

LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT COURSE: STUDENTS AND LECTURERS' VOICES ON HOW IT IS STRUCTURED

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to describe the structure of Language Assessment Course that students of English Study Program in Jambi University expect to learn and lecturers wish to teach. As a mandatory content course, Language Assessment course aims at enabling the students (1) to evaluate the classroom language learning through formative and summative assessment; and (2) to construct linguistically-acceptable language test items. Data were gained through students' questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion with lecturers of the course and/or language pedagogical courses. 83 students responded the questionnaire and 8 lecturers participated in the discussion. The results show that students expect to be equipped with practical theories of language assessment and to be trained on how to design scientific test items. In addition, lecturers convey that students are not only taught with theories of language evaluation but they are also guided to develop assessment of language learning. Both students and lecturers recommend that students' workshop of constructing the assessment takes major proportion in the course in which students take theories taught into practice.

Keywords: *Language, Assessment, Expectation, Test Items.*

Language Assessment course is one of compulsory courses in the curriculum of English Education Program in Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Jambi. This course involves theories about how to evaluate learning process and result as well as test forms (language testing). This course aims at enabling the students (1) to evaluate the classroom language learning through formative and summative assessment; and (2) to construct linguistically-acceptable language test items.

However, in the teaching and learning process of this course, there are several things that have not been covered in accordance to its *KKNI* curriculum. First, the standardized syllabus that fits to the content of the curriculum for this course is not available yet. The current syllabus reflects more on the language testing. In other words, the focus is still on the language cognitive area. Second, the syllabus has not discussed in detail the holistic assessment of language learning process (affective and psychomotor aspects). Third, the exercises provided are still limited. Next, the appropriate module/learning materials are not available yet. In the previous teaching process, the researchers as the lecturers of this course just compiled the materials from various resources. Last, the results of students' project works for this course have not met the standard of the summative test writing that can be accepted academically. In other words, the students just copied the tests from the Internet or teachers they have known without revising the test items in order that they can be accepted academically.

Based on those problems, the researchers thinks that it is highly important to restructure the course by considering teachers and students' voices on how it should be structured. By considering their voices it is hoped that the next teaching and learning process of this course will give better results. The focus of reconstructing this course is started with the reconstructing the syllabus. Syllabus is a document for teaching that covers learning objectives, the contents/materials that should be learnt by students, and evaluation systems explicitly planned as a guidance for education program (Newby, 2000). This is in line with Harmer (2001: 295) who states that "Syllabus design concerns the selection of items to be learnt and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence. The designer is concerned not just with lists of what will be taught, and in what order, but also the planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programmes."

According to National Education Department (2008), a syllabus must be designed by considering eight principles. Those are scientific, relevant, systematic, consistent, adequate, actual and contextual, flexible, and comprehensive.

In designing teaching and learning process, a teacher should consider three things. The first is analyzing students' needs and monitoring students' learning development. The second is selecting things that need to be learnt. And, the third is arranging learning elements to create effective learning process. Gathering data from teachers and students' voices on how this course should be structured is also a part of the efforts to design effective teaching and learning process of this course.

Method

To find out the students and lecturers' voices on how Language Assessment Course is structured, a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) with descriptive research design was used. The participants were 83 students from three classes who have ever learnt this course chosen by using total sampling technique and 8 lecturers who ever taught courses relating to language pedagogical courses (using purposive sampling). Data from the students were gained through a close-open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire asked about their opinions about the components of the syllabus and their suggestions on how to improve teaching and learning process of this course. Meanwhile, data from the lecturers were gained through Focus Group Discussion.

Results and Discussion

The result of the descriptive analysis of the close-ended questionnaire reveals that most of the participants think that the components of syllabus available now are complete. The basic and standard competencies are already stated clearly, the indicators, assessments of the learning, materials, learning activities, time allocation, methods, and resources are also stated clearly in the syllabus. For teaching methods, many of them prefer to have individual (42.2%) and group (41%) presentations. It might be because they think that by presenting individually they can be motivated to study since the score will be based on individual capability, and by group presentation they might think that the difficulties they find can be discussed with classmates. 37% participants prefer to have lectures.

For teaching materials, most of them (96.4%) agree that Language Assessment lecturers need to use other resources besides the textbook. According to the participants topics that they think beneficial to be learnt are Concept of evaluation, assessment, measurement, and testing, Test types and purposes, Types of assessment, Practicality of the test, Reliability of the test, Validity of the test, Authenticity of the test, Washback, Standardized-based testing, Teacher-made test, Technological-based Assessment, Authentic assessment, Testing the language skills, Testing the language aspects, Integrated assessment, Constructing test items, Analysing test items, Scoring test items, Testing the language skills and aspects. Those topics were chosen by more than 60 % of the participants. Only 43.4% participants chose Portfolio.

Furthermore, there are some considerations that the participants think important to be applied by Language Assessment lecturers in selecting the materials. They are (1) the materials fit to the students' need, (2) the materials should fit to school context, (3) the materials should be interesting and constructive, and (4) the layout should also be interesting.

For learning evaluations, most of them prefer to have assignment (78.3%), written mid-test (72.3%), final written test (66.3%), active participation (57.8%), and quiz (51.8%). Only 47% participants choose final project work as a part of evaluation components. This finding does not match with kinds of exercises that they prefer to have. For kinds of exercises they want to have while learning Language Assessment course are project work (85.5%), and multiple choice tests (57.8%). They think that process evaluation is better than result evaluation.

For open ended questionnaire, the result reveals that most participants think that lecturers should be able to manage the classroom well so that the students feel comfortable in learning. Lecturers are also expected to explain in detail the materials and do not give too many materials for one meeting because they cannot focus on important points they have to remember. They think that presentation is good but the lecturers also need to re-explain the material to confirm the explanation given by the presenters before. Obviously, English lecturers must be able to give a clear

explanation to students when teaching so that they are able to understand the lessons well. Presenting and explaining materials well can also encourage students to get involved in the lessons. One way to make students clear about the lesson is by applying appropriate teaching technique and method in the classroom. As stated by Chandy (2012), an appropriate technique in teaching and learning English will bring better results in language learning.

Besides their expectation to lecturers, they also give suggestions to the English study program staff. They hope that learning facilities such as internet connection, in focus, etc. can be provided maximally. Effective teaching and learning process would be hard without good facilities. Facilities meant here are physical facilities. It could be the sources of books and materials, labs for workshop, and so on. Taking some of the class labs could also provide useful variation in learning activities (Abidin, 2012). Therefore, it makes sense if good resources and good facilities will support the students to learn the materials better.

In addition to the questionnaire, the researchers also conducted a focus group discussion with 8 lecturers who ever taught courses relating to language pedagogical courses. From the discussion, there are four important points that need to consider in structuring Language Assessment course. They are (1) lecturers do not need to give many theories to students. Students have to be occupied with more workshop than theories. The theories the lecturers give just those that can help students construct test items. In workshops students must be facilitated well. (2) Materials about test item analysis should be included. (3) The assessment is based more on the process of learning than the result. (4) Kinds of test given to the students are mid-test (about theories they have learnt) and final project.

Conclusion

Based on the result from both students and lecturers it is clear that they all want to have a more effective teaching and learning process for Language Assessment course. Students expect to be equipped with practical theories of language assessment and to be trained on how to design scientific test items. In addition, lecturers convey that students are not only taught with theories of language evaluation but they are also guided to develop assessment of language learning. Both students and lecturers recommend that students' workshop of constructing the assessment takes major proportion in the course in which students take theories taught into practice.

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