

## THE INTERNALITY OF EVALUATION TO IMPROVE EFL PERFORMANCE OF COURSES ON GRAMMAR

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**Abstract:** This paper reports qualitative program evaluation research and its implication. The site of the research is a study program in English which had undergone changes in its student. Based on theory and purposive sampling, the case being investigated was one out of ten classes of the grammar course, based on its heterogeneity in the GPA of the students, and based on the consideration that the instructor of the class being the designer of the course. The focus of the evaluation was on the content, the student performance and classroom interaction. The researcher, historically part of the site, was the main instrument in data collection through participant and non-participant observation, serving the role as an insider in the research evaluation. Classroom events were observed and video recorded. Students and instructors of the grammar course were interviewed, and documents were collected and scrutinized. The result of the research was disseminated. Mechanism has been developed in on-going evaluation of the course through staff development program, and through learning organization.

**Key words:** evaluation, student performance, classroom interaction, grammar course

University as well as study program accreditation has been carried out following the PP No 19: 2005. On the level of study program, evaluation has been geared to facilitate external evaluation, the focus of which is on the standards depicted on document PP 19: 2005 as well as PP 49: 2014. The mechanism of external evaluation requires a desk evaluation followed by visitation as to confirm the information contained in the documents submitted for the desk evaluation. Empirical evidence shows the lack of attention by study programs to evaluate the process of education as required in the national standard which is characterized as interactive, holistic, integrative, scientific, contextual, thematic, effective, collaborative, and students centered as these are rarely addressed in considerable detail by the external evaluators. Internally driven and bottom up approach in classroom level curriculum development evaluation provides an alternative in enhancing the quality assurance of the curriculum development.

The site of the current study is a study program in English, which has been in operation since 1999. A change in the environment of the site was brought about in 2007, which was the establishment of several new study programs under the umbrella of Faculty of Cultural Studies and the implementation of the university policy concerning the extended number of student enrolment, including in the Study Program in English. The curriculum of the study program includes the teaching of language skills and content subjects (linguistics and literature related). In order to earn their degree, students are to write a final project, which requires them to carry out a research related to linguistics or literature. Only 25% of the first cohort of students following the implementation of the change could finish their studies on time. The final project undertaking has been identified as the factor that caused the delay. Concern has been expressed as to the poor grammar of the students, the under standard newly enrolled students' qualification, and also, the working overload of the academic staff. With the need of classroom level curriculum development evaluation described earlier, and the context of the change surrounding the curriculum of the study program, the focus of the study was put on the teaching of grammar, as part of the language skills subjects in the curriculum.

## **EVALUATION, TESTING AND TEACHING**

Evaluation has identical meaning with assessment, so evaluating and assessing are synonymous terms. It has relationship with testing. Tests are prepared administrative procedures that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum when learners muster all their faculties to peak to over, knowing that their responses are being measured and evaluated. Assessment, on the other hand, is an ongoing process that encompassed much wider domain based on Brown (2004, p.4).

Then, tests are a subset of evaluation; they are not the only form of evaluation that a teacher can make. Although tests can be beneficial tools, they are not only one among many procedures and tasks that teachers can ultimately use to evaluate students. In fact, we might be thinking, if we make evaluations every time we teach something in the classroom, does all teaching involve evaluation? Are teachers constantly assessing students with no interaction that is evaluation-free?

The answer relies on our point of views. For optimal learning to take place, students in the classroom must have the freedom to experiment, to try out their own hypotheses about language without feeling that their overall competence is being judged in terms of those trials and errors. In the same way that tournament tennis players must, before a tournament, have the freedom to practice their skills with no implications for their final placement on that day of days, so also must learners have ample opportunities to "play" with language in a classroom without being formally graded. Teaching sets up the practice games of language learning the opportunities for learners to listen, think, take risks, set goals, and process feedback from the "coach" and then recycle through the skills that they are trying to master, a diagram of the relationship among testing, teaching and evaluation is found in Figure of Test, evaluation, and teaching.

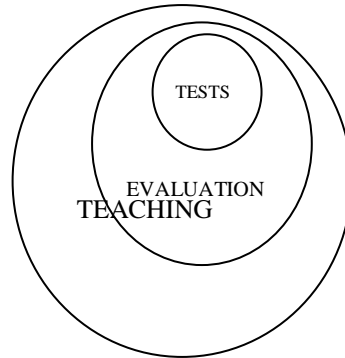


Figure 2.1 Tests, evaluation, and teaching  
(adapted from Brown 2004, p.5)

Indeed, during these practice activities, teachers observe students' performance and make various evaluations of each learner at the same time. How did the performance compare to previous performance? Which aspects of the performance were better than others? Is the learner performing up to an expected potential? How does the performance compare to that of others in the same learning community? All of these observations feed into the way the teacher gives instruction to each student in the ideal classroom.

## TEACHING GRAMMAR

Before discussing about teaching grammar. It is better to figure out the definition of grammar because language user's subconscious internal system. Therefore, linguists' attempt to codify or describe that system "*Grammar is the business of taking a language to pieces, to see how it works.*" (David Crystal). Grammar is the system of a language. People sometimes describe grammar as the "rules" of a language; but in fact no language has rules. If we use the word "rules", we suggest that somebody created the rules first and then spoke the language, like a new game. But languages did not start like that. Languages started by people making sounds which evolved into words, phrases and sentences. No commonly-spoken language is fixed. All languages change over time. What we call "grammar" is simply a reflection of a language at a particular time. Another definition of grammar is the mental system of rules and categories that allows humans to form and interpret the words and sentences of their language.

Teaching grammar is an essential part of school education or adult learning. Without good grammar, spoken or written words lose much of

their meaning and most of their value. Grammar is a very important thing to get right, and teachers should take extra care to impart proper grammar to all their students. Unfortunately, grammar is often seen as a difficult and boring subject, so one popular method of teaching is to just repeat the correct grammar for a certain situation over and over until it is memorised and able to be repeated, like a parrot (Byrd, 1998). This is dull for both teachers and students, and often only results in the students being able to repeat what they have learned, rather than resulting in a complete understanding that can be applied to all situations. English grammar is very complex, and all its intricacies cannot truly be learned by rote, they must be really understood – and understanding is most easily achieved when students are engaged, interested and having fun during a lesson.

### **PREVIOUS STUDIES**

Many students think that learning English grammar is difficult. Many teachers, however, have attempted to create grammar teaching a non-threatening, imaginative and useful activity in the English curriculum. It is supported by study done by Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011). In their journal about difficulties in teaching and learning grammar in EFL context, they reported a study undertaken to find the difficulties teachers face in teaching grammar to EFL students as well as those faced by students in learning it, in teacher's perception. The study is limited to EFL teachers teaching English in Omani Basic Education schools and the use of questionnaire as the research instruments. This study was mainly quantitative in design. It is aimed at investigating whether there are significant differences in teacher's perception of difficulties in relation to their gender, qualification, teaching experiences and the level they teach in school, thus providing insights into their own and their students's difficulties. Mean scores and t-test were used to interpret the data.

They conclude that both teacher's and students face serious difficulties with regard to EFL grammar instruction, students facing them to a greater extent than teachers. It is, therefore necessary to plan mediating or supplementary tasks to help learners tide over the difficulties in studying English grammar. The main findings are reported with implications. One of them is provide sufficient the curriculum document and teacher's book showing how the potential difficulties could be addressed in planning their classroom activities.

Concerning with authentic assessment, the other study was conducted by Finch (2002) about implication for EFL performance testing in Korea. This paper examines current theory and practice regarding the assessment of foreign language oral performance, and discusses implications for curriculum designers and teachers in tertiary learning institutions in the republic of Korea. In addition to suggesting that norm-referenced assessment be replaced with criteria-referenced, "authentic" assessment in these establishments, the first part of the paper also concludes that the current grading of students in National

Universities according to a prescribed bell-curve is inappropriate for language assessment, being intrinsically demotivating for students and teachers. It is therefore argued that tertiary English programs should act on recent research findings and government policy statements by promoting positive affect (attitudes, beliefs, confidence, motivation, etc.) in non-threatening learning environments, using criterion-referenced, authentic assessment. The second part of this paper recognizes two modes of authentic assessment (self- and peer-assessment) as reliable and valid methods of evaluation, particularly suitable for assessment of oral skills at tertiary level. These reflective models encourage students to become involved in their learning, and promote positive attitude change in the fostering of life-long learning skills and socially responsible citizens. It is suggested, therefore, that when employed in a student-centered, holistic setting, self- and peer-assessment are practical and effective evaluation tools for tertiary language education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research took place in the second semester, in which the teaching of grammar classified as Structure Analysis was organized. The sampling decision is purposive and theoretical. Ten classes of Structure Analysis class (A – J) were analyzed, each for its heterogeneity in terms of students' GPA on the first term to see the distribution of the high, average and low achievers. The classification used was 3.93 – 3.82 (high achiever); 3.81 - > 2.98 (average achiever) and < 2.98 (low achiever). No students fulfilled the criteria of the high achievers in six classes ( E,F,G,H,I,J), three students fulfilled the criteria of high achiever both in class A and class B, one student fulfilled the criteria of high achiever in class C, and two students in class D. Two students fulfilled the criteria of low achiever in class A, one in class B, five students in class C, and five in class D. Four classes (A,B,C,D) are potential to be chosen as the sample for their heterogeneity, but class B was chosen as the sample for the reason that it was taught by a senior tutor by teaching experience.

The focus of the research was on classroom interaction. The data is in the form of descriptive as well as reflective field-notes i.e. (1) on classroom observation, (2) the transcription of video recording of classroom events, the learning as well as teaching activities, and (3) the transcription of interview with the students and well as with the teachers, and (4) the result of document analysis. Ten classrooms of class B were observed. The interview with the students and the teacher follows the principle of snowball sampling. The data was analyzed based on Miles and Hubberman's flow of data analysis (1994). Classroom events were observed and analyzed. Teachers as well as students' views were sought through observation and interview.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

Document analysis on the statement of aims, instructional materials and the syllabus reveals that the content of the course is knowledge based, on the mastery of certain grammatical items such as

parts of speech (nouns, adjectives, and adverbs); tenses (simple present, present continuous, present perfect, present perfect continuous, simple past, past continuous, past perfect, past perfect continuous, simple future, future continuous, future perfect, future perfect continuous). Subject-Verb Agreement Verb Tenses Nouns and Pronouns Modal Auxiliaries Adjectives and Adverbs, gerund and infinitives, passive voice, conditional sentences and subjunctives, quoted and reported speech.

The linguistic content of the course obviously refers to the tradition of prescriptive grammar owing to the fact that the description on rules does not leave any room for how the language is really used, giving the impression that the rules are fixed. This can be identified among others, in the description of “future tense”, “conditional sentences”, and “subjunctives”. In the case of tenses, the instructional materials describes that included in the system of tense is “future tense” while the development of scientific study of language has provided language description as it is used today in which English only recognizes two tenses, i.e. present and past.

Recent development in the teaching of grammar has reached the stage where the debate on whether it should be focused on form or on meaning has no longer become the main concern. This is due to the consensus that ignoring explicit consideration on form will hinder the process of language acquisition. Although question still remains as to what degree teaching on form should be carried out as compared to teaching on forms, it can be identified that the methodology reflected in the instructional materials favors the dominance of teaching on forms.

## **LEARNING PROCES AND ASSESSMENT**

Congruent with the instructional materials and the syllabus, the classroom process reflects teacher centered activities. The grammar learning starts with the instructor’s presentation on rules, followed by the students doing the exercises. Individually, the student will be asked to do one item of the exercise on completion, gap filling, etc., while the others are expected to listen, pay attention and wait for their turns. During the process, the instructor would give short and quick comments on each of the student’s answer, depending on the prompt response of the student as well as its clarity. For those who delay their responses, after several seconds, the instructor would skip them and pass the turns to other students. The instructor’s comments would include agreeing and disagreeing, providing correct answers, or asking question for clarification, as well as showing her indifference on the students’ low performance. Upon the completion of each section of the exercise, the instructor gives the opportunity for the students to ask questions

English is mostly used to discuss grammatical items as is Indonesian. In expressing her indifference, informal Indonesian, mixed with Javanese is used. Hence, most of the time she is successful in creating the jocular tone that helps

make the atmosphere of the class less pressing despite her attitudes. She mostly sits in front of the class for she has to use the whiteboard and operate the LCD, but she would not refuse to move to get close enough to the students once in a while when she wants to hear the students better.

What is not written in the syllabus of the course is the students' presentation on rules. Several meetings are held for the students to present certain grammatical items. Students are organized into groups of three to four and they are given thirty minutes. They start their presentation using slides containing explanation of grammatical items as the topic they are assigned to present. Prior to this, the instructor would check their names for the purpose of scoring. High achievers find this task manageable. They can finish their presentation and answer questions from the instructor and other students. The average and low achievers found themselves reading their slides, baffling and mumbling, pausing several times trying to grapple with task. Very often, after asking several questions, with her indifferent tone, the instructor stop their presentation before they finish and give the turn to other groups of students. Learning assessment is conducted through small quizzes, individual performance in group presentation, mid-term and final tests.

## CONCLUSION

Among the list of subjects taught in the S-1 Study Program in English Literature Universitas Brawijaya are. Two undertakings are obvious. Reading in content subjects, both expository and narrative texts, and writing expository texts. The students' competence in grammar has been identified as one of the various factors leading to their poor writing ability which in turns fail them in completing their final project and accordingly, their study, on time. Concerns have been spelled out that an overall evaluation on the study program curriculum development is carried out.

In summary, all education depends on a foundation of good grammar. If students cannot understand grammar, they will struggle to read, write or speak clearly in any other area of education, from maths and science to history or geography. Good language is the base on which all other education has to stand. Teachers can use a variety of ways to make their grammar lessons memorable and enjoyable for students. Students who enjoy their lessons will pay closer attention, and you will then have an easier time while teaching. The evaluation also influences the success of teaching grammar and the learning outcomes. Therefore, the lecturers should consider the suitable assessment for their students.

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