

INTERNET-BASED READING ASSESSMENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Assessment has become one major focus in language teaching. In relation to the curriculum and the focus of language teaching in Indonesian context, probably reading plays an important roles. To make it connected, the reading assessment has become one field that the stakeholders concerned about. It is absolutely known that administering reading assessment is not easy, one factor is the money spend in administering the reading assessment. Therefore there is a need to create more efficient and feasible reading assessment on the new contexts of the language learners. As internet and computer become common things had by most of the language learners, there is a tendency to develop reading assessment through the use of internet and computer. Internet provide not only new and recent materials, it also meets the practicality and the feasibility of the reading assessment stated before.

Keywords: *reading assessment, internet-based assessment*

INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language teaching in Indonesia has been done through years and it has been improved to make better language teaching and learning. As a foreign language, English is viewed as a language used not in all everyday life. It is used in a certain occasion and certain community when it is used in everyday communication. English also has been used in the international communication especially in the technological communication. It is clear enough that the use of English mostly in the written texts. Therefore, the teaching of English are mainly focused on the use of written sources.

Regarding the use of written sources during the English language teaching, reading probably becomes the most important skill taught at schools. The existence of written sources enable the

teachers present various exposures of written texts and it can provide the students with the learning materials. Then, the more written texts provided, the more authentic materials read by the students. Believe it or not, the students will have many authentic texts provided in the teaching and learning processes due to the internet and technology advancement. By having various authentic texts, the students can learn the language more naturally and in context.

Moreover, reading enables the students learn the language better and more comprehensively. If the students read many written sources, they can improve their knowledge of both the world and language. Every text has both new knowledge and given knowledge. The more the students read, the more they get the knowledge of the world. Then, if they have good both knowledge of the world and language, they

can have master other language skills (listening, speaking, and writing). The students can listen better and understand better since they have good knowledge of the language and the world. They also can speak better since they have good content and expressions as gathered from their reading. Lastly, by having good reading exposures, the students can have good models of texts to help the students write good texts. Thus, the students can produce good texts both written and spoken.

Based on what the writer has told before, there are many phenomena which show that reading becomes difficulties for both the teachers and the test takers. Assessing the students' reading comprehension also meets difficulties. The problems faced by the teachers include finding the suitable reading assessment for the students based on their level, developing proficient reading activities and the texts for the students, and administering the reading assessment. Finding the suitable reading assessment always happens when the teachers only have limited time to develop new assessment instrument. Though the teachers have time to develop any reading assessment, there are less teachers who are creative enough to create good and appropriate reading assessment. Lastly, to conduct the reading assessment also needs time. When the test takers are many and the teachers need time to check the test takers' works, there is a need to develop feasible and practical reading assessment. In fact, those problems are still faced by the teachers.

The development of technology probably could be one of the best ways to meet the solution of the problems faced in assessing the students' reading comprehension. Technology especially internet and computer can help the teachers to conduct the reading assessment. The teachers can conduct the reading assessment which is taken by so many test takers and come from various places or areas. In this paper, the writer is going to present internet based reading assessment. The scope of this paper is on the development and

implementation of internet-based reading assessment.

DISCUSSION

1. Assessment

Assessment is defined as measuring the test-takers ability of a certain skill. Assessment is the systematic approach to gather data about the students' achievement or evidence towards the students' ability of the teaching. According to Brown (2003: 3) the term test is defined as a method to measure someone's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. A test is not done in unconstructed ways. The teachers should make preparation, developing the test, and validate the test. A research done by Coombe (2010: 178-187) shows that a teacher should validate the tests into cyclical relationship between teaching and assessment by developing the test based on the principles and procedures. Both the teaching and learning should be in relation to the learners' goals and to the institutional goals. The teachers should always refer to the learning and teaching goals in designing any test.

Brown (2003: 5) differentiates between the term assessment and test. Test is then defined as a subset of assessment created by teacher. Meanwhile, assessment is the ongoing process encompassing a wider domain. Assessment can be done every time the teacher wants to measure the students' achievement in a meeting. The teachers can assess the student today's outcome. The teacher can make a comprehension task to assess the students' understanding of today's class. The questions should be about today's class. If the teacher creates a test which measures the student's achievements in the whole semester, it is called testing.

The test or assessment developers should develop the test or assessment in systematic way. As proposed by Mislevey et all (1999: 6) in

Fulcher & Davidso (2007: 69), there are three steps in designing a task or test.

- a. Identifying the knowledge, skills or abilities (constructs) which will be tested.
- b. Identifying the relationship between the constructs and the behaviors in situations calling for their use.
- c. Describing the features of situations providing the evidence to draw inferences from behavior to constructs.

In developing assessment, the test developers should have some characteristics specified in some ways. Bachman and Palmer (1996) in Fulcher & Davidso (2007: 70) highlights the characteristics of expected input and characteristics of expected response in terms of format, language of input and topical characteristics. Language characteristics include the organizational characteristics, grammatical (vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and graphology), textual (cohesion rhetorical or conversational organization), pragmatic characteristics, functional (ideational, manipulative, heuristic, imaginative), sociolinguistic (dialect or variety, register naturalness cultural references and figurative language). Language assessments, though it is only one skill, speaking or writing, the test developers should correspond to all aspects of the language learned.

Assessment should be valid and reliable. Valid is the condition in which the test should test what it should be tested. Gronlund (1998: 226) in Brown (2003: 26) says that validity is the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment. The result of the test should give views on the purpose of the test. A test is reliable if the results of the test are statics. It means that when the test takers take the same test, the results are the same as the

previous ones. If the test results are different from the previous ones, it means that the test is unreliable. Brown (2003: 20) states that reliable means that the test is consistent and dependable. A good test should have those two aspect, validity and reliability.

Assessment must have changes felt by both the test developers and the test takers. Traditionally, assessment was based on the central need which is, sometimes, not suitable for the local needs. This conditions happens as the results of similarity of needs and demands on the teaching so the assessment should refer to the teaching materials. learning materials used in teaching and learning English are in line with the demands in using the target language correctly and appropriately. This causes some problems such as local materials which are not strongly emphasized which are needed by the local learners. the changing condition of globalization causes changes on the assessment materials which are nowadays more focused on the local needs and the standards (Staynoff, 2012: 240).

Assessments are done because there is a need to know what have been achieved by the test takers. The results of the test will be used as the reference of good teaching or vice versa. In scoring the students' works, the teachers as the test developers will use one of two types of giving score namely criterion referred score and norm referred score. Norm referred score is that every score is interpreted based on the mean, median, standard of deviation, and or percentile level (Brown, 2003: 7). Then, criterion referred score asks the teacher to give score or feedback depend on the criterion has been decided before. The criterion of te scoring has been decided before the teaching and learning processes. Mostly, the criterion elaborates the ranks of the students or test takers.

Nowadays, the teaching of English is aimed at communicative function. The organization of the teaching also influences the assessment. The organization of the assessment today is communicative assessment. Communicative assessment is developed to know the language mastery of the test takers in the real context or so called authentic. The authenticity of a test in communicative assessment is needed since the focus of language learning is the communicative skills which needs authentic condition (contextual) (Brown, 2003: 10). In the communicative language teaching, there are four language competence that should be mastered by the test takers which are grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Brown, 2007: 119-120). Grammatical competence includes lexical and morphological rules, syntax, semantic, grammatical sentence, and phonology. That competence connects the linguistic codes of a certain language with the linguistic competence. Discourse competence is the completion of the grammatical competence. It is the ability to connect sentences in the discourse range and to develop the whole meaning from the texts. Discourse means everything from the short conversation to the complex texts for examples essays, articles, books, and magazines). If the grammatical competence focuses on the sentence levels, discourse competence deals with the relationship among sentences. The sociolinguistic competence deals with the social, cultural, and discourse rules. This competence demands the language learners to understand the social context in which the language is used. Those include the participants' roles, information they gathered, and the interaction function. In a certain context, this aspect is used to know the appropriateness of a certain text. Lastly,

the strategic competence is a concept which is very complex. Strategic competence plays important role in communication meaning making. There are some strategies which can be used to improve the effectiveness of communication. This is the ability to choose an effective medium to perform communication act which might help the listener or reader understand the meaning of the text.

A test will be effective if the test is authentic. Authentic means that a level of corresponding characteristic. A single language test is given with the features of the language task in the target language then it has an agenda to identify the language tasks and to give valid test items (Bachman & Palmer, 1996:23 in Brown, 2003: 28). In more simple way, a test is authentic if the tasks used are in line with the real use in the real situation. Lastly, the existence of washback influence the test takers' results in the assessment. Washback is the effect of the previous test has been known by the test takers. Mostly, washback is the influence of a test in relation to the instructions related to how the learners prepare themselves before the test (Brown, 2003: 28). Washback includes the effect of the assessments and teaching and learning on the measurement which are the preparation of the assessment. Therefore, washback can create both positive and negative impacts.

2. Reading Assessment

Reading comprehension is capability to read texts more comprehensively in relation to the readers' prior knowledge. The readers need not only prior knowledge but also adequate knowledge of the texts in order to be able to read the text better. The readers use their language mastery and background knowledge to read the texts provided by the writer. Richards & Schmidt (2002: 99) support this view.

They argue that comprehension is an active process constructing information gathered both in the message and background knowledge. This process is by which the readers get meaning and information stated in the texts based on the context and readers' and writer's intentions. Mikulecky & Jeffrie (2007: 74) say that comprehension is a process of making sense of what you read and connecting the content of the text to the existing knowledge. Comprehending is defined as a process of thinking when the readers read. If the readers have good and sufficient knowledge of the topic discussed, the readers are able to comprehend the content of the texts.

Reading comprehension guides the readers to build meanings that can help them find the main idea and specific information more easily of the written texts. Lembs, Miller, & Soro (2010: 170) state that reading comprehension is the ability to construct meaning from a written text. The comprehension of the text is drawn through constructing meanings from the written signs presented in the text. The written signs are from the smallest part of a word which is about letters which are composed in words and structured those words into sentences. The readers compose meaning from the content of the text which has been formulated by the writer. The readers are assumed as having the same schemata and linguistics knowledge as the writer's so the main point of the text is transferred properly. The same linguistics knowledge mastered by the writer and the readers can help the readers interpret the writer's messages of the texts correctly. Nunan (1989: 12) states that students are expected to be able to know the various grammatical rules and use the rules effectively and appropriately when communicating. Therefore, the aim of communicating through written texts is achieved.

The use of knowledge of the world and knowledge of linguistics relates to some skills in reading comprehension. There are fourteen micro-skills for reading comprehension proposed by Brown (2001: 307). Some of those micro-skills are described as follows.

- 1) Recognizing a core of words and interpret word order patterns and their significance.
- 2) Recognizing that a certain meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms.
- 3) Recognizing cohesive devices in written discourse and their role in signaling the relationship between and among clauses.
- 4) Recognizing the rhetorical forms of written discourse and their significance for interpretation.
- 5) Recognizing the communicative functions of written texts, according to form and purpose.
- 6) Inferring links and connections between events, ideas, etc., deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given, information, generalization, and exemplification.
- 7) Distinguishing between literal and implied meanings.
- 8) Developing and using a battery of reading strategies such as scanning and skimming, detecting discourse markers, and guessing the meaning of words.

In conclusion, reading comprehension is a process by which readers use their knowledge of linguistics and schemata to get the message of the texts. They link the knowledge with the text being read. In order to comprehend a text, readers have to master some micro-skills. Those micro-skills start from the simplest form of a written text such as recognizing

words, into the complex ones, such as distinguish literal and implied meanings.

In this paper, the writer focuses on the reading comprehension which relates to the interactive reading. The suitable and correct tasks and activities to assess the students' reading comprehension are proposed by Brown (2004: 201-212) who formulates some tasks to interactive reading.

a) Cloze Task

This task lets the students' ability fill the gaps in an incomplete image which may be visual, auditory, or cognitive) and supply which comes from background schemata. The readers can guess, use formal schemata, background experience and other strategic competencies. A cloze test at least has two paragraphs in length which is to account discourse expectancies. It is constructed as the specifications for choosing deletion and scoring. The deletion can be fixed-ratio deletion for example every seventh word. Then another deletion is rational deletion. This is based on the grammatical and discourse functions of the words. Both of those deletions give opportunities for the readers to improve the reading comprehension.

The scoring of cloze tests are exact word method and appropriate word method. The exact word method supply credits to test-takers when they insert the exact word deleted. The appropriate word method lets the test-takers give any word that is correct in the term of grammar and sense.

b) Impromptu Reading Plus Comprehension Questions

This task belongs to a traditional test which involves the impromptu reading and responding to questions. This test resembles the reading section of TOEFL. The set of questions of TOEFL covers some

features which are main idea, expressions/idioms/phrases in context, inference (implied detail), grammatical features, detail (scanning for a specifically stated detail), excluding facts not written, supporting idea, and vocabulary in context.

c) Short-Answer Tasks

In this task, the readers are provided with a reading passage and questions which must be answered in a sentence or two. The features of the questions may be the same as in the TOEFL reading. This can be called open-ended reading comprehension questions.

d) Editing (Longer Texts)

This provides the readers opportunities to detect the error or unrelated sentences that are stated by the writer in the text. This test is appropriate for texts which consist of 200 to 300 words. In this test, the test-maker can create one error for each question which may be multiple-choice format.

e) Scanning

Readers find out the relevant information in a text. They are provided with prose or chart or graph format and require identification of information. The possible stimuli are a one-to two-page news article, an essay, a chapter in a textbook, a technical report, a table or chart depicting some research findings, a menu, and an application form. The scoring process of scanning is the time to recognize important elements.

f) Ordering Tasks

Ordering task serves overall understanding of a story and the cohesive devices which shows the ordered events or ideas (Brown, 2004: 209). It draws back to the students' understanding in connecting sentences and ideas of a story.

**g) Information Transfer:
Reading Charts, Maps,
Graphs, Diagrams**

Charts, maps, graphs, and diagrams presupposed the reader's appropriate schemata for interpreting them. The readers infer information and ideas stated in the texts because they can create different interpretation.

To know the improvement of the students in learning reading, the teachers assess the students' reading comprehension. There are various types of assessments in reading. The students and materials influence the use of suitable and correct type of assessment. The choice of reading assessment is based on the students' learning wants and needs. The assessment is also better reflecting on the materials given to the students during Assessment through Internet

3. Internet-Based Reading Assessment

Reading materials written in English is the prime goal of many reading programs around the world. Assessing reading is also starting to be the main focus of language learning and teaching. There are no significant differences of the content of the assessment through internet-based test and paper-based test. The content is the same but the medium used is different. This kind of text becomes very popular as the demand of the language learners to have easier and more feasible tests. Internet-based test can be used for the massive test takers and done in the same time. The use of internet in the test also provides other positive impacts. As stated by Teeler & Gray (2000: 36-37), there are some beneficial aspects that can be got from the use of internet. The first aspect is the scope. Through internet, the test developers can access huge information which can be used as the assessment. Then, internet also provide various topics. Not only various topics,

the test developers will also have more updated topics which can be used in the test sheets. With the topicality, the test developers also can suit their tests with the test taker characteristics since internet provide more personalization than the text books do.

There are some specification highlighted by Lee and Owens (2004: 118-127) for describing standards and design for multimedia elements. They are elaborated as follow.

a. Define the look and feel of the theme.

The theme should be associated with the job solution. It also depends on the materials and the characteristics of the students. The theme should be able to add interest and relate to the students and contents, supply a tread linking the course elements, support learning with a unified look and feel, and constitute a starting point for creating multimedia analogies, graphics, set and costume design, text styles, activities, and so on.

b. Define the interface and functionality.

To define the interface and functionality of the product developed, there are some characteristics that the interface design should be. Lee and Owens (2004: 119) explain those characteristics as presented that interface design should be

- 1) Be as simple as possible, with adequate white space, uniform spacing, and adequate margins (top and bottom, left and right).
- 2) Use consistent screen areas for repeated screen elements such as titles, feedback, links, menus, or prompts.
- 3) Include a consistent navigation design so users become comfortable within the learning or support environment.
- 4) Keep in mind that most people from western cultures view screens using a Z pattern. The Z pattern is drawn below.

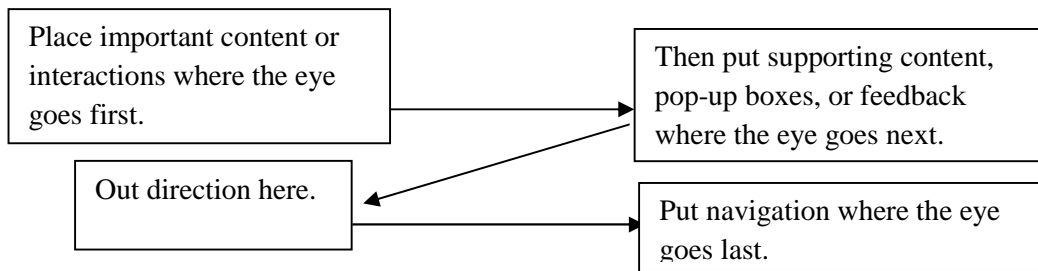


Figure 2. Screen Design Pattern (Lee & Owens, 2004: 120).

- c. Define the interaction and feedback standards.

Interaction becomes one important capacity of multimedia. The exciting work includes intelligent interfaces, visual reality, and other various interactions such as natural-language interface, voice and speech, technology, gesture recognition, and even biological interface. There should be clear instruction and the question contains only correct response. As with the feedback, the questions rise from the situation and learning can be through “doing” using situational based computer simulations.

- d. Define the video and audio treatments.

There are some standards of the media and the technology specifications. They are described as follows.

- 1) Audio: narration style and tone
- 2) Photography: file type, file-naming, conversations, and size requirements.
- 3) Video: file type, file-naming conventions, and size requirements. It should be shot with details and support the text, graphic, and audio presentation of the content.

- e. Indicate text design standards.

Text design and standards stimulate such things as font

style, size, and color. The text appearance and resolution on the screen should determine the size and font.

- f. Prepare the graphic design standards.

The graphic design standards include file type, file-naming convention and color range. The graphic should have clear benefit to the presentation of the content and hold the simplicity of design. The text and the graphic must be readable.

- g. Decide on animation and special effects.

It is good for having moving objects to illustrate the theme. The use of animation and the special effects is to support the learning objectives. The developer should consider the use of effects sparingly and consistently to support the project goals.

Those specifications are expected to be able to promote and support the student learning and performance. The developer creates suitable and motivating environment to success the learning activities. The learning environment should engage the learners’ modalities, provide a comfortable and street-free environment, present the content at the right level and sequence to the real environment as is possible, and meet the constraints and requirements of the

project goals (Lee & Owens, 2004: 116-7).

To develop good products, the researcher should consider some criteria. The four criteria stated by Borg & Gall (1983: 739-741) are to evaluate a product developed. The criteria as presented as follow.

a. Utility

Utility is how informative, timely, and useful the product to people is. It involves eight criteria.

- 1) Audience identification means that all audiences affected by the evaluation identified.
- 2) Evaluator credibility means that the evaluator should be competent and trusty.
- 3) Informative scope and selection means that the questions should be answer are pertinent and responsive to the affected audiences.
- 4) Valuational interpretation means that the bases for interpreting the results and value judgments that should be clearly described.
- 5) Report clarity means that the affected audiences should find it easy to understand the evaluator's report.
- 6) Report dissemination means that evaluation reports should be disseminated to all clients and right-to-know audiences.
- 7) Report timelines means that the evaluation findings should be reported in a timely manner.
- 8) Evaluation impact means that the evaluation should be conducted so as to encourage an appropriate action by the affected audiences.

b. Feasibility

Firstly, the evaluation design is appropriate to the setting in which the study is to be conducted. Then the design should be cost-effective. Feasibility includes these following criteria.

- 1) Practical procedure which is the evaluation procedures should be practical and minimally disruptive to participants.
- 2) Critical viability means that the evaluators should obtain the cooperation of affected interest groups and should keep any group from subverting the evaluation process.
- 3) List effectiveness which is the benefits produced by the evaluation should justify the resources expended on it.

c. Propriety

Propriety means that the rights of persons affected by the evaluation are protected. It consists of some criteria described as follow.

- 1) Final obligation which should be agreed to in writing.
- 2) Conflict of interest which arise in the evaluation process that should be created openly and honestly.
- 3) Full and frank disclosure which is evaluation reports should be direct and honest.
- 4) Public's right to know means that the public's right to know about the evaluation should be assured whenever legally or ethically permissible.
- 5) Human interactions means that evaluators should respect the worth and dignity of persons involved in the study.
- 6) Balanced reporting means that strengths and weaknesses of the entity being evaluated should be reported completely and fairly.
- 7) Fiscal responsibility means that expenditure of resources for the evaluation should be prudent and ethically responsible.

d. Accuracy

It involves eleven criteria which are presented below.

- 1) Object identification means that all pertinent aspects of the entity being evaluated should be described.
- 2) Context analysis means that all pertinent aspects of the conditions support the entity being evaluated should be described.
- 3) Described purposes and procedures mean that a careful record of the evaluation purposes and procedures should be kept.
- 4) Defensible information sources means that sources of data should be described in sufficient detail that their adequacy can be judged.
- 5) Valid measurement means that a range of validated measures should be used in the data collection process.
- 6) Reliable measurement means that the measures should have adequate reliability for their intended uses.
- 7) Systematic data control means that human error in data collection should be minimized.
- 8) Analysis of quantitative information means that analysis of quantitative data in an evaluation study should be accurate and thorough, and should yield clear interpretation.
- 9) Analysis of qualitative information means that analysis of qualitative data in an evaluation study should be accurate and thorough, and should yield clear interpretation.
- 10) Justified conclusion means that the conclusions of an evaluation must be based on sound logic and appropriate data analyses.
- 11) Objective reporting means that evaluation reports should be thorough and free of biases or pressure groups.

The new feature of language assessment is not only done by certain parties. A research has been done by Ahmet Erdost Yastibasa and Gülsah

Cinar Yastibas about the use of e-portfolio-based assessment to develop students' self-regulated learning in English language teaching. E-portfolios can be used as an assessment in courses effectively to improve different learning styles of learners. One of the learning styles is self-regulated learning focusing on students' taking responsibility for their learning from the beginning to the end. This process includes setting goals and organizing learning environments according to their determined goals, but finding research on the use of e-portfolios as an assessment tool in self-regulated learning in ELT is still rare. From the study done by the researchers, e-portfolio-based assessment can develop students' self-regulated learning in English Language Teaching.

Another research done by Laborda in 2009 about the use of internet-based language testing capacity to the private sector. Based on an experience gathered through the cooperation of Antwerp University and the Polytechnic University of Valencia, a language testing platform was administered to produce simple and multi-language skills assessments for a publishing company. The results of the study indicate that academic low stakes testing platforms can replace efficiently the use of larger tests or costly language testing companies that either are expensive, or just do not tailor the tests according to their customer specific needs properly.

There are various texts and examples which can be accessed by the test takers in the same website. The test administer can choose which test is suitable with the test takers so the test can be valid though the test administrators do not develop the test by themselves. It is also noted that there are various links that the test administrators can use to measure the target learners. The most important aspect of having internet as the assessment tools is that the test administrators should have broad

information and knowledge of the websites which enable the test administrators conduct the internet-based reading assessment.

CONCLUSION

The development of information and knowledge has become the major focus nowadays. There is always a need to develop every aspect especially in language teaching. The existence of internet and computer in the teaching and learning provides feasible teaching and learning processes which are new, innovative, and ongoing. One aspect of teaching and learning is assessment. Probably assessment is done to measure the test takers' ability in certain fields. There is also a need to have more feasible and attractive reading assessment which can be done in the massive assessment. This is done to make the assessment processes effective and successful. Internet and computers

which are commonly found in the society can be media used to hold the reading assessment in the same time and massively. The assessment through internet is more attractive so it can minimize the view of traditional tests which mostly done through paper-based test. Communicative assessment matches the move to a more communicative language teaching approach and thus involved more communicative exercises, with a fluency objective. Integrative assessment is the current movement, which focuses more on using computers for authentic discourse and adds learner agency into the objectives. Due to cutting-edge mobile technologies and the high quality of internet connections that today's mobile devices have, the current technological environment indeed enables such normalization of mobile devices into our daily life and facilitates mobile-assisted language assessment.

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