IMPLEMENTING PERFORMANCE-BASED FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN GRAMMAR CLASS DURING REMOTE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Language assessment is as challenging as language teaching. This idea applies more significantly in this Covid-19 pandemic situation as teachers struggle to create rich learning experiences remotely. Some problems have occurred in the higher education context in the grammar assessment process, specifically in giving tasks or tests. Previous observations on the writer's grammar class indicate some concerns around cheating and other barriers such as poor internet connection, inadequate devices, and students' unmonitored presence. The backwash effect of multiple-choice, standardized-like task is mostly negative. This study is a Classroom Action Research proposing an alternative assessment called performance-based assessment to assess students' grammar mastery. Online class observation, documentation, and interview were employed to collect the data. The analysis model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) is used. The writers implemented performance-based activities, i.e., *self-introduction paragraphs*, *short diaries*, *writing a message*, *reading short stories*, *telling unexpected moments*, and *short interviews*. These tasks indicate learners' ability to notice and apply grammar features in communicative, natural, and realistic contexts of use.

Keywords: *assessment, assessing grammar, language testing, performance-based assessment*

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic situation has required teachers of almost all levels to structure learning experiences, including giving assessments remotely. Those teachers should also adjust their teaching to the learners' different conditions. Thus, the assessment processes have become challenging because they are not standing beside their students in classes.

This challenge applies even in the higher education context. Henaku (2020) in Lutfiana & Suwartono (2020) has investigated higher education's online learning experiences during pandemic COVID-19, where the learning is held online. The study reveals some concerns on the internet access and learning environment or the unfavorable situation at home, which cause an effect on the learning process. Another study from (2020) mentions that students need to keep motivated during this difficult learning situation and hope for some flexibility, especially in doing their works. Such evidence, of course, influences how the teacher will conduct both the teaching and assessment processes.

In the higher education context, online learning is not a new idea. However, during this pandemic, the writers observed that some problems had occurred quite immediately, especially when it comes to assessment, particularly grammar. Limited previous observations on the writer's online grammar class result in concerns around cheating or academic honesty. Lutfiana & Suwartono (2020) also reveals the same issue. Other barriers such as poor internet connection, incompatible devices, and unmonitored students' attendance contribute to the difficulties in assessing them using standardized-like tests or tasks.

Spratt et al. (2011) in (Moqbel 2018) propose that adult learners can learn a language easier by learning grammatical rules. However, assessing their grammar in virtual is not an easy task. Teachers need to keep the tasks real or authentic, communicative based on the language use principle proposed by Bachman and Palmer (1996; 2010) in (Khan & Ali, 2018). Teachers also should fulfill the validity, reliability, practicality, and positive washback in the assessment process. These goals are harder to achieve in the context of discrete, standardized tasks as they focus primarily on recognition rather than productive skills. Students may know the rules accurately but do not have the sufficient capability to apply them during language use. Thus, the backwash effect of such test items tend to be negative.

The term 'grammar' is defined in different ways by language teachers and grammarians, which have influenced and been influenced by different approaches to teaching grammar (Ellis, 2006; Purpura, 2004) in (Khan & Ali, 2018). Some learners view that learning grammar often means learning the rules and having an intellectual knowledge of them. Teachers often believe that grammar mastery will provide the basis on which learners can use the language eventually. Thus, many teachers rely on a wide use of grammar that is not contextual and tends to be discrete items and isolated sentences (Thiam 2011) in (Samb, 2013).

The problems above lead to becoming aware of options for implementing formative grammar assessment in this pandemic situation. This type of assessment requires teachers to evaluate their students in building competencies and skills to continue the developing process (Brown, 2004). Formative assessment is also based on the fact that it always puts the learners in the center of learning as it involves learners' concerns in the teaching/learning process. Therefore, the teachers should provide authentic tasks that can promote students' learning. The tasks should also enable the teachers to monitor students' performances and progression. Formative assessment will also help teachers create necessary and immediate betterment in their teaching practice (Suskie, 2010).

The above theories strengthen the idea that performance-based assessment seems to be the most appropriate to accommodate the needs of change in the grammar classroom teaching and learning in an online setting. Formative assessment can be designed to elicit actual performance. The performance-based assessment would require the performance actions directly observed and evaluated by a teacher or possibly by herself and peers. It implies productive, observable skills, such as speaking and writing, of content-valid tasks. It often implies the integration of language skills, perhaps all four skills of project work. O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) in (Brown, 2004) propose some performance-based assessment characteristics, including constructed response, higher-order-thinking engagement, meaningful and authentic open-ended tasks. The tasks also integrate more than one language skill. Both process and product are also assessed.

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This study describes how this type of assessment is implemented for grammar class and can become an appropriate alternative assessment in this remote learning because learners need to notice grammar features in natural, realistic contexts of use. Without face-to-face interaction, grammar textbooks are no longer enjoyable for both the students and the teacher. Some tasks provided may not suit the distant learning context. The study presents how to shift the grammar assessments to be more performance-based and consider long-term projects that leverage performance tasks. Some tasks were also split into shorter tasks or performance items to be completed. Chances to cheat or consult notes can be minimized because they have performed their grammar understanding through performances (speaking, reading, and writing performances).

METHOD

Considering the basic objectives, namely, improving the quality of education through efforts to improve learning, by improving the conditions under which these learning practices are carried out, this study is an Action Research (AR). Koshy (2005) states that "doing action research facilitates evaluation and reflection to implement necessary changes in practice, both for an individual and within an institution, with increased understanding and confidence." In other words, AR offers approaches and procedures that are expected to offer improvement and professional improvement of teachers/lecturers in the teaching and learning process in the classroom by examining indicators of the success of the process and learning outcomes that occur in students/students and teaching and learning process. The writers have found problems when conducting some online assessments in grammar class, and this AR is undertaken to improve the quality of online learning. The study involved the English Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta that joined the writer's *Foundation of English Grammar* class. The data were collected through observation, documentation, and interview. The collected data were then analyzed using a qualitative data analysis model from Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014): data collection, data condensation, data analysis, and conclusion drawing. The writers also base the assessment process on O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) in (Brown, 2004) characteristics of performance-based assessment.

RESULTS

This part describes the writer's effort in improving her grammar class practice. Since the trend of teaching and learning activities during this pandemic era has changed, the writer has reformed how she assessed students' understanding of grammar. She intended to take a careful look at grammar assessment, which, in practice, should be based on students' performance.

How Performance-based Formative Assessment is Implemented in Foundation of English Grammar Class

The teacher planned some different activities which involve simple tasks. The explanation of the material, i.e., grammar components, was done both deductively and inductively. She conveyed both the explicit and the implicit grammar teaching techniques in delivering the grammar forms. The main topic was English tenses, and the teacher discussed some types of them, i.e., simple present tense, past tense, and future tenses. As this study's primary focus is the assessment process, the

writers do not describe the materials' delivery (grammar topics). However, because the assessment is formative, some additional information about the teaching process is sometimes explained. In giving feedback, the teacher or the writer explained and corrected any misconceptions or wrong understanding that the students made. This inductive technique led to more effective instruction and yielded better results.

The students' understanding of the subject matter was observed during classroom instructional or non–instructional settings such as writing, monologue, interview, and group works. Employing the characteristic of performance-based assessment proposed by O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) in (Brown, 2004) here are some activities executed:

Activity 1: Self-introduction Paragraph
This activity is a typically spoken monologue, where students talk about their identity. The general information, of course, conveys present tenses, specifically the simple present tense. General facts, habitual actions, or repeated activities are expressed using this tense. Rather than constructing separate sentences, it is more communicative if the students write a whole paragraph by applying the simple present tense.
Here is the instruction on this activity.

On Simple Present Tense
Tell us about yourself: your family, personality, hobbies, siblings, etc. Underline all the verbs you have written in your paragraph.

Here are some of the samples of how the students introduced themselves.

Student 1
My unique habit is that I like to think too much at night. I like listening to old songs. I like the old style of dress, especially the 90s. I prefer to wear sneakers over heels. And an interesting fact about me is that all my bags are black. Sometimes I feel really beautiful when I wear black clothes, I don't know if it's weird or not but sometimes I like to compliment myself. I am more interested in public speaking, I really want to be a radio announcer. That's a unique fact about my own version.
Student 2
My name is Syamsiati Arifah, my nickname is Arin. My habits to be honest I like to repeat watching the same Korean drama with different subtitles for example sub China, Korea, Indonesia, English etc.
Student 3
My name is Theresia Priska Alfeyans,my friends and others call name is Priska. in here i want to tell you about my uniqueness. my uniqueness is sing a song in bathroom because i think,if i am singing a song in the bathroom my voice sounds good. just it thank you .

The developed paragraphs above reflect more performance-based, and they look more natural for the students. They would not easily cheat like what they usually do in a multiple-choice grammar test. By writing down general information, the students could create sentences in the form of simple present tense. The submission was facilitated in the university's internal Learning Management System (LMS).

The above activity was chosen because, without good grammar knowledge, clear and effective communication may not happen. Applying appropriate grammar, even in a simple form of activity above, is an effort to encourage learners to mind their grammar to possess sufficient writing skills. Besides, correct writing promotes confidence and credibility. Learners can start by conveying meanings through phrases, clauses, and sentences (Doff, 2000) in Hashemi & Daneshfar (2018)

There's an additional task for this topic, i.e., finding short descriptive information (8-10 sentences). The students were asked to find a short video (on YouTube or any other video-sharing websites) containing general information about something they wanted to find out (place, food, person, disease, scientific fact, etc.). They had to watch and listen to the video carefully. Generally, the speaker in the video frequently used the present tenses. After watching and listening to the video, the students wrote down the sentences they heard (in the simple present tense, present perfect tense, or present continuous tense). Each sentence must be labeled appropriately according to the name of the tense. The link to the video was also put on the answer sheet. This way, cheating was minimized, and the students experienced a more extensive way of learning grammar. They could also choose any channel or content they like. Below is an example of the work.

I find the video with a title "everyday smart casual work clothing haul ft Nastygal" on youtube channel of Briddy Li and the it's necessary for me because I like this look for working.
Simple present tense:
Today i am here with nasty girl .
I have really cool haul for you guys.
These are more smart casual.
I put things in my car like i put a lot of jackets.
     (source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ha0RHnRLt0&t=310s)

Activity 2: Short Diaries

Diary may become something sensitive for some people. They may be uncomfortable sharing a lot about their lives. However, it will be different whenever they are asked about things they want to share. It is like giving them room to tell the world about their life, characteristics, etc. This second assessment dealt with making a short diary. The students were told to share about where they went that morning, whom they met, what they did in the morning/noon/evening, whether something special happened, and what they feel about the day. Through writing a diary, students can intentionally apply certain English tense, i.e., the simple past

tense. They could make sentences in past tenses by answering the guiding questions below.

> Where did you go this morning?
> Whom did you meet?
> What did you do in the morning, noon, and evening?
> Did something special happen?
> What do you feel about today?
> What class did you have yesterday?
> Did you open your camera and said something to your teacher
> Did you experience something new from the classes? Tell us a little bit about it.

The cited activity above was conducted on Zoom with the videos to increase the enthusiasm during their presentation. The students had been asked to answer the above questions and present the answers on the Zoom call. This task employed certain tenses, i.e., past tenses. Whenever the students answered those questions correctly, they experienced applying past tenses in their writing and speaking. During the discussions, students had opportunities for giving opinions, asking and answering questions. In line with this, a study by Liang (2010) in (Rinekso & Muslim, 2020) reveals that online peer response group supports the teaching of writing. It accommodates students to brainstorm and share ideas collaboratively. In performance-based assessment, after performance session is important. This was the opportunity for the teacher to give a further explanation about the subject matter. This technique makes grammar lessons less stressful for the students.

The guiding questions above were not obligatory. Students might improvise or arrange their own story based on their situation, as shown in the sample of a student's diary below.

> One day I was given seeds by my friend. I was asked to guess it but I guessed it wrong several times. He gave me butter pumpkin seeds, I never knew before. My friend told me that I was asked to care until the seeds bear fruit. At first I wasn't sure because I had never planted fruit before. I tried to find information on the internet about how to plant butter pumpkin fruit. I looked for fertilizer, made my own media and polybags to plant it. I water the seeds every morning. After a few days I waited but no progress I thought that I failed. But on the 4th day I was very happy when I saw that the seeds were starting to appear leaves.

The above activity's ultimate goal was to encourage the learners to apply the grammar rules to the daily life context. However, it was time-consuming as the teacher had to observe all presentations and give necessary feedback on each performance. The tiredness paid off because the teacher was able to observe learners' understanding and learning progress. Grammar should not be considered as an independent and abstract lesson. It should be integrated with other learning fields to lead to the success of grammar instruction (Demir & Erdogan, 2018)

Activity 3: Writing A Message

Another type of tense which was done to connect to performance-based activity is present perfect tense. Writing messages is suitable for this tense, as shown in the sample of the task below.

> You are writing a message to someone (your family, friend, etc.). In the message, give news about your study, daily activities, problems, or things that have changed during your *Learning from Home*. Use Present Perfect Tense as many as possible.

Writing a message to family or friends enabled the students to express the situation of things that started in the past but still going on today. This is very relevant to the present perfect tense. Below is one example of a student's work.

> Hillin, what are you doing? Are you busy? I have a little story. You know, I got a new experience an internship during the pandemic. **I have learned** how to make google classroom for my students. I know **they have had** some difficulties to use it, but the enthusiasm is very good. **I have made** lesson plans for learning during the pandemic. **I have taught** for a month there and 2 weeks again will be over. How about you? Please tell your experience elin.

From the above excerpt, a student was able to tell news using sentences with different tenses. Among the sentences she created, the use of *present perfect tense* is dominating. The clauses in bold indicate proper use of *present perfect tense* in the message. Implementing performance-based assessments like this is part of using communicative tests, and it definitely increased teacher's workloads. It required considerable time and effort from the teacher to check all the messages. However, this offers greater washback and fulfills authenticity, carries greater face validity. The teacher did not try to propose an accurate connection between grammar and writing. Instead, she tried to provide opportunities for the learners to develop their writing skills while learning grammar. She believes that every attempt at writing will bring learners to a higher level of progression.

Besides, the teacher let the students use much of their compensation strategy as Sun, Mantero & Summers (2014) in Supakorn et al. (2018) propose in their study that learners tend to prefer compensation strategy to others when learning grammar. This strategy enables learners to use the language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge of grammar and poor vocabularies. The point is, the teacher did not ignore the accuracy (knowledge of grammar rules). Instead, she hoped that acquisition would take place through more relaxed but meaningful activities.

Activity 4: Reading Short Stories

Integrating grammar in reading activity was the next assessment process. The teacher assigned the students to find short stories that contain simple past, and past

continuous tense. They had to identify the tenses they found. The tenses were colored or highlighted differently according to the name of the tenses. Below is a sample of a student's work.

The Bogey-Beast

There was once a very cheerful woman, though she had little to make her so, for **she was old, and poor, and lonely**. She lived in a little bit of a cottage and earned a scant living by running errands for her neighbours, getting a bite here, a sup there, as reward for her services. So she made shift to get on, and always looked as spry and cheery as if she had not a want in the world.

Now one summer evening, as **she was trotting**, full of smiles as ever, along the high road to her hovel, what should she see but a big black pot lying in the ditch! "Goodness me!" she cried, "that would be just the very thing for me if I only had something to put in it! But I haven't! Now who could have left it in the ditch?"

The above sample presents how the learner could identify the past tenses and give them different colors to show that they are different tenses (green for simple past tense and blue for past continuous tense). This task is an example of a significant contribution of the communicative or proficiency-based approach, which underlies that the knowledge of structures is best to be assessed through performance such as the production and comprehension of written texts (McNamara & Roever, 2006) in Nozadze (1999).

Activity 5: Telling Unexpected Moments

This task was carried out in the discussion of the past perfect tense. As commonly believed, English tenses can feel or seem complicated. The longer the name, the harder it seems. The teacher tried to ask the student to think about their past experiences and shared them in Bahasa first. The teacher thought using the mother tongue helped understand the function of the past perfect tense. Below is the given instruction.

Write down five of your past experiences/situation using Bahasa so I can understand what exactly happened. Next, express the situations using Past Perfect Tense. Underline the past perfect tenses you create or make them in bold.
Example: *Bulan lalu saya berniat mendaftarkan diri ke sebuah Webinar. Saya tidak memperhatikan kuota peserta sehingga saya menunda pendaftaran. Ketika saya mencoba mengisi form, kuota sudah penuh.*
Answer: *When I tried to fill out the form, the registration **had been closed.***

The teacher instructed with an example. The learners gave satisfying responses as they said they understood how past perfect tense must be used. The followings are some of their works.

> *Student 1*
> Hampir setiap hari saya meminta adik saya yang paling kecil mandi sebelum maghrib namun kemarin sore ia sudah mandi sebelum saya minta. (Before I asked him, **he had taken** bath).
>
> *Student 2*
> Kemarin minggu saya sangat ingin membeli dessert box di daerah gejayan tetapi disaat saya tiba di tokonya ternyata tokonya sudah tutup. (The store **had closed** when I arrived).
>
> *Student 3*
> Satu bulan yang lalu Zalfa dan Sintya sama-sama datang ke sekolah untuk mengambil ijazah.Zalfa datang pukul 11.00 siang dan pulang pukul 11.30.Sintya datang jam 12.00 tepat,dan mereka tidak bertemu. (Zalfa **had gone** before Sintya arrived).

Such activities encourage the students to use their own experiences. Chances of cheating could be minimized. If they asked their friends about the rules, this activity remains meaningful because they had different experiences to share.

Activity 6: Short Interview

Activity 6 was done on audio conference rooms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, or Google Meet. These media were selected because of their accessibility and familiarity. The students were free to take the most comfortable tool for them to do the interview. The topics were *future continuous tense* and *future perfect tense*. To assess the learners' understanding, the teacher asked them to answer some questions regarding their plans or upcoming activities at a certain time, as presented below.

> Teacher: What are you going to do tonight?
> S: I **am going to update** some softwares
> Teacher: What about tomorrow at 9:25 am?
> S: I **will be joining** a web meeting in Speaking class
> Teacher: Tell me about your activity tomorrow around 11:00
> S: I **will have finished** my web meeting
> Teacher: Is there any plan with your classmate tomorrow evening?
> S: We **are going to check** some pools because we really miss swimming after the lockdown and quarantine.

It took much time for both the teacher and the students, but this activity has given meaningful experiences. Distance did not prevent the students from having real communication with their teacher. Rosenblit (2006) in (Agung & Surtikanti, 2020) underlines that humans' need to socialize is essential. The students also said that they could easily listen and watch the lecturer's explanation in a face-to-face meeting, but they cannot have it yet this time. The relationship is well maintained through this interactive activity.

Activity 6 indicates a positive contribution of the online course in performance level. The learners found the activity useful and fun. They said they felt the teacher's presence through this activity. The same positive feedback was reflected in Al-Jarf's (2005) study in which the students considered performance as a new way of learning English grammar and doing homework.

CONCLUSION

The performance-based assessment provides important information about the students. The performance-based activity requires more time and energy, but it is worth keeping the students engaged in communicative activities. Besides, they can experience a real application of certain grammar topics they have learned. In general, information about a student's grammar knowledge is different from information about a student's communicative competence. This assessment's challenge is that raters typically assess grammatical performance using scales that involve accuracy, complexity, and the range of grammatical structures used. The judgments are generally subjective. The open-ended format also matters since it leads to the possibility of inconsistencies. Thus, certain factors should be considered to get information that can be made reliable and valid by the teacher's attention to clear scoring criteria. Teachers can interpret the student's performances more precisely with the appropriate guidelines derived from the topics discussed to obtain a picture of the achievement of student learning progress.

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