ASSESSMENT FOR WRITING SKILLS IN ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic required learning to be done online. Likewise, the assessment had to be done online. This study intended to examine the assessment of writing skills on online learning in Senior High School (SMA) in Denpasar. The study used a qualitative approach with a structured interview. Eight questions were asked to an English teacher to explore how the teacher conducted the online learning writing assessment. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the interactive data analysis method suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994). The findings showed that the teacher already understood the importance of assessment and already done the authentic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment. However, in assessing the writing, several aspects such as the organization of the writing, discourse, and mechanics (punctuation, spelling, and capitalization) were not assessed by the teacher. Additionally, the teacher faced some obstacles regarding plagiarism/originality of students' writing and time management in conducting writing assessments on online learning. The teacher warned the students about plagiarism and used an online plagiarism checker to check student work's authenticity to solve this problem. Furthermore, to solve the problem of time management, the teacher divided the time strictly between planning, teaching, and assessing. The research suggested a need to conduct training for the teacher to do online assessments, especially on writing skills, and recommend other researchers to conduct studies on an online assessment for other three skills: listening, speaking, and reading.

Keywords: online learning, teaching writing, EFL, assessment

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic is very influential currently. The disease can be transmitted through droplets from contact with someone who is infected by the Covid-19 virus (World Health Organization, 2020). Unfortunately, it seems that online learning will last longer because the Corona-19 case continued to increase in Indonesia until July 20, 2020. The Covid-19 Handling Acceleration Team (Gugus Tugas Percepatan Penanganan Covid-19) reported that 88,214 people were tested positive for Covid-19, 46,977 people recovered, and 4,239 people died as a result of Covid-19 (CNN Indonesia, 2020). Thus, the government set limitations on physical interaction and encourages physical distancing. The Covid-19

Handling Team (Satuan Tugas Penanganan Covid-19) explained that physical distancing was necessary. Hence people had to work, study, and do worship at home. They have to minimalize going out, and it should be reserved only for essential shopping or medical treatment. When going out, it is mandatory to wear masks when outdoors while always keep a distance of more than one meter from other people. It is also suggested to avoid using public transportation, postpone or cancel events that invite large crowds, use the telephone or online services to contact doctors or other facilities, and isolate when the symptoms of fever, fatigue, and dry cough occur.

These physical distancing rules impose a shift in the learning model from dominant or even fully face-to-face learning into fully online learning. As a result, the Minister of Education and Culture issued circular number 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education in the Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) Emergency, which urged that learning to be carried out online without being burdened by demands for curriculum completion with a focus on life skills education, including on the Covid-19 pandemic (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020).

Online learning can be defined as learning conducted in synchronous or asynchronous environments supported by the internet (Dhawan, 2020) that provides the learning material and access for teachers and students (Bakia, Shear, Toyama, & Lasseter, 2012). Online learning uses learning materials available on the internet, such as YouTube videos, PowerPoint, e-book, and audio (Jeffrey, Milne, Suddaby, & Higgins, 2014). In short, online learning employs the internet as a learning platform. However, full-online learning is new learning for most schools in Indonesia. Therefore, many things must be considered and improved in its implementation.

The Minister of Education and Culture also emphasized that teachers need to conduct assessments to examine student achievement in online learning (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). However, online learning creates a dilemma on how to do online assessments. Assessment in online learning has become an issue lately relating to online learning implementation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Assessment is one aspect of teaching that the teacher must master. It is one of the activities carried out in teaching as well as in teaching online. Assessment is a process to measure the learning through the document as evidence (Bakerson, Trottier, & Mansfield, 2015). Assessment is done to measure the extent of student mastery of a material seen from students' ability to apply knowledge about the material to problems in real life. Therefore, the assessment must be meaningful and authentic associated with everyday life (Cumming &

Maxwell, 1999; Dennis, Rueter, & Simpson, 2013). Moreover, the assessment includes knowledge/understanding, skills, attitudes, and behavior (Wragg, 2003).

There are two kinds of assessments which are formative assessment and summative assessment. These two assessments are different, yet both of them are used to decide on students' learning. Formative and summative are different related to the time when they are implemented. Formative assessment is done during the learning process, while summative assessment is done at the end of the learning unit (Bakerson, Trottier, & Mansfield, 2015). Summative assessment is commonly in the form of final projects or standardized tests (Dolin & Evans, 2018). However, an assessment in the form of a standardized test contradicts the principle of authentic assessment and is considered to be only able to assess lower-order thinking skills (Villarroel, Boud, Bloxham, Bruna, & Bruna, 2019).

On the other hand, final projects are more authentic to be used as an assessment because the process of completing the final project is also assessed, and the final project can assess students' high order thinking skills since students have to plan, apply, and even evaluate. Meanwhile formative assessment, which is generally an informal assessment, is used to record students' progress, which helps report to parents (Dolin & Evans, 2018). Formative assessment is done during the process of learning. Moreover, formative assessment results from changes in the paradigm of teaching and technological development that allows the giving of instruction like distance education (Ogange, Agak, Okelo, & Kiprotich, 2018).

Assessment can help learn progress by giving feedback (Wragg, 2003). Giving feedback is part of formative assessment. Feedback is information received from someone such as teachers, partners, reading, experiences, parents, or oneself about the results of work and someone's understanding (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The information might say about the strengths, weaknesses, and how to fix those weaknesses. Feedback can act as a follow-up to formative assessment (Dolin & Evans, 2018),

connecting assessment and learning for improving instructions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Dolin & Evans (2018) assert that giving feedback refers to providing comments on a product, process, or event to enhance learning. Like learning in general, learning writing also requires feedback. Feedback becomes a medium of teacher and student communication where the teacher provides input to student work; then, students reflect the teacher's feedback to improve their writing. However, feedback is not only from student teachers but also from students to teachers as well. Feedback given by teachers to students aims to give students input on how they can improve their learning. On the other hand, students' feedback to teachers is useful for teachers to find out students' responses to teaching that can be used as a consideration when planning future teaching. Generally, the students did not see any differences in the various types of assessments. Furthermore, the students gained more feedbacks from the peer assessment and computer-marked assessment than from teacher-marked assessment (Ogange, Agak, Okelo, & Kiprotich, 2018).

Although online learning is new for most teachers and students, some previous research found that online learning assessment contributes positively to learning. The research conducted by Bailey, Hendricks, & Applewhite (2015) showed positive results related to students' preferences towards online learning assessment. Zlatovic, Balaban, & Kermek (2015) found that online assessment influenced students' learning strategies into expected learning strategies, leading them to achieve learning goals (Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011). Conducting assessments with the help of technology-supported learning improved student's learning (Elmahdi, Al-Hattami, & Fawzi, 2018) and created effective learning (Mohamadi, 2018).

Online assessment enables students to get feedback immediately and comprehensively compared to traditional assessments (Baleni, 2015). Students also felt more comfortable giving feedback to their classmates' work through online thus they could provide more in-depth comments to others' work (McCarthy, 2017). However, conducting online assessments is not easy. It requires good cooperation between teachers, students, parents, and the community (Baleni, 2015). Some challenges faced in the online assessment were the lack of time to do the assessment, over workload, and the requirement to gather various data and give feedback (Kearns, 2012).

In language teaching, four skills must be taught: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of the four skills, writing is the most complex skill (Durga & Rao, 2018). Writing is essential to be taught since writing allows students to think creatively and improve their vocabularies (Dewi, 2020). Writing certainly also requires assessment to evaluate student writing which will later be used as a reference for reflection to improve students' writing abilities (Dolin & Evans, 2018). Therefore, assessment for writing still should be done even in online learning. A study conducted by Yusuf (2019) indicates that the application of assessment, especially in the form of feedbacks, supported the students in developing their writing skills.

Therefore, to assess the students' writing, Brown (2001) suggested the following six categories that can be used in assessing writing, among others (1) content which includes the thesis statement, the relation of the ideas, the development of the ideas by telling experiences, illustration, facts and opinion, the utilization of description, comparison/contrast, cause-effect, and the focus of the content; (2) organization which covers the organization of the introduction, the logical sequence of ideas, the appropriateness of the conclusion, and the length of the writing; (3) discourse such as topic sentences, the unity of the paragraphs, rhetorical conventions, transitions, discourse markers, cohesion, references, fluency, and variation of the text; (4) syntax (related to grammar); (5) vocabulary (related to dictions); and (6) mechanics include the spellings, citation of references, punctuation, tidiness, and appearance.

An effective online assessment should have various kinds of assessment with clear

explanation, the provision of feedback, clear assessment rubrics, and interaction between teachers and students on the online platform so that there are no misunderstandings about the assignment given (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007). A study conducted by Vonderwell, Liang, & Alderman (2007) suggested that the teachers need to have a deeper understanding of the terms of assessment for learning and learning assessment.

Related to authentic assessment, a study done by Huang & Jiang (2020) showed that all English teachers accepted the value of authentic assessment, but only one-third had tried to increase the authenticity of their assessment. The study also found several barriers in conducting an authentic assessment, such as the alignment of authentic assessment with the curriculum, teacher's knowledge about assessment, and misunderstanding about students' abilities. On the other hand, Burner (2015) also studied students' and teachers' perceptions on formative assessment for writing, in which the result showed that there were contradictions found between the students' perceptions and teachers' perception about feedback, grades, text revision, self-assessment, and student involvement. Therefore, mutual understanding should be developed to conduct an effective assessment.

Online assessments must run effectively to decide whether learning objectives can be achieved. However, the sudden change to online learning has resulted in no research being conducted to know the student and teacher's online assessment strategies, especially in Bali. Furthermore, this study explored the assessment for writing skills on online learning in a senior high school in Denpasar that implements online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study examined the online assessment in writing skills done by the teacher related to authentic assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, obstacles in the assessment, and overcoming the obstacles. This research can be used as a reference in conducting online assessments in learning writing skills and also informing other teachers about problems that can arise from online

assessments so that in the future, efforts can be made to prevent these problems and deepen teachers' understanding of online assessments for writing skills.

METHOD

This study was a qualitative study which used narrative inquiry, where the data were collected through interviews with a research subject that can answer the research purpose (Josselson, 2011). The research subject was an English teacher in 11th grade in a senior high school in Denpasar. The teacher was chosen as the research subject in the present study because he had two years of experience in teaching English for senior high school students; he claimed to conduct writing assessments in his online learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

During the interview, the teacher was asked about the assessment he conducted in his online learning writing skills. There were eight questions related to the writing assessment of online learning conducted in his class English class. The list of questions and their answers can be observed in Table 1.

The interview was done through WhatsApp chat to reduce the physical contact due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The data were analyzed using three interactive data analysis methods proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In data reduction, the data from interviews were transformed into transcription and selected for the related answers. Moreover, in data display, the data were organized and arranged to be more readily understood and then displayed in the form of an essay in the discussion section. Lastly, in conclusion drawing and verification, the data was verified by linking the data collected, condensed, and displayed to ensure all the necessary data are included and presented correctly to derive a reliable conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were eight questions that the teacher should answer in the interview. Table 1 below displays the questions asked to the research subject and the summary of the answers given during the interviews.

Table 1. Questions and Answers of the Interview

No.	Questions (Q)	Answers (A)
1.	Do you do online writing assessments?	Yes.
2.	Does the writing assignment you give relate to student's daily life?	Yes.
3.	What aspects do you assess when doing student writing assessments?	Grammar, vocabulary, language used, and content
4.	Do you do a formative assessment? If so, how do you do that?	Yes. (feedback and exercises after learning one material)
5.	Do you provide feedback for student's writing on online learning? If so, how do you do that?	Yes. (inserting comment on student's writing)
6.	Do you do a summative assessment? If so, how do you do that?	Yes. (End-of-semester examination).
7.	What are the obstacles when assessing writing online?	Plagiarism and time-management
8.	How to overcome those obstacles?	Using plagiarism checker and applying strict time-management

The first question asked about whether the teacher assessed writing skills even in online learning or not. The teacher said that he did a writing assessment. He said:

A1:   *"I always do the assessment for writing since assessment is useful for me to measure the students' writing skills and help the students to improve their writing. Additionally, assessment can be used to reflect on my teaching."*

Assessment is an essential step in teaching. Referring to the first question (Q1), the teacher realized the importance of the assessment carried out in writing class that could help students develop their writing skills as students' writing skills could also influence the assessment activities (Vonderwell, Liang, & Alderman, 2007). Besides, by doing the assessment, the students and teachers can reflect on their learning and teaching to see whether the teaching and learning activities achieve the learning goals. It is also used to see the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning and how to improve it.

The second question was about the relation of the teacher's assignment with the students' daily lives. The teacher answered:

A2:   *"I always try to connect the assignment with students' daily life, as nowadays, the teachers are required to do the authentic assessment. For example, when I was teaching about biography, I assigned my students to write a biography about one of their family members. It could be their mother, father, grandfather, sisters, brothers. It is related to their daily lives."*

The teacher also realized the importance of assessment that is connected with daily life. The teacher's answer in A2 showed if the teacher has applied authentic assessment by linking the given assignment to everyday life so that later students could easily apply it to their problems in real life. It is in line with the argument from Cumming & Maxwell (1999) and Dennis, Rueter, & Simpson (2013), who state that the assessment must be meaningful and authentic that is associated with everyday life. This statement of Q2 also indicated that the teacher was up-to-date with the teaching trends and already understood the importance of doing the authentic assessment. It is in the same line with the study conducted by Huang & Jiang (2020), which found that English teachers realized the value of implementing authentic assessment to their teaching.

The third question was related to the criteria used in assessing the students' writing. The teacher assessed several aspects. He said:

A3:   *"There are some aspects that I assess including grammar, vocabulary, language used, and content."*

Regarding how the teacher assessed the students' writing, the writings were evaluated in several aspects. Referring to Q3, the teacher assessed the writing from its grammar, vocabulary, language used, and content. However, if it linked with the theory of evaluating writing by Brown (2001), there were several aspects in evaluating the writing that was not included in teachers' assessment, such as the organization of the writing, discourse, and mechanics (punctuation, spelling, and capitalization). Moreover, this finding showed that although the teacher has carried out an assessment on the students' writing, the teacher's knowledge about assessment is still lacking. It is the same as the finding from research conducted by Huang & Jiang (2020), who found that the lack of teacher knowledge about assessment was an obstacle in carrying out the assessment.

The fourth question was something to do with formative assessments done by the teacher. The teacher stated:

A4:   *"I do formative assessments that I sometimes don't realize. For example, giving feedback to students directly and giving questions to students related to the material that has been learned. But sometimes I also do formative assessments through exercises after learning certain material."*

The teacher generally had already done formative assessment. The answer for Q4 revealed that the teacher did formative assessment as an informal assessment, such as giving feedback and questioning when the learning was ongoing. A4 shows that the teacher already did the formative assessment correctly by conducting the assessment in the process of learning. As Bakerson, Trottier, & Mansfield

(2015) assert that formative assessment is done in the process of learning. On the other hand, A4 also indicated that the teacher already knew the importance of doing formative assessments. It is in the same line with the theory proposed by Baleni (2015) and Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis (2011), who argue for the importance of formative assessment for learning in their studies.

Meanwhile, the fifth question asked about whether the teacher provided feedback on students' writing in online learning or not. The teacher answered:

A5:   *"Yes, I gave feedback to their writing by underlining the parts of the writing that I wanted to comment or highlighted those parts. After that, I inserted the comments to give my inputs and suggestions to their writing. I think feedback is useful for the students to be used to improve their writing because through my feedbacks they can know their strength and weaknesses in writing."*

Furthermore, the answer of Q5 explained how teachers give feedback to students' writing on online learning. The teacher utilized the tools in Microsoft Office Word to give his comments toward the students' writing. Using this tool, the teacher could easily give his feedback to the students, even in online learning. A5 proved that the teacher understood that giving feedback is essential in learning. Dolin & Evans (2018) stated that teachers' feedback could help students improve their performance by reflecting on the inputs and suggestions from teachers. The teacher also states that feedback is beneficial for students to develop their writings. It is in the same line as the result of the study done by Yusuf (2019), who found that feedback also helps students improve their writing. Moreover, Wragg (2003) also said that feedback is essential for student's learning progress. Besides, this statement from the teacher is also in the same line with Hattie & Timperley (2007), who argued that feedback helps connect learning and assessment. Furthermore, this feedback done on online learning can make online learning more

effective as Gaytan & McEwen (2007) argued that giving feedback on online learning increases the effectiveness of online learning.

The sixth question asked about the summative assessment done by the teacher in an online learning environment. The teacher answered:

A6: *"Summative assessment is done at the end of the semester. This assessment is held simultaneously following the school schedule through the end of the semester exams by answering the objective questions."*

A6 revealed that the teacher also did a summative assessment at the end of the semester in the form of an objective test conducted simultaneously by the schools. The answer is consistent with the theory that summative assessment is done at the end of the learning unit (Bakerson, Trottier, & Mansfield, 2015) and is commonly in the form of final projects or standardized tests (Dolin & Evans, 2018). This summative assessment in the form of multiple-choice tests was a school policy that was widely used in most schools. However, Villarroel, Boud, Bloxham, Bruna, & Bruna (2019) argued that this type of test could only assess lower thinking skills, namely remembering. The form of this test is contrary to the principle of authentic assessment, which requires that the assessment be carried out to assess students' high order thinking skills, and assessment is also a context-based assessment. In conclusion, summative assessments carried out by teachers still do not reflect authentic assessments.

Moreover, the seventh question concerning the obstacles faced by the teacher in assessing writing on online learning. The teacher stated that:

A7: *"The obstacles in assessing writing online are related to the originality and plagiarism of the students' writings. Online learning does not allow the teacher to monitor students directly when students write their writing assignments. The students can cheat by submitting assignments that are not his*

work that might have been made by someone else or they stole it from the internet since learning online allows students to access everything including learning materials from the internet. Moreover, I also have a problem with time-management in assessing since I teach many students this semester. "

Q7 was about the obstacles in conducting writing assessments on online learning. The teacher found that plagiarism matters and time management were the obstacles to do assessments. It is in line with the study done by Kearns (2012), who found the lack of time to assess the challenge faced in online assessment.

The last question asked about how the teacher overcame the obstacles he faced in conducting writing assessments on online learning. He answered:

A8: *"To overcome the problem of originality, I only advised students if I value honest work that results from their thinking even though the work is not good enough. I also added that if teachers already know the abilities of their students so they cannot fool the teacher by submitting the assignment that is far from their abilities. Besides, to make sure that the students' works are free from plagiarism, I used a plagiarism checker application to check the plagiarism. Regarding time management, I made strict time management to manage my time well between planning, teaching and assessing. Thus, I can do all of them well."*

A8 indicates that teachers must be able to adapt to change. Online learning allows students to access the internet, where there are many written sources that they can copy and paste and then collect as their writing assignment. The teacher must be able to find solutions to problems that come. To overcome the plagiarism problem, the teacher utilized an online plagiarism checker to check students' writing originality. Moreover, the teacher

overcame time management by dividing his time as best as possible between planning, teaching, and conducting assessments so that no teaching process is neglected in the future.

CONCLUSION

The result of the research conducted at the high school in Denpasar related to the writing assessment in online learning showed that the teacher did an online assessment for writing skills in which the teacher tried to design the assessments to be much related to the student's daily life. Some aspects assessed by the teacher in writing in online learning include grammar, vocabulary, the language used, and content. However, several aspects were not assessed, namely the organization of the writing, discourse, and mechanics (punctuation, spelling, and capitalization). The teacher also did formative assessments such as giving feedback and giving exercises. Meanwhile, a summative assessment was done in the form of an end-of-semester examination though this kind of assessment does not reflect authentic assessment.

This study identified a number of problems faced by the teacher during the implementation of authentic assessment in his writing class. Plagiarism was one of the most persistent problems. To overcome the problems, the teacher used a plagiarism checker and managed his time between planning, teaching, and assessing. It can be concluded that generally, the teacher had done a good assessment and followed the theory of assessment. However, in evaluating writing, several aspects were not assessed by the teacher thought they were important aspects that could show the quality of writing.

Related to these findings, the present study implied that training on conducting assessment in writing, especially on online learning, is needed by the teachers to improve the implementation of online learning. Besides, since this research was still limited to the assessment of writing, it is recommended for other researchers to conduct other studies online assessments for other three skills: listening, speaking, and reading.

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