



Formative assessment in distance learning: narratives of Indonesian senior secondary school EFL teachers

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is a pivotal endeavor where the teacher can provide feedback, evaluation and solutions on students' learning so that the teacher can find out the level of students' understanding of the lesson that has been taught and see the abilities and difficulties faced by the students to determine what students need. Based on the current situation, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in the learning system from offline learning to distance learning with online mode. In response to this, teachers and students need to adapt to the online mode of teaching and learning process. To fill this gap, the current study aims to explore the way of English teachers in conducting formative assessments related to students' proficiency during distance learning. Designed in narrative research, data are garnered through semi-structured interviews with three Indonesian English teachers of senior secondary school. The interview seeks to explore the methods or strategies of English teachers towards online formative assessment during distance learning. The results of this study indicate that formative assessment during distance learning is carried out online with one or more combinations of language skills.

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Introduction

The learning modes are forced to change in accordance with the demands of avoiding social contact. From face-to-face learning, the learning process must adapt to an online mode called distance learning. The Distance learning process affects the interaction of the teacher with students (Escobar & Morrison, 2020). By this interaction, the teacher can observe the students' performance and students will get feedback from their teacher during the teaching and learning process (Mudra, 2018). Even in these circumstances, teachers must be adaptable and professional in teaching remain innovative in educational development even though the

learning modes have changed (Kidd & Murray, 2020). An example of these adaptations in the learning context is in formative assessment.

Assessment is a pivotal endeavor systematic process, especially in English subject that use various methods and tools to collect the information on learning outcomes and competency attainment of students (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986). In addition to knowing the achievements and abilities of students in the learning process, assessment is also conducted to develop a curriculum (Gultom, 2016). There are three types of assessments which are diagnostic assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment (Connors, 2021; Dixon & Worrell, 2016) in the process of collecting the data, this study discussed one of them only, which is the formative assessment used in assessing students' proficiency in the English language subjects.

Formative assessment aims to gain information about students' understanding of one basic competency that has been delivered by the teacher, where the information can be used by teachers and students to develop (Jian & Luo, 2014). This assessment is used during the learning process and may take a variety of forms, such as informal questions, quizzes, and fill the blank (Brown & Hudson, 1998). It provides feedback on the learning process. In carrying out formative assessments, teachers can assess students' skills in both knowledge and the four basic aspects of English, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

The same as offline learning, in distance learning, an assessment is also conducted as an evaluation process to find out the achievements and proficiency of students in the learning process. However, due to changes in the learning system, there are some challenges for both teachers and students, one of them is in the assessment process. This pattern is different from the previous assessment mode, it must be carried out in an online mode (Al-Hattami, 2020). In this online assessment, teachers use online platforms such as WhatsApp group, google classroom, Edmodo, zoom meeting, etc. These online platforms can help teachers provide direct feedback and reflection to students (Ali & Sofa, 2018; Khanafiyah et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020). In addition to assessing students, these online platforms are also used by teachers to support the distance learning process.

English language assessment refers to a variety of ways to collect the information of English language proficiency or achievement of the students (Koizumi, 2022). According to Brown and Hudson's (1998) theory about the alternatives in language assessment, they claim that teachers have many choices to choose the type of their language assessment based on their specific purposes. In choosing the type of language assessment, the teacher must pay attention to the positive and negative of washback from the assessment procedure, the importance of giving feedback on students' assessment results, and the importance of using multiple sources of assessment information. Therefore, assessment in the English language subject has become an important component in the learning process which aims to improve students learning and achievement (Meidasari, 2015).

At this time, Indonesia has made changes to the new curriculum called the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum that promotes new policies to better the quality of education. In senior secondary school, it is not only the grade level has changed, but also the level of a subject, one of them is in English language subject. These changes are in the learning design, materials, and assessment (Sari & Wardani, 2018). As we know that in Indonesia, English language was introduced as a foreign language and was taught from secondary education to

the university level (Alwasilah, 2013). Based on the current curriculum in Indonesia, English language subjects at senior secondary school the students are focused on four skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Efendi, 2017). The implementation of distance learning in this pandemic situation requires English teachers to change the procedures of the teaching and learning process includes an assessment process that still meets the policies set out in the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

According to the above explanation, assessment is critical in this pandemic era because it could help teachers track students' progress throughout their studies (Arif, 2020). However, there are many problems such as carried out face to face, lack of parental guidance. Teachers cannot monitor students directly either the students are active or passive. Most of the students are passive because they think that not taking online classes is not a problem and they will pass. Besides, there are also economic problems, such as a lack of funds to buy internet data or even not having a cellphone. Geographical factors can also restrict internet signals so that assessments during distance learning are not carried out properly.

In response to this growing need, further investigation regarding the real problems faced by English teachers in the formative assessment process of English language is needed. Therefore, this research focuses on teacher's experience in conducting the formative assessment while teaching English during distance learning. The present study aims to explore narratives of Indonesian senior secondary school EFL teachers in terms of theory and practices of formative assessments based on the novel methods or strategies in the time of distance learning.

Method

This research looked at the experience of three English teachers in conducting formative assessment of their students' English proficiency during distance learning in senior secondary schools in Central Java, Indonesia. This study employed narrative research, by narrating the results of the interview (Barkhuizen, 2014; Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It was chosen because the participants told their experience and the way they conduct a formative assessment to their students during distance learning through the interview. The researcher hopes that from the results of the interviews there will be some lessons that readers can get.

The present study recruited three senior secondary school EFL teachers, i.e., Mrs. Daisy, Mrs. Sekar, and Mrs. Ayu (pseudonyms), to share their narratives (see Table 1). The motive behind the researcher selects the participants was because they had conducted the distance learning process during this pandemic. Before conducting the interview, the researcher was asked the participants for permission to make consent to participate in this research and their personal information was kept confidential (Bolderston, 2012).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Name of participants	Sex	Educational background	Teaching experience	Informal training
Mrs. Daisy	Female	Bachelor degree	6 years	Curriculum design
Mrs. Sekar	Female	Bachelor degree	5 years	Curriculum design
Mrs. Ayu	Female	Bachelor degree	4 years	Curriculum design

The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect the data from the participants through direct or face-to-face interviews and virtual interviews via WhatsApp video calls. The researcher focused on how do teachers conduct formative assessments in English subjects on students during distance learning. The researchers provided open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview is an interview that includes a series of open-ended questions based on the topic of the study and enables questions to expand from the list of planned questions but still refers to the topic so as to produce more deep information (Heigham & Croker, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were used as a tool to dig deeper information in this research. The interview was conducted by using the Indonesian language to avoid misunderstanding between the participants and the researcher (Ferdiansyah, 2018).

The researcher transcribed the data which had been collected from the interview to assist in analyzing it. To analyze the transcript in more detail, the researcher read the transcript repeatedly to find the main themes. The researcher used thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze by identifying, analyzing and reporting the patterns contained in the data and presenting them in detail and comprehensively. Then, to minimize misinterpretation of the interview result, the researcher used the Alternatives in Language Assessment by Brown and Hudson (1998) to analyze the data descriptively.

Findings and discussion

Practices and quizzes in online formative assessment

The current implementation of distance learning makes it increasingly difficult for teachers to conduct assessments due to the emergence of problems that come from the teachers, students, and parents (Krishnan et al., 2020). Online formative assessment is useful as a reflection material for both students and teachers (Ardiansyah et al., 2018; Grob et al., 2021; Oellermann & der Merwe, 2015).

Mrs. Ayu expressed about the implementation during distance learning. The two types of assessment used were formative and summative assessments. This can be seen in the following interview vignettes:

The assessment is not only measured by numbers, but it can have many functions. The first is formative assessment which aims to get as much information as possible that can be used by teachers and students to change or develop. The second one is formative assessment which can provide valuable information for the teacher to know about the condition of the students and serve as material for teachers to reflect on themselves in teaching (Mrs. Sekar, Video call interview, June 7, 2021, Researcher translation).

Teachers can change students can also change to be better while the summative assessment is usually in the form of the final exam, which is measured by numbers (Mrs. Ayu, Face-to-face interview, June 9, 2021, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview data, the formative assessment is conducted in online mode. The researchers found that there were some methods of the formative assessment were used by the participants in assessing senior secondary school students' proficiency in English language subjects (Becker & Nekrasova-Beker, 2018) during distance learning. One of them is practices and quizzes with Google Form.

The following interview excerpt contains the experience of English teachers in conducting online formative assessments through Google Form, such as quizzes and practice questions.

Formative assessment of students' achievement, when one basic competency is completed, I always give feedback in the sense that I assess the students in the form of practice questions or quizzes using the google form link according to the material that has been studied (Mrs. Daisy, Face-to-face interview, May 28, 2021, Researcher translation).

The interview data show that formative assessment could be in the form of quizzes and practice questions. Where the question can be in the form of a selected-response assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Schauber et al., 2021), it usually includes options that can be chosen by students as their answers such as multiple choice and true or false. Those types of assessment are suitable for assessing skills, which are reading and listening.

Videos for assessing speaking, reading, and listening via WhatsApp or Google Classroom

The second emerging theme is videos for assessing speaking, reading, and listening via WhatsApp and Google Classroom. The following interview vignette contained the experience of English teachers in conducting online formative assessments in the form of video by using online platforms, such as WhatsApp and Google Classroom for assessing speaking, reading, and listening.

During face-to-face learning, teachers can see their ability from speaking as well as through daily interaction, now only through online platforms. Thus, for material related to speaking and reading practices such as singing, procedure text, and presentation of material in the form of video that is collected in google classroom which will also be watched by other students. Indeed, by making these videos students are more creative in making the media. But for the pronunciation, it's very low achievement (Mrs. Daisy, Face-to-face interview, May 28, 2021, Researcher translation).

Drawn in the interview result, methods of assessing students' speaking, reading, and listening skills gave positive and negative washback. Washback is the effect of a test and assessment on student learning behavior (Brown & Hudson, 1998). The positive effect of this activity is the students become more creative starting from the preparation of ideas to finishing the video. In addition to creative students, based on the data the assessment method also provides negative washback which is detrimental to teachers and students because by making videos of student pronunciation there has been no improvement. It happens because of the lack of practice in speaking English, so the students' pronunciation is not fluent (Chan, 2022).

Images and documents uploaded to Google Classroom

The next emerging theme is images and documents uploaded to Google Classroom. The following interview excerpt illustrates the experience of English teachers in conducting online formative assessments in the form of pictures or documents by using online platforms, e.g., Google Classroom, for assessing students writing skills.

Teachers must learn and be creative in creating assessment methods to attract students' interest during distance learning. To assess students' writing skills, I use Google Classroom, by students uploading their work results in documents and then give feedback directly in the comments section, so the others student can help to correct their friends' assignments starting from the results of their writings, content, and

structure. As a result, teachers and students can interact with each other if there is a revision or the score is not sufficient (Mrs. Sekar, Video call interview, June 7, 2021, Researcher translation).

One of these applications was explained in more detail by Mrs. Sekar.

For example, basic competency is about explanation text and I want the students to explain how the natural phenomenon "rain" happens. I will give a picture of an example of the rain cycle, so the students will explain the picture in an article or essay about how rain happens. Therefore, what is assessed are the content and structure, from there students will think that my writing should fulfill the assessment target (Mrs. Sekar, Video call interview, June 7, 2021, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview result, the use of image media makes students more understand the direction and purpose of what they will write in writing from what they see (Liong et al., 2019). Not only pictures motivate students in learning, but they can also reduce student boredom in participating in learning, and picture media can change learning situations or classroom conditions to be more live because of variations in learning. Due to the lack of vocabulary mastery, students have difficulties in writing because they do not have ideas and vocabulary for them to express themselves (Asrifan, 2015). Therefore, the teacher uses pictures that match the circumstances around the students.

Interactive discussion on WhatsApp

The following data contained the experience of English teachers in conducting online formative assessments by WhatsApp voice note for assessing students speaking skills. Mrs. Daisy stated that in responding the changes in the education system, teachers must accept this situation. This can be seen in the following interview data:

At this time, the educational system changes cannot actually improve the learning quality. During this pandemic, teachers are required to accept this situation by understanding students' condition in assessing student proficiency (Mrs. Daisy, Face-to-face interview, May 28, 2021, Researcher translation).

In line with Mrs. Daisy, Mrs. Sekar also stated that in responding to the changes in the learning system, teachers must also prioritize the safety of students during the implementation of distance learning.

The existence of the covid-19 pandemic has led to changes in the education system so that learning is still conveyed properly to the students. The point is that every educator and student must be able to adapt to changes in the education system. Teachers must have the ability to be able to carry out distance learning in order to meet academic and non-academic targets so that the responsibility to ensure the safety of students must also be prioritized during the current pandemic. It also would be better if the school facilitated the distance learning process with free internet data, free Wi-Fi, and computers. In addition, the implementation of distance learning also requires the full cooperation of parents. Teachers can also outsmart them by visiting students' house one by one (Mrs. Sekar, Video call interview, June 7, 2021, Researcher translation).

The interview data portray that the meaning of teachers must accept this situation is that teachers are not only silent and accept but are confronted by teachers with situations like these teachers should be able to create new learning methods that are more creative while still paying attention to the students' circumstances. It can make students are not easily bored, burdened, and still have curiosity related to the implementation of distance learning (Conrad & Witthaus, 2021). One of the methods is used WhatsApp voice notes for assessing students speaking skills as an interactive discussion.

At this time, the most affected is the speaking aspect, so that teachers should be more creative in creating methods to attract students' interest in this distance learning period. Speaking uses the voice message method in WhatsApp in the form of question and answer (Mrs. Sekar, Video call interview, June 7, 2021, Researcher translation).

In addition, teachers can also assess students' reading skill using WhatsApp in the form of voice notes or recordings. This can be noticed in the following interview vignette:

The assessment of reading skills is usually in the form of recordings or voice notes, recordings that are not too long. There is a text then students read a paragraph, not only reading but also conveying the contents of the text (Mrs. Sekar, Video call interview, June 7, 2021, Researcher translation).

By using WhatsApp voice notes, it can provide opportunities for students to share information and speak especially in narrative texts easily (Nurazizah et al., 2019). Besides, it can also make it easier for students and teachers to do questions and answer sessions using English easily. Thus, it can be emphasized that speaking English skills using WhatsApp voice notes is an interesting learning activity, a positive activity, and WhatsApp voice notes are easy to use.

Storytelling via Zoom Meeting or Google Meet

The following interview data depict the narrative of English teachers in conducting online formative assessments in the form of storytelling of pictures by using online platforms, such as Zoom Meeting or Google Meet for assessing students speaking skill.

For the formative assessment, students sending their pictures of the situation in their home and then the pictures are developed by using storytelling. With these activities, they still relate to their lives now because if we continue to follow the book sometimes it doesn't relate to their lives and the vocabulary is also difficult, so they become even lazier. It's okay for a teacher to lower the competencies a little as long as we make new competencies that we think are still related to the basic competencies. Students will be happy to do it, so they will also be happy to practice it (Mrs. Ayu, Face-to-face interview, June 9, 2021, Researcher translation).

Storytelling can add their insight in creating stories, they can think or imagine more stories that are familiar or unfamiliar (Zuhriyah, 2017). It can help them grasp the main point sense, summarize the important information, and improve students' comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. In addition, storytelling techniques using pictures that relate to their lives can help them in daily speaking.

From the interview, the researchers found that this pandemic situation has caused several obstacles in the learning process that have affected the process, techniques, and results of the formative assessment related to the student's proficiency in English language lessons. Mrs. Ayu expressed her perspective on the changes in the learning system during the pandemic. She stated that the impact of distance learning can made the students decline in terms of quality. This can be seen in the interview excerpt:

Distance learning causes changes in the learning system that cannot be avoided. Students are declining in quality because they used to be able to work offline, but now they are learning online. It is often found that teachers only pursue the material in the most important sense that the material and assignments have been completed, without knowing whether the students understand the material or not. It does not increase student competency. From all of these changes, I think the point is actually in the teacher. If the teacher does not want to change, automatically student achievement will decrease everything, starting from the quality of learning and their competency. The thing that must be changed is the teacher's

perspective on this misconception of distance learning (Mrs. Ayu, Face-to-face interview, June 9, 2021, Researcher translation).

The interview result demonstrates that the COVID-19 has led the transition in the way English teachers teach from face-to-face learning to distance learning, so the learning process does not run effectively (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). It causes many problems that faced by the English teachers. One of them is declining student proficiency caused by several problems such as unavailability of smartphones, inadequate internet connectivity, and other technical problems (Zalat et al., 2021). It is because the internet network is very important in this distance learning period, so the material can be conveyed properly to students (Rahardjo et al., 2016).

Mrs. Ayu asserted that in this situation teacher's role is not only to teach, but the teacher should also be willing to continue learning so that distance learning becomes more meaningful.

The solution is that the teacher must learn a lot, the teacher should not be fixated on the problem. We as teachers must side with our students and support students, not schools. Moreover, the government sometimes provides policies that are not in accordance with the situation and conditions. When the teacher sided with the students, what must be done is sincere to learn and develop. Teachers should learn from changes that occur in the education system, should try to be willing to change, not only students who have to change but teachers too. Teachers can learn by participating in the teacher community or webinars related to how to make distance learning still meaningful during this pandemic (Mrs. Ayu, Face-to-face interview, June 9, 2021, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview data, it shows that distance learning could makes students decline in terms of quality, because of changes in policies that are not in accordance with the situation and conditions of students and teachers. Thus, teachers should have the ability to be able to carry out the distance learning in order to achieve academic and non-academic targets by using a contextual approach where teachers bring real-life situations into learning and encourage students to make connections between their knowledge and application in their lives as family and society members. In addition, teachers still have to understand their students and still have to prioritize the safety of students in implementing distance learning.

Website-based resources for assessing listening and writing

The following emerging theme is website-based resources for assessing listening and writing. The interview data illustrate the experience of English teachers in conducting online formative assessments in the form of fill the blank from listening to the audio by using online platforms, such as Zoom Meeting or Google Meet for assessing students listening and writing skill.

For listening, the teacher also cannot monitor the students whether it is true that they are listening to audio or not, but yes, the method still should be done. I send audio or songs and they continue to do activities such as fill the blank. It shows that the activity is listening. They are listening to English audio more, the bigger the effect that the students get (Mrs. Ayu, Face-to-face interview, June 9, 2021, Researcher translation).

According to Brown and Hudson (1998), the type of this assessment is called constructed-response assessment that is suitable for assessing writing skills, as well as the interaction among productive and receptive skills. In this assessment, students need to focus on listening to the audio and concluding the answers. Students simply listen and write down

what they hear when the audio is being played. In addition, when students have to listen and write what they get from listening, it can also improve the focus and concentration of students in listening skills (Aldukhayel, 2021; Arifiyanto & Ali, 2019).

Concerning the implementation of distance learning, Mrs. Ayu stated that this situation presents an opportunity for teachers to be able to convey the material through a contextual approach related to the environment or situation experienced by students at this time. This is because the student does not only need material, but they also still need the guidance of his teacher to be able to achieve certain skills and competencies. This can be seen in the following interview data:

The thing that should be handled by the teacher is how students can still learn, but their life skills are still connected to their lives, which will later become a certain competency that these students use to survive, so that learning becomes more meaningful (Mrs. Ayu, Face-to-face interview, June 9, 2021, Researcher translation).

The interview vignette illustrates that a contextual approach is a learning concept in which teachers bring real-life situations into learning and encourage students to make connections between their knowledge and its application in their lives as family and society members (Mishra, 2019). With this concept, learning outcomes are expected to be more meaningful for students. The learning process takes place in the form of student work and experience activities (Arrafii, 2021), not the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021).

Conclusion

The present study promotes some methods of formative assessment used by the participants during distance learning with one or more combinations of language skills, such as practice and quiz, speaking, reading, and listening skill in the form of video through WhatsApp or Google Classroom, writing by using pictures or documents through Google Classroom, question and answer through WhatsApp, storytelling through zoom meeting or google meet by using pictures for speaking skills, and listening and writing by using the audio. The changes in policies have led to the new problems faced by teachers, students, and parents of students that require teachers to learn more. It causes the assessment process to become not optimal which affects the assessment results.

In this section, the study contributes some suggestions for further research to explore the way of English teachers in doing formative assessment during distance learning. The future researcher is suggesting to involve the other student level such as junior secondary school students and university students because they are not same with senior secondary school students. In addition, because this current research was conducted in narrative research, further studies, e.g., case study, photovoice study, survey study, etc., is recommended to conduct which is focused on teachers' feelings when they are assessing students during distance learning.

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