Using Different Forms of Assessment to Assess Young Language Learners

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Using different forms of assessment is beneficial. The practice will increase the reliability of the assessment itself and enable teachers to obtain deeper and richer information regarding students' abilities. Even though it might present numerous challenges, applying the principle in assessment for young language learners can be advantageous as well. Thus, literature review was done so that rich information regarding the practice of using multiple sources in assessment, especially the ones intended for young language learners, can be presented in this paper. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that assessment for young language learners should not focus solely on tracking the learners' progress. Instead, it should also aim to get the learners involved in the process and maintain their motivation in order to create strong "pillars" for their language learning journeys. Hence, adding forms of assessment that can cover those areas will increase the quality of the assessment. Self-assessment and portfolio are forms of assessment that can be used to reach the goals. These insights will be beneficial for teachers of young language learners who wish to achieve maximum results not only in terms of assessment, but also in the learning and teaching process as a whole.

Keywords: assessment, language learners, young learners

Penggunaan berbagai bentuk asesmen dapat membawa keuntungan. Praktik tersebut akan meningkatkan keandalan dari asesmen itu sendiri dan memungkinkan pengajar mendapatkan informasi yang lebih dalam dan kaya mengenai kemampuan pelajar. Meski dapat memunculkan sejumlah tantangan, menerapkan prinsip tersebut ketika melakukan asesmen terhadap pelajar bahasa berusia muda juga dapat membawa keuntungan. Maka, studi pustaka dilakukan agar informasi yang kaya mengenai praktik penggunaan berbagai sumber dalam asesmen, terutama asesmen yang dibuat untuk pelajar bahasa berusia muda, dapat disajikan di dalam karya tulis ini. Berdasarkan temuan-temuan yang diperoleh, dapat disimpulkan bahwa asesmen terhadap pelajar bahasa berusia muda tidak boleh hanya berfokus pada kemajuan pelajar. Asesmen juga harus dapat mendorong keterlibatan pelajar dalam proses asesmen dan menjaga motivasi mereka guna menciptakan "pilar" yang kuat bagi perjalanan mereka dalam mempelajari bahasa. Maka, penggunaan bentuk asesmen yang dapat mencakup area-area itu dapat meningkatkan kualitas asesmen. Penilaian diri dan portofolio adalah dua bentuk asesmen yang dapat digunakan untuk mencapai tujuan itu. Informasi ini akan bermanfaat bagi pengajar untuk pelajar bahasa muda yang berharap untuk meraih hasil maksimal dalam pelaksanaan asesmen serta proses belajar dan mengajar secara keseluruhan.

INTRODUCTION

People often associate the word "assessment" with "test" and assume that those terms represent the same concept and, thus, can be used interchangeably. However, the two terms actually refer to different concepts. Assessment does not only take the form of prepared procedures like tests; it can take many different forms. Using these different forms of assessment is beneficial. Even though it might present more challenges, applying the same principle in assessment for young language learners can be advantageous as well. This paper will explore the ways in which using different forms of assessment when dealing with young language learners can bring benefits to all the parties involved.

METHOD

The method that is used to collect data is literature review. The sources include scientific articles and books that are relevant to the topic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Brown (2004), a test is a method used to measure someone's ability, knowledge or performance in certain areas. Tests are a part of assessment. Assessment itself is a process in which teachers continuously monitor and assess their students' performance. Thus, tests are not the only form of assessment; there are various types of assessment that can be used by teachers to assess their students.

Brown (2004) divides assessment into several categories based on their characteristics. The categories include informal assessment; formal assessment; formative assessment; summative assessment; norm-referenced tests; and criterion-referenced tests. Informal assessments are usually unplanned and made during daily classroom activities while formal assessments are planned, systematic and structured procedures specifically made to assess learners' certain skills and knowledge. Summative assessments are administered at the end of a course, while formative assessments are made to assess the process that students undergo as they build their competence. Examples of norm-referenced tests are standardized tests, such as Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which are different from forms of criterion-based tests, such as classroom-based tests.

Another dichotomy known in assessment is traditional and alternative assessment. Brown and Hudson (1998) criticize the common use of the term "alternative assessment", which is often used to describe forms of assessment that contradict the traditional assessments. They believe the term is misleading as it makes people assume that the alternative assessments are forms of assessments that are completely new and different from the traditional ones, while, in fact, they are not. Brown and Hudson (1998) believe that the term "alternatives in assessment" is more suitable to represent the concept. Furthermore, they classify various alternatives in assessment into another set of categories, which includes selected-response assessment; constructed-response assessment; and personal- response assessment.

Types of assessment that belong to the first category, which is selected-response assessment, usually include options that can be chosen by students as their answers. These types of assessment enable a quick scoring process, but they are not easy to create. True-false, matching and multiple-choice tests are some examples of selected-response assessment. Those types of assessment are suitable for assessing receptive skills, which are reading and listening.

The second category is called constructed-response assessment. The types of assessment that belong to this category are suitable for assessing productive skills, which are speaking and writing, as well as the interaction among productive and receptive skills. Fill-in, short-answer and performance are examples of constructed-response assessment. Those types of assessment push students to produce language, but the production is usually limited and guided.

Personal-response assessment is the third category in the classification created by Brown and Hudson (1998). The advantages of using forms of assessment from this category include the fact that they are personalized. Furthermore, they can also be used to assess not only the final product, but also the process that occurs during the completion of the assessment. However, producing and organizing personal-response assessments are not easy. Conferences, portfolio, self assessment and peer assessment are examples of personal-response assessment.

According to Brown and Hudson (1998), using more than one type of assessment in a process of assessing students will increase the reliability of the assessment itself. To illustrate, imagine a student whose overall performance is assessed based on only a single test that she takes. It can be said that the assessment is unfair because a single test might not represent the student's overall performance. Hence, it is better to use more than one test or other forms of assessment outside the test so that we can have deeper and richer information regarding the student's performance.

Maki (2002) supports the idea of using multiple sources of information in assessing language learners. She believes that interpretations of multiple sources can provide explanations on how and why students learn and develop in the ways that they do. Moreover, seeing through different lenses can generate stories of students' learning journeys that are richer and deeper, which can also be used by institutions to reflect on the effectiveness of their programs. Maki (2002) argues that institutions need to implement triangulation in terms of assessment so that they will be able obtain the information that they need about their students. The triangulation includes direct assessments, such as portfolios, standardized tests and essays; indirect assessments, such as alumni surveys and student focus groups; and other forms of assessments that can possibly be done, such as assessment on students' participation in activities outside the classroom.

Similar to teaching young language learners, assessing them might be challenging for some teachers. I have met many language teachers who state that they do not have any intention to teach young learners because they find it extremely difficult. In my opinion, many teachers find dealing with young language learners hard because these learners have characteristics that are different from adult language learners. In order to succeed, teachers of young language learners need to adjust their teaching styles with these characteristics. I believe that the same principle can be applied in assessment for young language learners.

One of the numerous things that I learned from my six-year experience of teaching young learners of English is that we cannot push them to show significant progress in a short period of time. We cannot expect young language learners to reach native-like proficiency in a language that is new and foreign for them instantly. Personally, I believe that early language learning programs should not focus on making sure that progress occurs. Instead, those programs should focus on helping young language learners build strong and solid "pillars" for their learning journeys. I believe that a strong base will help language learners master the target languages successfully.

The belief that I expressed in the previous paragraph is supported by Nikolov (2016a). In her work, Nikolov (2016a) states that tests designed for young language learners usually aim to track their progress and figure out which level of proficiency they are currently in. One of the reasons behind the creation of such tests is parents' demands. Parents who send their children to early language learning programs want their children to make significant progress and have the proof of the progress. However, Nikolov (2016a) believes, just like I do, that tests for young learners should not focus only on those issues. Furthermore, Nikolov (2016a) argues that the tests should also highlight the ways teachers perform the assessments and how the practices affect the psychological situation of the young learners who experience the assessments.

It is also stressed by Nikolov (2016a) that maintaining young language learners' motivation after going through forms of assessments and in the times after the early language learning is a crucial thing to do. The issue of standardized language assessments' motivational effects on young language learners' motivation in China is explored by Zhao (2016). In the meta-analysis, it is found that overly-used standardized assessments and parents' high expectations cause stress among young learners of English in China. This finding indicates that teachers and test-makers need to be cautious when creating and implementing assessments. However, despite the urgency, Zhao (2016) states that the issue has not been explored and addressed properly.

In relation with standardized language assessments for children, there are many forms of them that have been developed and used (Nikolov, 2016a). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is one of frameworks that are often used in assessments for young language learners. Besides that, there is another form of assessment that is often used in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) contexts, which is borrowed from second language acquisition research. This assessment analyzes the language performances of young learners using three criteria: complexity, accuracy and fluency. However, Nikolov (2016a) believes that those forms of assessment are not suitable for young language learners. The CEFR was not created for young learners while the one used in CLIL contexts cannot document young language learners' development, which is usually slow and unstable.

Another notion regarding language assessments for young learners emerges amid the discussions on the use of standardized language assessments for young learners. Recent research reveals that teacher-based assessments that are developed based on the concept of assessment for learning are able to fulfill children's needs (Nikolov, 2016a). This kind of assessment recognizes learners' readiness to develop (McNamara & Roever, 2006, cited in Nikolov, 2016a). An example of teacher-based assessment created especially for young learners in a certain context is presented

by Nikolov (2016b). She developed a diagnostic test for young learners of English in Hungary based on the CEFR.

If we consider the findings reported by Gu and Hsieh (2019) and Sabatini, Halderman, O'Reilly and Weeks (2016), it can be said that teacher-based assessment matches several characteristics of young language learners' development. In their research in Korea, Gu and Hsieh (2019) used TOEFL Junior English Test to explore young language learners' development in terms of speaking proficiency. The findings indicate that young language learners' oral performances include features that are different from adult language learners' performances. Furthermore, the features and characteristics also differ in every level of development. The changing development of young language learners at different levels is also recognized by Sabatini et al. (2016), whose study focuses on assessing young language learners' reading comprehension. In my opinion, these findings prove that assessment that are created and conducted by the teachers themselves are suitable for young language learners. As teachers spend a lot of time with their learners in the classroom, they are the suitable figures for the task of diagnosing the learners' characteristics, needs and readiness as well as creating assessments that can support learners' development.

As it has been explored in one of the previous paragraphs, using multiple sources of assessment is a recommended practice. It is believed that the practice will bring such positive impacts. Applying the practice when dealing with young language learners might be challenging. Nevertheless, I believe that it is suitable for the assessment of young language learning. After exploring the trends and issues in assessing young language learners, we know that assessment for young learners should not only aim to track their progress and figure out their level of proficiency. Assessments for young language learners should also project things from the learners' side. Teachers need to be able to use the assessments to identify learners' needs and characteristics and maintain their motivation.

Based on the findings, I believe that using multiple sources of assessment when assessing young language learners will be beneficial. Tests that are created to track the young learners' progress as well as level of proficiency can still be used, but teachers should not rely only on such tests during the assessment process. Teachers should also use other forms of assessment that enable them to see other areas of the learners' journeys. Two forms of assessments that, I believe, are suitable for this purpose are self-assessment and portfolios.

Self-assessment is a form of personal-response assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998). When self-assessment is implemented, students need to reflect on their own learning and assess themselves. This type of assessment enables students to be involved in the assessment process. Furthermore, implementing self-assessment can also increase the level of learner autonomy and motivation. However, sometimes results of self-assessment can be inaccurate and subjective. Students' personal expectations and past experiences might affect the ways that they assess their own learning processes.

As it can be seen in the previous paragraph, the positive characteristics of self-assessment match the needs that should be fulfilled in assessment for young language learners. Self-assessments will allow young learners to express the way they perceive their learning and

assessment processes and maintain high motivation. In order to minimize the inaccuracy and subjectivity, I believe that training students to perform self-assessment should be done by teachers before implementing it in the class. Even though it might sound impossible for some people, I actually have the experience of doing that with groups of kindergarten students with such positive results. It was difficult for both teachers and students at the beginning of the training, but as soon as the young learners became used to the practice, they were able to perform self-assessment well. However, I believe it is important to keep the assessment child-friendly, especially for children aged 2 to 7 years old who still have limited capabilities in assessing their own learning (Pinter, 2012).

The use of self-assessment and its impacts on young language learners are explored in a study conducted by Butler and Lee (2010). The study was conducted in South Korea with 254 young learners as the participants. These students were asked to perform self-assessment regularly for one semester. The researchers used multiple instruments to collect data, which include tests, surveys and interviews. The findings of the study indicate that self-assessment manages to increase students' performance and confidence, but the improvement is not significant. It is also found that the ways teachers and students view self-assessment are different as they are affected by contextual and personal factors. Another study on self-assessment is conducted by Monika (2013) in Indonesia. The data in the research was obtained through interviews, questionnaires, field notes and scores on students' speaking ability given by teachers and students. The findings indicate positive impacts brought by self-assessment on students' learning. Students became more aware of their own speaking skills and felt that the use of self-assessment can produce fairer scoring.

The findings presented by Butler and Lee (2010) can be related to one of the issues discussed by Nikolov (2016a), which is about parents' demand to see proof of young learners' progress. As stated by Butler and Lee (2010), South Korea is a place where teacher-centered teaching and measurement-driven assessment are valued highly. Thus, the concept of self-assessment, which is the opposite of the highly valued ones, might be hard to accept in the context. Hence, I believe that teachers, students and parents need to be given trainings on self-assessment. In terms of the assessment's influence on learning, both studies report positive impacts. As for the marginal impacts of self-assessment found in the study conducted by Butler and Lee (2010), I believe it proves that we must not rely on one form of assessment only. We need to combine self-assessment with other forms of assessment in order to fulfill all the needs.

The second form of assessment that I recommend is portfolios. Portfolios are also considered as personal-response assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Portfolios enable students to select, compile and display the works that they produce in class. Furthermore, portfolios also have the ability to reveal students learning processes. Another benefit of using portfolios is added by Maki (2002), who states that portfolios can show students' abilities to monitor and reflect on their own work. Furthermore, portfolios can be used to showcase students' work that they are proud of (Jones, 2012). However, portfolios present many challenges for teachers as they have to think about the portfolios' design, resources, etc.

As someone who has the experience of using portfolios as a form of assessment for young learners, I have to agree with all the descriptions presented in the previous paragraph. Portfolios' positive characteristics also match the need to document young learners' learning journeys. However, the process of producing portfolios can be challenging and time-consuming. I worked with very young learners at the kindergarten level, and involving them in the creation of their portfolios was not an easy task. Teachers need to provide continuous support and guidance for the young learners in order to generate successful results.

A number of studies that explore the impacts of using portfolios have been conducted and found positive results (Efendi et al., 2017; Kaur & Samad, 2013; Rukmini & Saputri, 2017). However, those studies have adult learners as the participants. The benefits of using portfolios in assessing young learners' writing skills are explored by Aziz and Yusoff (2015) in their research. The study was conducted in Malaysia with eleven Year 4 students from a rural school in Sabah as the participants. The researchers observed the students' activities in the classroom and interviewed them at the end of the study. The findings indicate that using portfolios can help the students improve in writing.

CONCLUSIONS

Tests are not the only form of assessment. There are various types of assessment that can be used by teachers. In order to create assessments that are reliable and valid, we need to use multiple sources of assessment. The same principle needs to be implemented when assessing young language learners. Assessment for young learners should not only document the learners' progress and level of proficiency, but also involve the students and maintain their motivation. Forms of assessment that can document those areas, such as self-assessment and portfolios, can be used by teachers of young learners in their assessments. More studies that explore the use of such assessments in language classes for young learners need to be conducted in order to provide insights and references for practicing teachers.

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