

EXPLORING LECTURERS' WAYS IN ASSESSING STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the ways lecturers assessed students' English writing. The respondents of this study were two lecturers teaching Writing course at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh. This study employed interview as the instrument to collect data. Data were analyzed by using thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the lecturers employed analytic rubrics when evaluating their students' writing. The findings suggest that rubrics are effective to evaluate the students' writing for its reliable scoring system. This study is expected to provide insights for other lecturers in terms of evaluating writing using assessment rubrics in English classroom.

KEYWORDS: *Lecturers' Ways, Students' Writing, Assessment Rubrics.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is seen as the most complex skill to acquire among the four language abilities (Fitria et al., 2023; Hamp-Lyons, 2003; Hinkel, 2006; Myles, 2002; Rosdiana, 2020). Conducting assessment in writing is crucial for evaluating students' writing proficiency, as feedback is essential to their learning process (Deane, 2022; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Suek, 2020). In this case, teachers should understand how to design objective assessments that offer insight about their students' writing skills, as well as how to create assessment criteria and rubrics for scoring (Crusan et al., 2016). Nevertheless, assessing students' writing remains a significant challenge for teachers. Teachers may feel overwhelmed with this workload, as assessing writing is time consuming and makes them difficult to grade properly (Crusant et al., 2016). Moreover, they may possess varying perspectives when evaluating students' writing assignments. Therefore, teachers may utilize rubrics to help them assess their students' writing more easily, as rubrics are a useful tool, which can serve a number of benefits for both teachers and students (Donlan, 2014).



Rubrics helps teachers and students communicate clearly about academic performance requirements, leading to an improved outcome (Jackson & Larkin, 2002). Teachers create rubrics to specify the criteria they are looking for when assigning an assignment or paper. Setting criteria for grading ahead of time helps save teachers time and ensures uniformity for students with equivalent grades and abilities (Donlan, 2014).

In light of the aforementioned descriptions, this study posed the following research question: How do lecturers of Writing course assess the students' writing? The study aimed to investigate the ways that the lecturers used to evaluate their students' English writing products in the Writing class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is a cognitive process in the realm of language that entails contemplation on a certain subject matter (Alisha et al., 2019; Hamp-Lyons, 2003; Hinkel, 2006; Myles, 2002). Writing is a mode of communication that enables students to express their thoughts or emotions on paper (Oatley & Djikic, 2008). Effective communication requires the mastery of this skill (Fhonna & Ismail, 2022). Writing serves as a means to effectively express the intended message in written form, and it also serves as a standard for evaluating English writing skills (Nurfidoh & Kareviati, 2021). Good intentions and manners demonstrate the ability to read and write in a methodical and artistic way as well as the ability to listen, read, write, and speak, both in *Bahasa Indonesia* and in English (Fauzan et al., 2022). Achieving proficiency in writing skills should adhere to the established criteria; hence, it is necessary to utilize a rubric as a tool for assessing competence in writing (Donlan, 2014).

Rubrics establish the standards by which students' work is evaluated. Instructors can employ them to evaluate a wide range of student products or performances (Wolf & Stevens, 2007) including essays, research papers, oral presentations, and group projects, among others. Rubrics can be utilized to clearly define expectations, offer comments for improvement, assign grades, and evaluate courses and programs (Covill, 2012). A rubric with a clearly defined set of criteria is efficient to assess a learner's work or performance, offering more comprehensive information than a single grade or mark (Allen, 2014). Textbooks and pre-packaged instructional programs often include ready-made rubrics for assessment purposes. In addition, students can engage in self-assessments, while others, such as instructors and fellow students can also provide judgments. They can utilize a rubric as a scoring guide to evaluate the quality of their constructed responses (Chowdhury, 2019). Rubrics typically consist of assessment criteria, a precise specification of the quality of those criteria at specific degrees of

accomplishment, and a method for assigning scores (Brookhart, 2018). Usually, teachers employ a rubric to allocate students' scores and evaluate their learning achievements (Chowdhury, 2019; Donlan, 2014).

Many researchers have undertaken studies pertaining to this topic. In their findings, the implementation of a rubric enhances the reliability of teachers' assessments. Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) found that while using a rubric, the teachers were more affected by the technical aspects of students' writing rather than the substance. Furthermore, a study conducted by Andrade et al. (2010) found that middle school students could enhance their writing skills by reading a model, developing criteria, and employing a rubric for self-assessment. In addition, according to Arindra and Ardi (2020), the advance notice of using writing rubrics reduced students' anxiety when it came to writing.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researchers conducted this study using a qualitative research design to provide a detailed description of the subject matter. The respondents of the study were two lecturers of English Writing course at English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh. The researchers selected the respondents that met the criteria for this study: an English lecturer who has taught writing and had an experience of teaching for more than 10 years. The researchers conducted an interview to gather the necessary data. The interview consisted of six questions exploring the assessment methods used by the lecturers in assessing their students' writing. To begin with, the researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with the respondents to collect the data. All of them have expressed their willingness to participate in this study. The researchers recorded the interview and then transcribed the data for analysis. Afterwards, the data analysis served as the basis for discussing the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the interview with the respondents, the researchers examined the information gathered from the answers to the questions in the interview sessions. The results are described as follows:

GUIDING THE STUDENTS' WRITING PROCESS

The interviews revealed that the lecturers provided some guidance during the students' writing process. L1 responded that she believed the writing process needed assistance. She aided the students during writing in generating ideas, responded to their inquiries, and offered additional assistance when they had difficulties or required extra attention. L2 clarified that she refrained from assessing the students' writing process due to their

ongoing learning. Instead, her primary objective was to assist them in enhancing their writing abilities. Both of these statements are substantiated by the idea that composing in a language that is not one's native tongue is intricate and might result in feelings of unease (Karakaya & Ulper, 2011). Below are the excerpts of the interviews:

"I did not think the writing process should be evaluated..., but along the process, I assisted them in thinking ideas or providing the information they requested." (L1)
"I did not assess the students' writing processes because they are still learning, so I will teach them how to write well." (L2)

ON ASSESSING THE STUDENTS' WRITING PRODUCTS

The findings showed that the L1 evaluated the students' writing outcomes, as the quality of the writing was undoubtedly deserving of assessment. L2 expressed her belief that a lecturer's appraisal of students' writing was not significant, as the ultimate work was what truly mattered. According to O'Malley and Pierce (1996), writing assessment is most effective when the criteria for grading written work are apparent to the students and when the students notice a clear association between their writing and the grades they have earned. However, if the teacher adopts a complicated writing format, students will be concerned about whether they have met the criteria (Arindra & Ardi, 2020). The following are the respondents' statements:

"I evaluate their work since the outcome is very necessary for assessment." (L1)
"I think the final product is what matters." (L2)

In addition, both lecturers clarified that when evaluating students' writing, they employed two forms of assessment: formative assessment and summative assessment. The formative assessment involved monitoring students' progress through weekly assignments whereas the summative assessment involved administering midterm and final exams. The assessments employed by the lecturers were directly aligned with the outline in the syllabus and lesson plans.

ON MEASURING THE STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITIES

L1 used a rubric to assess her students' abilities, since it helped her in deciding the aspects to measure, the methods of assessment, and the criteria she deemed important to evaluate. Moreover, this rubric could function as a mathematical equation for determining the score. L2 stated that she utilized the rubric to evaluate the students' work based on its content, organization, language, and mechanics. This finding confirms the high appreciation for rubrics as effective instruments for enhancing the reliability and validity of assessments (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Rubrics are very significant tools for determining the proper and fair assessment of students' work (Rini & Purnawarman, 2019). The respondents' answers are as follows:

"I measured my students' writing by using a rubric. The rubric helps me a lot when assessing their work." (L1)

"I used a rubric to assess the student's writing. It has several criteria to assess such as content, organization, language and mechanic." (L2)

ON REASONS TO SELECT THE WRITING ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

L1 explained that she chose the analytic rubric because of its intricate characteristics, which demanded her focus. Additionally, it offered formulas for calculating the final score. L1 used a rubric encompassing five distinct criteria. These criteria consist of substance (comprising both the topic and its accompanying details) accounting for 30% of the overall assessment, organization (including the identification and description of the content) contributing 20%, grammar (evaluating the usage of present tense and agreement) making up 20%, vocabulary constituting 15%, and mechanics (evaluating spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) comprising the remaining 15%. She used the rubric due to its detailed aspects to assess.

L2 highlighted her confidence in the rubric ease of use with which she could evaluate students' writing using the rubric. L2 employed an analytic rubric, which consists of four criteria: content (15–30%), concept organization (10–20%), language (15–30%), and mechanics (8–20%). She utilized this rubric due to its efficacy in assessing students' work, as well as its user-friendly and objective scoring system.

Some studies have shown that analytic scoring rubrics are more reliable when assessing writing than holistic rubrics, as they put those being examined on a more clearly specified scale of writing proficiency (Brown et al., 2004; Ghalib & Al-Hattami, 2015; Zhang et al., 2008). Two important considerations are validity and reliability when utilizing rubrics to evaluate an individual's work (Moskal & Leydens, 2019). The excerpts of the interviews are below:

"The factor that made me choose this rubric was that it's really detailed... It has very detailed information, so it's something to which I needed to pay attention. Then, there are formulas on how to consult the scores at the end, and I got the final score, so that's why I chose this rubric." (L1)

"I think it's very easy for me to assess the student's writing by using this rubric." (L2)

ON CHALLENGES IN ASSESSING THE STUDENTS' WRITING

L1 expressed that she faced a challenge in comprehending the intentions and ideas that students intended to convey in their writing, which consequently perplexed her in evaluating the writing. Teaching English writing skills is reportedly one of the most difficult undertakings, as encountered by both native speakers and English second

language teachers (Akramovna et al., 2020). On the contrary, the teacher's instruction might also affect the students' emotions and attitudes during the writing process (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). In addition, L2 reported discovering multiple grammatical faults and other difficulties while assessing the students' work. Undoubtedly, in order to achieve proficiency in writing, the learners must take into account the grammar rules of the specific language they are studying (Al-Shujairi & Tan, 2017). Nevertheless, L2 held the belief that evaluating students' work and offering criticism is advantageous. Their responses are as follows:

"I struggle with understanding what they wanted to write and how they wanted to express themselves." (L1)

"I found grammar errors and many more when I assessed a student's work." (L2)

The implication of this study is that the utilization of rubrics helps standardize teachers' assessment, resulting in fair and consistent judgments of student writing and eliminating bias (Shabani & Panahi, 2020). Rubrics also help provide clear, thorough feedback that highlights students' strengths and areas for improvement, resulting in better learning results (Donlan, 2014). The emphasis on rubric-based evaluation highlights the value of tailored instruction for improving students' writing skills (Rodríguez Romero, 2018). This study thus recommends that teachers use rubrics to provide objective assessment for their students; however, teachers should also have training on designing and utilizing rubrics more effectively and efficiently so that their assessment can be valid and reliable (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010).


CONCLUSIONS

Of the four linguistic abilities, writing is typically regarded as the most difficult to learn. This study explored the ways lecturers, who have taught English writing, evaluated the students' writing skills. The study found that the lecturers have employed writing assessment rubrics to evaluate the students' written works. Furthermore, the lecturers expressed a strong appreciation for rubrics as an excellent tool for improving assessment reliability and validity as well as providing clear reference for assessment. Assessment rubrics should be valid, consistent, equitable, relevant, and valuable to both teaching and learning. Finally, while using rubrics is necessary to evaluate students' work, teachers should also provide some guidance to help students improve their writing competence.

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