although learners described strategies that they utilized to establish their writing skills, students also expressed several issues. For example, several learners mentioned that they like to read and write their favourite topic, as can be seen in this excerpt:

"I hope, as students, we had the freedom of selecting our preferred topic. For instance, I enjoyed reading and writing about culture, yet the case delivered in class rarely discussed culture-related issues."

Notwithstanding being given reading courses in the initial years of college, several learners considered the digital texts beyond their reading abilities. For example, one of the participants expressed his thoughts as follows:

"I learn about the given topics on a variety of websites. I tried my hardest to make notes and learn new words. However, some texts were tough for me. I believe the educator should have provided us with more accessible reading materials."

Several learners, as predicted, rejected the repeated regrouping or pairing with others. Conversely, they tended to collaborate with their classmates, particularly those with

a high English and writing ability level. Furthermore, the learners claimed that the success of collaborative projects is impacted by factors rather than context, as one student commented:

"I believe that the classmates' understanding and knowledge determine peer-assessment effectiveness. For example, I noticed that several peers were more adept at commenting on our work than other classmates. Hence, we should have the freedom to select our group members."

Students' Response to Teachers' Feedback

The researchers found that the teachers are accustomed to delivering online feedback to the learners through MS Word's "track changes". Nevertheless, not all students have enjoyed the feature, in that the educators tend to apply when giving response on their writing, as the following quote from one student:

"When the MS Word bubble (the teacher's comment) stated that some words in my writing should not be there, I could click the "accept all changes" feature, and the bubble will go away. Yet, I was not comfortable with the feature in commenting on my work because sometimes it can make me wonder why the words should or should not be there and I cannot ask the teacher directly."

Moreover, most students report that there is tremendous feedback from the teachers. For example, one student gives a response:

"Sometimes, I thought that the feedback could be overwhelming. Thus, I felt that I could not fix anything because there were many comments on my work. I immediately said to myself, "Wow, I have to rewrite that and correct this..." yet after seeing all of the errors, I am not sure about what the educators expect the students to correct."

Once the researchers asked the students about the way to fix difficulties in responding to writing assessments, they highlight the significance of educators' instruction. To eliminate misinterpretations, the majority of students favour oral feedback on their work, as follows:

"I felt that I had committed a significant error. However, I have no idea what the educator expects to revise. It is much easier if I have the chance to meet the teacher to confirm directly regarding the feedback."

Furthermore, the majority of learners are emphasized on receiving a lot of negative comments. The researchers had already witnessed the practices. The students stress the significance of getting constructive feedback like the following quote:

"The negative aspects of the feedback are overrepresented. I recommend that teachers may also give us positive things we have done. I think with appreciation. We can be motivated to

write other good quality essays. Other students emphasize the importance of knowing if something in their work is inaccurate. We recently learned where to best positioned the comma in our writing, however not the reason."

Overall, the learners confess to not following up on the comments on the essays. The most prominent explanation appears to be the pessimistic nature of the comments. Moreover, they also do not comprehend the feedback. All in all, oral remarks on students' essays would be preferable so that they could confirm things. The learners believe that their scores interfere with the feedback, often only because they have informed them. The learners stated that they welcome feedback or comments. However, they would like to get more constructive ones.

In a nutshell, the data analysis from various sources indicates that considering the difficulties learners encountered, they nurtured a deeper comprehension of various strategies in formative assessment and employed them to enhance their works. Also, greater practices improved students' contentment with their writing skills and propelled the desire to write better.

Owing to the lack of studies on the formative assessment implementation in EFL writing class of college students (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. The findings showed that the assessment enabled learners to reduce their inaccuracies and difficulties in various writing aspects from one draft to the next. Nevertheless, reviewing the questionnaire results found that the students were focused not only on eliminating grammatical and lexical problems but also on other facets of writing progress. The condition was not shocking, given that there are many components of good writing, in that the learners are expected to get from the input of classmates and teachers.

This research revealed that the strategies in formative assessment developed learners' abilities (e.g., by helping classmates with potentials support others and by highlighting what learners have achieved well) and equipped them with ongoing knowledge and feedback to find obstacles in writing. Peer-review was one of the strategies in which learners presented and sorted out the writing difficulties in groups. Peer-review can be used to assist learners progress to the next ZPD, as suggested by Vygotsky (1978) in a situation in which working collaborative is not common in writing classes (Abdollahzadeh, 2010; Rahimi, 2013) and learners are usually seated in mixed-capability classrooms, and where

there is no comprehensive measurement strategy or English Preparatory courses to homogenize learners' English proficiency level.

Portfolio writing, as some researchers have pointed out (e.g., Chee et al., 2009; Wang, 2015), has proven to be an effective formative appraisal strategy for facilitating learners in taking stronger accountability and responsibility for their learning. Learners expanded the lexical sources and acknowledged the crucial function that vocabularies can play in effective textual distribution. They focused on the gathered reading material, primarily by paraphrasing and summarizing practices. Even though Indonesian students are discouraged from keeping journals because of the crowded classrooms, educators' time restrictions and the heavy workload (Mohamadi, 2018), the learners in the research recorded gains in various aspects of their writing and language learning by participating in various learning activities in the portfolios. One rationale for portfolio improvement is to improve learners' exposure to more L2 feedback by incorporating reading-writing practices. This condition is especially important for Indonesian students, who have less experience with authentic English text and whose works are riddled with cross-linguistic flaws (Mohamadi, 2018; Rahimi, 2009).

Likewise, introducing learners to model an essay and reading material strengthen their understanding of how various literary elements and discourse structures are interlinked to produce an English text. The condition involved, yet was not restricted to, teaching students how to use cohesion and coherence mechanisms in the essays, like conjunctions and connecting words, critically defending their arguments, and taking a firm stance on argumentative or persuasive writing assignments. The shift was most noticeable in the writing style of the learners. For instance, although learners concentrated powerfully on stylistic and rhetorical standards and structures of their first language in the essays, like using dramatic and metaphoric language, hints of more academic techniques, such as describing and illustrating, were found in the students' writing regarding the end of the course.

Many researchers suggested classroom discussion and oral dialogue as another critical strategy in formative assessment because they provided ways for learners to connect and communicate (e.g. Black, 2016; Black & Wiliam, 2009; McMartin-Miller, 2014). The data from interview sessions showed that learners' involvement in classroom discussions, pre-writing activities, and interactions enabled them to effectively administer written discourse and improved learners' interest in other language learning skills like speaking since they have to express their ideas in class. The result is aligned with the "writing-to-

learn" viewpoint (Manchon, 2011), which advocates for using writing to enhance language learning by giving a more meaningful and relevant learning context for learners, like a formative assessment in a writing class.

While learners expressed some issues, mainly either because of their poor reading or English competence and possibly as the impact of prior guidance, the results could be promising for the state of writing pedagogy in the context of Indonesia in which more conservative approaches of instruction to the pedagogy and assessment in writing course are still prominent (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 (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.

4 **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion is intended to help the reader understand why your research should matter to them after they have finished reading the paper. A conclusion is not merely a summary of the main topics covered or a re-statement of your research problem, but a synthesis of key points. It is important that the conclusion does not leave the questions unanswered.

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