

UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' NEEDS IN AN ENGLISH CLASS THROUGH A DIAGNOSTIC TEST

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Running effective teaching-learning activities can be a challenge for English teachers due to the lack of understanding students' needs. Therefore, knowing the students' strengths and weaknesses is important in English class. This research aims at investigating the students' need related to the English materials through a diagnostic test. The type of this research is descriptive qualitative research. The data were collected by using a test that had been taken by 20 students who were in the second semester of eight grade at a Junior High School in one of Indonesia's small city. The result shows the English materials which are needed to be focused on by the English teacher before starting the class for the ninth grade. The diagnostic test helps the English teacher to prepare the English materials that fit with the students' needs.

Keywords: diagnostic test, assessment, English learning materials

INTRODUCTION

A test in Indonesian class is commonly seen as a frightening activity for students. The students often feel afraid when they hear about "a test." It is because the test is usually used as a tool to judge their performance in mastering the subject being tested. Sometimes the test is also used to measure the students' abilities to see if they can enter a course or institution. According to Brown (2003), a test is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge or performance in a given domain. Tests are a subset of assessment; they are certainly not the only form of assessment that a teacher can make. This assessment can be formal or public, and sometimes it is informal and takes place in day-to-day lessons.

According to Cohen (2001), teacher and other education professionals spend a lot of time testing, evaluating, and assessing students. Majority of teachers often do not like to construct the test. They also face some difficulties in preparing the test such as the confusion about standardizing of the test. Sometimes, they are not sure what the tests actually trying to

measure. As a result, the goal of doing the test is not achieved and it makes misuse of the test such as tests are used as a punishment.

A diagnostic test is used to determine students' level of knowledge, skills, and understanding as the beginning of a course, grade level, unit or lesson. It tests the students on what they already know and allow the instructor to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of the students. A diagnostic test can also be used to build on students' strengths, clarify misconceptions, adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of the students, and even introduce new and unknown concepts. There are several classroom activities for a diagnostic test such as initial writing prompts, running records, informal reading assessment, pre-tests, surveys, and journals. A diagnostic test also provides feedback for both teachers and students. Feedback can be more direct when it comes in the form of guidance and consists of advice on next steps or what should be done in order to improve or succeed. It is called direct feedback (Black and William, 1998). Whereas indirect feedback is used only to point out students' particular areas of strength or weakness (Earl, 2003). In addition, Brown and Hudson (2002) argued that feedback can be provided to different users, for instance, students, teachers, administrators, etc. Useful feedback can help its users to make different instructional or learning decisions.

A diagnostic test also can be defined as a test that can be used to expose learner difficulties, gaps in their knowledge and skill deficiencies during a course. Thus, when we know what the problems are, we can do something about them (Harmer: 2007, 380). It may occur at the beginning of a term or a unit of study, or whenever information about the prior learning of a student is useful. Diagnostic tests should elicit information on what students need to work on in the future (Brown: 2003, 47). Further he stated that a diagnostic test will typically offer more detailed subcategorized information on the learner. In a curriculum that has a form-focused phase, for example, a diagnostic test might offer information about a learner's acquisition of verb tenses, modal auxiliaries, definite articles, relative clauses, and the like.

In teaching-learning process, teacher sometimes finds difficulties in understanding students' need especially for knowing their English basic ability. A teacher might confuse about what materials have been mastered by the students and what materials should be focused on in the class. However, there is not any test that has been provided by the government to solve this problem. As a teacher, this situation can be seen as a challenge to create a diagnostic test in the class. The implementation of a diagnostic test is still rare in Indonesia. Commonly, teachers only focus on the formative and summative test. The diagnostic assessment informs teaching and guides learning, and yet it is free of the horrible anxiety associated with high-stakes testing, grading, and pass-fail decision making. Due to the result is not used for judging or evaluating students such as assigning grades or selecting students for particular opportunities so it has lower stress levels and opens the door for the use of various "self-appraisal" techniques since students would most likely be honest in providing information about areas in which they needed help (Reed, 2006: 4).

There have been a number of researchers conducted some studies related diagnostic tests with different aims. First research was conducted by Luke Harding (2015), et.al. under the title "Diagnostic assessment of reading and listening in a second or foreign language: Elaborating on diagnostic principles." Their research aimed to explore the implications of their proposed diagnostic process for the assessment of reading and listening. The research explored and suggested practical answers to how diagnostic assessment may take place in the context of SFL reading and listening.

Second research came from Yuan Sun and Masayuki Suzuki (2013) with "Diagnostic Assessment for Improving Teaching Practice" which had a goal to show how Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) can provide detailed information about students' strengths and weaknesses and discuss the applicability of CDA for providing effective feedback for teachers to improve their teaching practice. The result of the teachers showed that the CDA could be a

useful approach and to use CDA in practice, diagnostic score reporting strategies for effective feedback need to be developed.

The third study was done by Dr. Kholoud Subhi Yaghmour, Dr. Luai Taleb Obaidat, and Dr. Qaseem Mohammad Hamadneh (2016) under the title “The Level of Diagnostic Tests’ Preparation Skills among the Teachers of the First Three Elementary Grades’ Teachers at the Directorate of Education of Bani Kinana District. It aimed at exploring the level of Diagnostic Tests’ Preparation Skills among the teachers of the first Three Elementary Grades at the Directorate of Education of Bani Kinana District, and its relationship to the variables of gender, academic qualification, and years of experience. The result showed statistically significant differences, at the significance level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$ in the diagnostic tests’ preparation skills among the teachers of the first elementary grades in the Directorate of education in Bani Kenanah district, due to the variable academic qualification. The difference was between (high diploma) and (M.A. degree or Higher), and on behalf of the (M.A. degree or more).

The last study, Jang (2005) conducted the research about “The Effect of Diagnostic test in Reading Skill”. It investigated the process of the effects of the diagnostic cognitive reading skills assessment on teaching and learning. The result of this study showed that the diagnostic test is quite valid and it could provide informative feedback to teachers and even students. Then, the researcher also proposed a customized diagnostic assessment framework as an alternative approach to formative diagnostic assessment. This study allowed teachers and other users to plan, customize, and implement a diagnostic test at any particular time of an instructional program.

However, the implementation of a diagnostic test in the form of multiple choices which cover the materials in the English syllabus is still new. Therefore, this research is conducted in order to develop the implementation of a diagnostic test in English class. The aim of this research is to explore the implications of a diagnostic test which implemented in an English class. In particular, we concentrate on the use of multiple-choice tests which had developed through the syllabus of ninth grade in order to get a better understanding of the students’ need in starting the ninth grade.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative research. Qualitative research attempts to describe all the symptoms or existing circumstances according to what it is at the time of the study conducted based on Mukhtar (2013: 28). The aim of the study was to investigate the students’ need related to the English materials through the diagnostic test. There were twenty students who participated in conducting the study. They were in the second semester of eight grade students at Junior High School in one of Indonesia’s small city. The data were collected by using test. The test was used to measure the students’ ability to understand the sub-chapters in English subject that they would learn in the ninth grade. There were some principles in conducting a diagnostic test. Firstly, the researchers observed the indicator in accordance with the syllabus of ninth grade students based on the curriculum 2006. Secondly, the researchers were seeking for materials based on each indicator, the materials were used to create some questions. Third, the questions were examined to the twenty students of Junior High School in Indonesia’s small city with the time allotment 45 minutes. The fourth step was calculating the correct number of the students’ answer sheet on each item adjusted to the indicator. From the result of the calculation, it could be investigated the materials that the students mastered and have not mastered. In the last, to examine the accuracy of the data, the researchers used the expert judgement. The result of the data was consulted to the experts to receive some feedbacks related to the diagnostic test.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The diagnostic test in this research is in the form of multiple choices. Thirty questions were formulated based on the English material in syllabus of ninth grade that is going to be taught by the English teacher. According to Harmer (2007:382), multiple choice questions were considered to be ideal test instrument for measuring students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and also it is easy to mark. A test is identified as one types of diagnostic assessment (Pati, 2012). In the syllabus, there are 6 standard competencies that must be achieved by students in the ninth grade. Every standard competency has basic indicators. The basic indicators in the English syllabus of the ninth grade are listed in the table below.

Table 1. The basic indicators of English materials for ninth grade

The basic indicators of English materials for ninth grade
(1.1) Responding to the meaning contained in simple, accurate, fluent and acceptable short interpersonal and interpersonal conversations to interact in everyday life contexts involving speech acts: soliciting and providing certainty, as well as expressing and responding to doubts;
(1.2) Responding to the meaning of simple, accurate, fluent and acceptable interpersonal conversations to interact in the context of everyday life that involves following speech acts requiring repetition, showing concern, and expressing admiration;
(2.1) Responding to the meaning contained in a simple short functional oral text accurately, fluently, and gratefully to interact in the context of everyday life;
(2.2.) Responding to the meaning contained in simple short monologues accurately, fluently, and receptively to interact in the context of everyday life in a text in the form of procedure and report;
(3.1.) Expressing the meaning of simple, short-term and simple interpersonal (to get things done) and interpersonal (social) conversations using accurate, fluent and acceptable spoken language to interact in the context of everyday life involving speech acts: soliciting and providing certainty and expressing and responding doubt;
(3.2) Expressing the meaning of simple, short-term and simple interpersonal conversations by using accurate, fluent and acceptable spoken language to interact in the context of everyday life involving speech acts: asking for repetition, showing attention , and expressed admiration;
(4.1) Expressing meaning in the form of simple short functional oral text by using a variety of spoken language accurately, fluently and receptively to interact in the context of everyday life;
(4.2.) Expressing the meaning in simple short monologues using accurate, fluent, and acceptable spoken language to interact in the context of everyday life in procedural text and report
(5.1) Respond to the meaning and step of rhetoric in simple short essay accurately, fluently and acceptable to interact in the context of everyday life in the form of procedure and report text
(5.2.) Responding to the meaning contained in simple short functional text accurately, fluently and acceptable for interacting in the context of everyday life
(5.3.) Meaningful reading of functional text and simple short essay in the form of procedure with acceptable stress and intonation speech
(6.1) Expressing meaning in the form of simple short functional written text using a variety of written language accurately, fluently and gratefully to interact in the context of everyday life

(6.2) Revealing the meaning and steps of rhetoric in a simple short essay by using a variety of written language accurately, fluently and gratefully to interact in the context of everyday life in text in the form of procedure and report.

Every basic competency has two to three main competencies that must be mastered by the students. Each competency contains indicators of the skill that students must master during the learning process in the class. The 30 items of the questions as the diagnostic test cover all of the indicators. The result of the test is listed below:

Table 2. The indicators of material in the first semester of ninth grade

Question	Indicator	Number of students who answer correctly
1.	Responding the expression of admiring	11
2.	Responding the expressing of asking repeating	7
3.	Respond to expressions of asking and giving certainty	15
4.	Responding to the expression and responding to doubt	13
5.	Responding the expression of asking and giving certainty	10
6.	Responding to the expression of showing attention	19
7.	Respond to expressions of asking and giving certainty	16
8.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	17
9.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	2
10.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	14
11.	Identifying the communicative purpose of monologue text in the form of procedure	17
12.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	4
13.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	8
14.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	5
15.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	11
16.	Identifying various information in short monologue text in the form of procedure	7
17.	Identifying the various information contained in the text in the form of a report	17
18.	Identifying the various information contained in the text in the form of a report	13
19.	Identifying the various information contained in the text in the form of a report	8
20.	Identifying the various information contained in the text in the form of a report	5
21.	Identifying information contained in functional/short texts, personal letters	15

22.	Identifying information contained in functional/short texts, personal letters	17
23.	Identifying information contained in functional/short texts, personal letters	3
24.	Identifying information contained in functional/short texts, short message	5
25.	Identifying information contained in functional/short texts, short message	17
26.	Identifying information contained in functional/short texts, short message	13
27.	Identifying the information contained in functional/short texts, brochures	3
28.	Identifying the information contained in functional/short texts, brochures	11
29.	Asking and answering about the expression and responding to doubts	11
30.	Arranging a random sentence into a unified text in the form of procedure/report	12

The table shows the number of the indicators of competency that must be mastered by the students and the number of students who can answer correctly. As it shows in the table that majority of the students are able to do the test well. During the test, they did not have any difficulties in answering the questions. The result of the test shows that every student has a different score. In this research, we highlight the most correct answer and the least correct answer in order to know in what part the students find difficulties and understanding of the materials.

The great number of correct answers shows the level of mastery material by the students. The area of level of difficulties of the students in this research was shown by the least correct answer. The result of the least correct answer also can be used as a tool to determine the specific nature of learning difficulties. Most of the students answers correctly on the indicators of giving respond to an expression of attention. There are 19 students can answer the question correctly. It means the students do not have any difficulty with this material. Then, the least of the correct answer is on the indicator of identifying information in monolog texts in the form of procedure. There are 2 students can answer the questions correctly. It can be stated that the students might have difficulty in understanding the question related to procedure text, especially about how to identify the information in the text.

From the result of the test, the teachers are able to know what materials that should be given attention, so that the teaching learning can run more effective. The result of this diagnostic test is used to know which materials which have been mastered by students and which materials have not been mastered yet. It can be used as useful information for teachers to know about each student's detailed knowledge state and give them appropriate guidance individually for teaching-learning process later (Sun & Suzuki: 2013, 608).

Several materials that have the least correct answer are considered as the materials that should be focused on by the teacher for the learning activities in the ninth grade. The first material is identifying information in monolog text in the form of procedure. In the test, we provided nine questions which talk about identifying information in a procedure text. The majority of students have not mastered this indicator, especially for question number nine. For question number 9, there are two students can answer question. The question can be seen as below:

Table 3. Question that has the least answer

-
9. What do we press when we want a very smooth result?
- a. Off switch
 - b. On switch
 - c. One switch
 - d. Pulse switch
-

The second material is about identifying information in short functional texts (personal letter). This indicator can be found in question number 23 and 27. For question number 23, 17 students cannot answer the questions correctly and it goes same with question number 27.

Table 4. Questions that have the least correct answer

-
23. How does Debby feel?
- a. Glad
 - b. Scared
 - c. Anxious
 - d. Thoughtful
-
27. What happened to the resort in November and December?
- a. There is no privacy to do things
 - b. It offers special service
 - c. It is closed
 - d. Many people visit it
-

The result of the test can be used as consideration of the English teacher of the ninth grade to focus on the appropriate pedagogy that fits with the students' need. In the teaching-learning process, diagnostic test plays a significant role in improving learning outcomes as the English teacher knows the students' strength and weakness. According to Ugodulwa (2008), diagnostics assessments are used for identifying and remedying learning difficulties, errors, and misconceptions which formative assessment could not correct. Hence, before starting the class, the English teachers can plan the appropriate teaching materials based in the students' need.

In implementing the diagnostic test, the teachers are constantly making decisions about individual or group of students in achieving learning objectives. So, the teachers are able to recognize the students' ability and competency in the class by looking at the result of their diagnostic test. For the materials that have been mastered by the students, the teacher can facilitate the students to improve their performance in the area of skills acquisition by adding activities in the learning process.

The diagnostic test is not used to judge students' ability in mastering the material but it is used to understand students' need. As the result, the students do not feel afraid in doing the test. Since there is not any pressure to reach some levels or scores, the students can enjoy the test. The implementation of the diagnostic test is very beneficial for teachers because it helps the teachers to find out what students know and can do. The result of the diagnostic test in this research shows that the students have a lack of understanding in the materials related to the short monolog text in the form of procedure text. Therefore, in the future class, the English teacher supposed to give more attention in it.

CONCLUSION

The use of the diagnostic test in the form of a test with multiple choice questions is very beneficial for teachers to investigate the students' ability. Besides that, it also helps them in achieving the learning goals which involves the main competency. Implementing diagnostic

test in an English class at the beginning of the term can make a strong contribution to the improvement of learning. Despite knowing the students' need, teachers are able to identify student strengths and weaknesses in a learner's knowledge or use of language. By knowing the area of the students' strengths and weaknesses, the teachers will have more effective time in the teaching-learning process. It will provide feedback effectively and show the assessment has the potential to provide useful information for teachers to improve their teaching. As a result, the learning objectives will be achieved. However, the use of the diagnostic test is still not common. The awareness of the teacher in using diagnostic test is still shallow. Therefore, government and other educational stakeholders who already understand and aware about diagnostic test should work together to promote the use of the diagnostic test in teaching-learning class.

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