A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND STRATEGIES IN ASSESSING YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC COVID-19 SITUATION

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Abstract:

The teachers' beliefs about assessment and the strategy used in assessing and evaluating the students' ability to express the idea virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic inspired this study in investigating assessment practices in English for young language learners' classrooms. It attempts to capture part of the phenomenon in the classes, especially on how language skills the teachers measured in the school prior to the pandemic situation. The critical points of the report in this study were the teachers' purpose of assessment in English language teaching of young language learners (YLLs), assessment techniques used, and the language skills assessed in the Indonesian context. The research design is a case study. We collected the data through observation, interviewing two English teachers from one public school, and document analysis of students' work and assessment records. There were indications that the teachers of YLLs conducted an assessment for five purposes. The purposes are (1) formative purpose, (2) summative purpose, (3) informative purpose, (4) diagnostic purpose, and (5) evaluative purpose. This study also revealed that teachers used three assessment techniques: assessment, self/peer-assessment, and classroom tests. The most frequently conducted assessment technique was on-the-run assessment, followed by self/peer assessment and classroom test. The most frequently teachers assessed language skills by teaching, followed by reading, and then writing and listening. Part of the assessment used in the YLLs classroom did not fulfill assessment standards maximally stated both theories government regulations about assessment for YLLs. The teachers' effort in performing the ongoing assessment showed the beliefs and strategies behind the action

Keywords: Teachers' beliefs, assessment, Young Language Learners (YLLs)

Introduction

The number of children who learned English as a lingua franca has been growing. Introducing early English learning is influenced by the "strong 'folk' belief" that "young children learn languages better and more easily than other children" (Brewster, Ellis, & Girrard, 2003:1). By starting English language learning in early grade in primary school, the duration for English language learning will be longer. This learning longer period will cause better English language acquisition since students will get much more English exposure. Wijirahayu argued (2017) that children learn a language better than adult-like language learning. They also believed that mastering English from an early age will give more economical, cultural, or educational advantages (McKay, 2006:1).

This growing condition puts pressure on governments worldwide to introduce early learning English (Pinter, 2006:4). It is also inevitable in free trade that mastering English is one solution in strengthening competitiveness. strengthening competitiveness.

We have held English language teaching for elementary level in Indonesia for more than ten years. We based the English teaching policy on Education and Culture Development policy No. 0487/4/1992 Chapter VIII concerning local content curriculum, which states that schools can add some subjects into their curriculum as long as they are not against the aim of national education. It also strengthened this policy by decreeing Ministry of Education and Culture Number 060/U/1993, 25 February 1993, concerning elementary curriculum, enabling English teaching and learning to be conducted since fourth grade. They have responded positively to these policies (Suyanto, 2005). This growing trend of early English teaching and learning may lead to a significant concern: teachers may have to teach the young language learners (YLLs) and asses them with no special training both on teaching YLLs and assessing them (Hasselgren, 2005: 340).

The teacher factor is one of the most critical roles in any English teaching and learning success. Teachers have essential roles in creating and managing the conditions in which students can learn effectively (Richard and Rodgers, 2001:29). In order to know whether learning has run effectively, teachers conduct the assessment. Assessment enables teachers to get feedback on their teaching and students to get feedback on their learning to develop further. The assessment also functions as a tool

to know whether learning is taking place, whether YLLs are developing and making progress, and to what extent teachers are achieving their teaching goals or intentions (Moon, 2000:148). Assessment is an essential aspect of teaching and learning. It is inseparable from the teaching and learning process. Assessment is a critical aspect in promoting "more powerful learning" and recording the students' performance (Lang & Evans, 2006:161).

The study investigates the purposes of assessment in English language teaching for YLLs, what assessment purposes and techniques the teachers used, and what language skills are at an elementary level in the Indonesian context. The study, however, does not capture the whole phenomenon of assessment practice in the entire year of English language teaching

Discussion

1. Concepts

In this pandemic, we usually conduct situation assessment online. It involves teachers and parents in primary education. However, teachers could still conduct peer assessments differently. Peer assessment of Total Physical Response will need more teachers' and parents' effort. Previously, it could develop students' autonomous learning and collaborative skills in language learning (Wijirahayu & Septiani, 2018).

According to (Helena Harrison, 2017), case study research has grown in reputation as an effective method to investigate and understand complex issues in real-world settings. Malik & Hamied (2014) stated that a case study research relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion and in data gathering and data analysis follow the procedure as outlined in qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

The researchers in this study applied case study design as it was focusing on a bounded system comprising an individual, institution, or entity and the site and context in which social action occurs. We conducted this study in a public primary school in East Jakarta. The methods used in collecting research data were observation, interview, and document analysis.

Prior to the pandemic situation, researchers interviewed two teachers from the observation and document analysis. The result showed that teachers of YLLs conducted an assessment for five purposes. The purposes are formative purpose, summative purpose, diagnostic purpose, and evaluative purpose. The purposes of assessment are in line with the assessment purposes proposed by Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2003: 245). The purposes are also in line with the purposes of assessment stated in the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20, 2007, 11 June 2007 (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2007).

Based on the observation and document analysis, we found that the teachers applied three assessment techniques. They were on-the-run assessments, self and peer assessments, and classroom tests. Both Teacher #1 and Teacher #2 conducted the on-the-run assessment, self-assessment, and classroom test. It means that among seven assessment techniques stated by McKay (2006) and in the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20, the year 2007, 11 June 2007 (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 20 tahun 2007 11 Juni 2007), there are only three techniques applied by the teachers of YLLs.

To complete the data, the researcher also made the frequency of assessment techniques table, and prepared notes to know which assessment technique was the most frequently conducted by the teachers. Table 4.1 displays the frequency of assessment techniques conducted by T#1 and T#2.

Table The Frequency of Assessment Technique

Assessment Technique	T#1	T#2	Total
On-the-run assessment	14	16	**30**
Self-and-peer-assessment	7	9	**16**
Classroom Test	6	7	**13**
Total	**27**	**32**	

The table shows that the most frequent assessment techniques conducted by the two teachers observed were on-the-run assessment which and it was 30 times. T#2 was the one that conducted an on-the-run assessment most frequently by doing this technique 16 times. The table display shows that the second assessment technique most frequently used by two teachers was self-and-peer assessment. They conducted these techniques 16 times. Among the two teachers observed, T#2 conducted this technique nine times, while T#1 only conducted this technique seven times. The classroom test was the least frequent assessment technique conducted by the two teachers observed. The total frequency was 13 times. T#2 was the one who conducted this technique most frequently (7 times).

The observation and document analysis data was in four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading., It was from the young language learner (YLL) assessed writing. Both the two teachers observed both assessed all the language skills. This finding is in line with the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 23 the year 2006 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 23 tahun 2006*) which states that English teaching and learning at the elementary level must focus on all four language skills. To analyse the data, the researcher made the frequency of language skills assessed. We recorded this occurrence to see which language skill the teachers most frequently assessed.

Table the frequency of language skills assessed

Language skills Assessed	T#1	T#2	Total
Listening	3	4	7
Speaking	8	6	14
Reading	5	6	11
Writing	6	4	10
Total	**21**	**17**	

The table shows the frequency of language skills assessed by each teacher in eight meetings before the pandemic of Covid-19. The table shows that the most frequent language skill assessed by the two teachers is speaking (14 times). T#1 is the one who assessed speaking skill most frequently (65 times), followed by the t#2 who assessed speaking skill six times.

The next most frequent language skill assessed by two teachers observed was reading skill. The total frequency of speaking skills conducted by all 2 (two) teachers observed was 11 times. T#2 assessed reading skill most frequently (6 times), followed by T#1, who assessed reading skill five times. The following language skill that the teacher most frequently assessed was writing skill. The total number of writing skill assessments was ten times. T#1 assessed writing skills most frequently (6 times), followed by T#2, who assessed writing skills four times. The language skill that the teacher least frequently assessed was listening. Listening skills were frequently totally assessed seven times. T#2 assessed listening skills most frequently (4 times). It followed them by T#1, who assessed listening skills three times. The conclusions described here based on the study's findings: the data was from classroom observations, document analysis, and interviews with two English teachers.

2. The Case
The Purpose of the Assessment

The first research question is about the purposes of assessment in English language learning of YLLs are. The data obtained from the interview of two teachers, from the observation and document analysis, show that teachers of YLLs conducted an assessment for five purposes. Those are formative purpose, summative purpose, informative purpose, diagnostic purpose, and evaluative purpose. Wijirahayu & Armiati (2019) reported a similar study on reading comprehension.

Based on the data above, we can conclude that all teachers observed have the same perception of assessment purposes for YLLs. The teachers realize the importance of assessment and how assessment is inseparable from the teaching and learning process. However, even though they are aware of how vital assessment is, they are lack knowledge and training on how to assess YLLs. The fact is that they had no training on assessment language especially training on assessing YLLs.

One of the purpose of assessment stated by the teachers is diagnostic: to identify what students need and which students need exceptional support. We show the diagnostic purpose through the following statement of T#1 and T#2 as below:

"…kita selalu melakukan evaluasi soal-soal yang sudah dikerjakan supaya ke depanya kita bisa melihat kekurangan anak itu dari mana, dari soal mana, dari materi apa, jadi kita melakukan suatu evaluasi". T#1

*"oke, pertama kan itu misalkan materi sudah selesai langsung diadakan tanya jawab berupa soal-soal berbentuk tulisan, lalu langsung saya ambil nilai di situ juga sebagai bentuk pengukuruan untuk mengetahui di bagian apa atau hal apa yang sudah ataupun yang masih harus diberikan kepada anak-ana*k". T#2

Based on the excerpt above, both the two teachers did not directly state the purpose of the assessment they conducted to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. They stated they intended the assessment conducted to determine if students were successful in achieving the learning goals of a material unit. However, they mentioned that the data obtained from the assessment enabled them to identify what part of learning made the students successful or unsuccessful in reaching the learning objectives.

This finding is suitable to the theory that teachers conduct an assessment to identify what students need and which students need particular support (Brewster, Ellis, and Girard, 2003: 245). The assessment purpose stated by the teachers above is also in line with the purpose of the assessment decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20 the year 2007, 11 June 2007 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 27 Tahun 2007),* which stated that the purpose of assessment is to identify students' learning difficulties.

Nevertheless, from further interviews with the teachers observed, we found that even though the teachers could identify the students' weaknesses, they did not do any treatment. They mentioned there would be some enrichment in order to improve students' ability. However, it was not clear how the teachers conducted the enrichment. The teachers stated that even when the students were unsuccessful in achieving minimum passing grade criteria, teachers only asked the students to conduct a remedial test. It is not in line with the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20 the year 2007, 11 June 2007 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 27 Tahun 2007),* which states that students who still have not to achieve passing grade criteria have to take not only remedial test but also remedial learning. After the students have re-learn specific material, they also have to perform a remedial test.

Concerning government regulation of assessment purpose in English teaching for YLLs, it stated by the teachers and supported by observation and document analysis are in line with the theories and assessment standard stated in the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20, the year 2007 11 June 2007 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 20 tahun 2007 11 Juni 2007*).

The other purpose of assessment stated by the teachers is evaluating purpose, and the teacher used it to check students' level of achievement. However, the other two evaluative purposes that are to select or rank the students by their achievement and to check whether teachers, teaching materials, or teaching methods have been effective or not.

It showed the evaluative purpose through the following statement of T#1 and T#2 as below:

"*…Nah jadi penilaian ini merupakan salah satu hasil yang harus diperoleh oleh seorag peserta didik supaya kita bisa melihat kekurangan dan kelebihanya, ketika ada kekurangan kita bisa melakukan evaluasi dari penilain tersebut, jadi sangat sanggat penting penilaian ini dilakukan oleh guru terhadap peserta didik".* T#1

"*karena saya juga ingin mengukur apakah materi pelajaran yang telah saya berikan itu masuk atau mereka mampu mengerti atau tidak".* T#2

"*penilaianya itu kan sebenarnya mengukur kemampuan siswa sampai sejauh mana, gitu".* T#2

Based on the excerpt above, the teacher stated that one of the primary purposes of the assessment they conducted was to evaluate the students' progress in learning. The statement refers to the theory that the teacher has to conduct an assessment to check students' level of achievement (Brewster, Ellis, Girard, 2003: 245). It is also in line with the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20, 2007, 11 June 2007 (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2007); one purpose of assessment is to monitor the learning process and the student's learning progress. The teacher could know what ability or progress that students have achieved by conducting the assessment.

The data got from the observation video recording below also supported this statement:

T : *oke, kita mengulang dulu yang sudah kita pelajari kemarin nih*
(The teacher wrote some words on the whiteboard)
(Let us review what we learned yesterday)

T : *tentang* "time", *sapa yang tau arti dari kata-kata di bawah ini?*
(The teacher asked the students and wrote some words)
(Teantang "time", who knows the meaning of some words bellow?)

T : *apa arti dari* "Time"?
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "time"?)

S : *waktu*
(The students answered together in the class)
(time)

T : *apa arti dari kata* "minute"?
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "minute"?)

S : *menit*
(The students answered together in the class)
(minute)

T : *apa arti kata dari* "second"
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "second"?)

S : *detik*
(The students answered together in the class)
(second)

T : *apa arti kata dari* "past"
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "past"?)

S : *lewat*
(The students answered together in the class)
(past)

T : *apa arti kata dari* "to"
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "to"?)

S : *kurang*
(The students answered together in the class)
(to)

T : *apa arti kata dari* "half"
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "half"?)

S : *separuh atau setengah*
(The students answered together in the class)
(half)

T : *apa arti kata dari* "quarter"
(The teacher asked and turned his face to the students)
(What is the meaning of "quarter"?)

S : *seperempa*t ...
(The students answered together in the class)
(quarter)

Although the teacher conducted an informal evaluation in Bahasa, students' partial literacy in grammar is the evidence in the student-teacher conversation. Using mother tongue is part of the teachers' strategies in language teaching, especially in vocabulary (Wijirahayu, 2014).

The Use of Assessment Techniques

The second research question is about assessment techniques are used. Base on the data obtained from the observation and document analysis, it is found that teachers conducted only three assessment techniques, those are on-the-run assessment, self-and-peer assessment, and the last is classroom test. Both T#1 and T#2 conducted three assessment techniques above.

1. On-the-run Assessment

All teachers (T#1 and T#2) conducted on-the-run assessments during their teaching and learning process. T#1 was the one who conducted this technique 14 times. The example of an on-the-run assessment is in the following excerpt.

T	: *Sapa yang tau bahasa inggrisya apa?*
	   (Teacher wrote (08.15) on the whiteboard and then asked to the students)
	   (Who knows what is the English word for

S	: Quarter past eight
T	: *Ayo ucapin bareng-bareng* "quarter past eight" (Let us say together, "quarter past eight.")

In the excerpt above, T#1 asked the students directly about how to say in English for 8.15. He did not specifically focus the question on students or individually. He asked the whole students in the class. The students answered the question orally. Before asking, he had told his students to answer the question of words related to the time before; he wanted to know whether his students could remember how to say about time in English.

2. Self and Peer Assessment

The data also shows that the most frequent assessment technique conducted by the two teachers observed is an on-the-run assessment conducted 30 times. Teachers conducted self-and-peer assessment 16 times, and classroom assessment conducted by two teachers 13 times. Among the two teachers, T#2 is the one most that conducts all three assessment techniques. Concerning the theories and government regulation of assessment techniques in English teaching for YLLs, various and assessment techniques for YLLs implementation are insufficient. We proved that the teachers only implemented three assessment techniques out of the seven total assessment techniques introduced by McKay (2006), and the Decree of Ministry of National Education number 20 the year 2007, 11 June 2007.

All teachers (T#1 and T#2) conducted self-and-peer assessment techniques (16 times). An example of the self-and-peer assessment technique is in the following excerpt.

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T   : *Nah sekarang yang namanya ibu panggil langsung maju ke depan untuk mengisi jawaban dari soal-soal di papan tulis ya. Siap-siap ya!*
(Now, I will call your name and please come forward give the answer of question on white board, be ready, please)

T   : *Fahrizal, maju ke depan dan isi pertanyaan nomor 1. Firmansyah nomor 2, Intan nomor 3, dan Nurul isi nomor 4 ya!*
(teacher saw to students and pointed the questions on white board).
(Fahrizal, please come forward and answer the question number 1, Firmansyah for number 2, Intan for number 3, and Nurul for number 4)

S   : (the student stood and came forward, fill the answer "wet", "slippery" for question number 1, and so the others)
(the question number 1 was "The street will become ... and ... rainy season).

T.   : *oke, sekarang saya kasih kesempatan untuk melihat kembali jawaban-jawabanya, kalo belum yakin boleh dirubah, kalo yang sudah yakin boleh duduk.*
(Ok, I will qive opportunity for you to make sure your questions whether it is right or wrong, if you convinced yor answer, have a seat, please!)

S   : (The students look to their answers for a while)

T   : *Apa kalian sudah yakin dengan jawaban masing-masing?*
(Do you convinced to your answers?)

S   : *Yakin, Pa.*
(Sure, sir)

T   : *Oke, kalau begitu silahkan duduk kembali ya.*
(Ok, so you can get back to your seat then)

T   : *Sekarang perhatikan semuanya ya. Coba Fairus, Fairus, menurut Fairus jawaban sudah bener atau belum, kalo belum tolong betulkan.*
(Right now, you have to pay your attention, Fairus, what's your oppinion about Fairus's answer. Is it correct or wrong, if it is wrong make it correct, please).

S   : (look for a while) *betul, Pa.*
(Yes, it is correct, sir)

T   : *betul apa masih salah?* (teacher replied)
(Is it correct or still wrong)

S   : *Sudah betul, Pa.*
(Yes, it is correct, Sir)

T   : *Oke*
(Ok)

The learning topic is about the season. The teacher gave and explained the vocabulary of the season. After that, the teacher asking the students to memorize vocabulary related to the topic. The teacher asked the students to answer the question on the whiteboard. The assignment for students was to fill in the right words to complete the sentences. After that, the teacher asked the students to convince themself about the answers. Finally, the teacher asked the other students to check the students' answers before.

3. Classroom Test

The teachers observed have conducted classroom tests. T#1 conducted the classroom test technique six times; T#2 conducted this technique seven times, so both of them conducted the classroom test technique 13 times

The test topic was time. The teacher asked the students to transform a specific time into a picture of a time in the task. In the task, they asked the students to copy the teacher's words on the blackboard. After that, the students had to transform into the right picture. They based the score of 80 got by the student on the student's correct answer criteria. So the teacher gave a score of 80 because of the way students draw a picture of time. The test does not represent the whole classroom activities. In the learning and teaching process, the teacher also asked the student to translate words from English to Bahasa Indonesia or vice versa. They also asked the students to write the proper vocabulary of time well. However, in the test, any of the teachers did not assess these factors. This case is not in line with the theory that assessment should be congruent with learning (Cameron, 2001: 220). The consistency between the assessment and the learning process raises the validity and reliability of the test.

Language Skills Assessed

What the teachers did by conducting assessment mainly on reading and writing assessment with the focus on grammar and vocabulary aspects are not in line with the decree of the Ministry of National Education number 20, the year 2007, 11 June 2007 (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2007*) either. The decree states that English learning at the elementary level is limited to oral communication in the school context. The decree also states that learning must focus on all four language skills as described in the third research question; listening, speaking, reading, and writing in which it meant writing and reading skills for supporting oral communication learning, although it revealed that the assessment much focused on grammar and vocabulary aspects

From observation in T#2 class, the learning topic is part of the body. In order to assess the students' listening skills base on the topic, the teacher asked the students to stand up, mentioned some parts of the body. The students listened and then pointed to their parts of the body, following the teacher's instruction. Some students followed the teacher's instruction well, and the others looked confused and pointed their body parts lately after the others.

....
T   : Tunjuk mana yang namanya Lips?
            (Point your lips)
S   : (Some students pointed their lips but the other confused and
            pointed their lips after saw the others).
T   : Mana yang namanya chin?
S   : (Some students pointed their chin and some of them also said
            "this is chin, Bu").
T   : Ear?
S   : (Some students pointed their ear while the other confused)
T   : Hand?
S   : (Almost students pointed their hand)
....

The result was also in line with the analysis of the teacher interview script related to the alternative in assessment, which revealed that they have a limited understanding of the assessment, which is because of the absence of exceptional guidance and training for teachers regarding assessment.

Conclusion

The case study about the teachers' beliefs and strategies in assessing YLLs revealed some critical findings. There are some weaknesses and strengths the teachers have performed in the classroom practices regarding efforts to increase the students' English achievements through assessment. Both of the teachers have applied strategies in evaluating their students through many assessment techniques. The teacher did not apply the alternative in the assessment that may improve the quality of the assessment well yet. The literacy about the purpose of assessment is sufficient, yet the teachers could increase the creativity to conduct the assessment process to encourage the students' motivation to have better English mastery.

The teachers believe that the assessment techniques before the pandemic of Covid-19 must differ from those in this current situation. Technology in the virtual teaching and learning process encourages teachers to develop their ways of delivering language teaching material. It influences the instructional design and the assessment.

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