

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE THE STUDENTS' ENGLISH GRAMMAR ABILITY<sup>1</sup>

Lely Refnita

English Department of FKIP, Bung Hatta University

## *Abstract*

*This article is a part of the writer's dissertation on the development of an integrated English grammar assessment. Although some say that English grammar is not needed when someone speaks and/or writes English, it was found that incorrect use of grammar disturbed the communication. It is also believed that having good English is a must when someone wants to be a model. Standing on this position, the writer had carried out an experiment on giving an integrated assessment to train her students who will be future English teachers to develop their English grammar ability. The research was carried out in the form of an experimental research by using a one-group pretest posttest design. The sample comprised all the first year students of English Department of Bung Hatta University, Padang, West Sumatera. The research result showed that the assessment did not only help the students write more sentences, but it also helped them write more number of grammatically correct sentences. The data analysis revealed that the students improve their achievement. It was shown by the increasing mean score from 26.43 in the pretest into 50.12 in the posttest. The analysis of significance also showed that the calculated-t value (18.9052) was much higher than the table-t value (1.9837). It indicated that the integrated assessment was effective to improve the students' English grammar ability.*

**Key words/phrases:** *English grammar, effective, experiment, grammar ability, integrated assessment.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Indonesia aims at developing the learners' communicative competence. This competence is supported by the mastery of five supporting competences, i.e. linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, strategic competence, actional competence, and discourse competence. Linguistic competence deals with grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc. Strategic competence deals with efficiency and recovery. Sociocultural competence deals with non-linguistic knowledge for appropriate deployment of linguistic resources. Actional competence deals with carrying out/understanding communicative intent by performing and interpreting speech acts and speech events. Discourse competence concerns the selection, sequencing of

linguistic items (words, structures, sentences, utterances) to achieve a unified spoken/written text (Celce-Murcia, et.al., 1995). Among the five supporting competences, the mastery of linguistic competence seems to be the most important; other supporting competences will be meaningless without linguistic competence.

In relation with linguistic competence, the ability to recognize and use correct grammatical rules is a must because the use of incorrect ones will disturb the communication. Especially for the candidate English teachers in Indonesia, English grammar ability is urgently developed because they will be the only models for their students later on. Besides that, they will need good English grammar ability when they write scientific articles or

1. This article has been presented in the International Seminar on Languages and Arts (ISLA), Padang, 20-21 October 2012

papers to share their ideas and develop their profession further.

The writer's experience as a *Grammar* lecturer revealed that her students' ability in using correct English grammar was not satisfying. Some of them had to retake the subject because they failed the subject or had low grades. Only about 15% of the students could achieve good grades (Refnita, 2006; Refnita, 2007). To make the problem more serious, when the good graders were asked to write paragraphs, grammatical mistakes still appeared much of the time.

To train the students to develop their grammar ability, the writer had developed an integrated classroom assessment by which the students did not only recognize the correct grammatical features but also used them in their writing. This paper discusses the effectiveness of this integrated assessment in improving the students' English grammar ability.

## B. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

Williams in Bygate et.al. (eds.) (1994:109–110) explains that there is a considerable difference between teaching grammar to foreign speakers and that to native speakers. Native speakers are competent in various types of grammar rules. They know the forms and the meanings of *didn't go* and *doesn't go*; there is a form/function fusion for them. This communicative rule would not have to be taught to a native speaker of standard English. However, the position of nonnative speakers is different. They would have to be taught the meaning associated with the structures. If learners are not taught, they will never know – for the relationship between syntactic form and meaning is as arbitrary as that of lexis and meaning. The possession of this important rule in communicative grammar helps people to 'say what they mean'.

In addition, sentence construction should also be explicitly taught to foreign learners. If the learners haven't learnt to construct a sentence and make sure that

each clause has a verb, how certain can a teacher be that they will eventually learn to write a coherent memo or a reasonably grammatical e-mail? Unless students are rigorously taught the language fundamentals, the quality of their learning has little chance for improvement (Hinkel, 2008:285).

Grammar instruction program is a system made up of many factors. Besides human resources, the availability of teaching facilities, academic policies, teaching materials, and evaluation program determine the success of the instruction. As one of important factors, evaluation program together with its related matters needs a fully paid attention in order that instruction objectives can be achieved and the next program can be planned. In this case, an assessment as a part of evaluation has an important role in pursuing a successful grammar instruction.

Kubiszyn and Borich (2003:4) state that an assessment can be done by using tests and other measurement instruments, such as portfolio, performance display, rating scale, checklist, and observation. More comprehensively, Nitko (1996:4) identifies such assessment techniques as student's formal and informal observation, written test, the students' performance in completing homework, laboratory activity, research report, project, spoken question, and analysis of records. Meanwhile, Johnson and Johnson (2002:6) use the term assessment procedures to refer to assessment techniques. According to them, assessment procedures are various, some of them are goal-setting conferences, standardized tests, teacher-made tests, quizzes, exams, written compositions, oral presentations, projects, experiments, portfolios, observations, record keeping (attendance, participation, homework, extra-credit), simulations, questionnaires, interviews, learning logs and journals, student management team, total quality learning procedures, teacher assessment teams, and student-led parent conferences. Based on Kubiszyn and Borich's as well as Johnson and Johnson's ideas above, assessment can

be classified into test-based assessment and performance assessment.

Johnson and Johnson (2002:6) define performance assessment as collecting information about demonstrations of achievement involving actually performing a task or set of tasks, such as conducting an experiment, giving a speech, writing a story, or operating a machine. Simply, Nitko (1996:239) says that performance assessment is a procedure in which an exercise or a task is used to get the information about how well the students have learnt. So, based on the two opinions it can be concluded that the main component in a performance assessment is the completion of a task. Therefore, performance assessment is also called task-based assessment (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010:16).

Experiences have revealed that for the sake of practicality most teachers commonly used the assessment in the form of task or test that contained discrete point items. Such assessment is not useful for classroom teachers who want to create a program that can improve instruction. A good classroom assessment should be able to promote learning and give information about instruction. Therefore, to promote grammar instruction, a learning-oriented assessment of grammar should be designed. It is believed that learning-oriented assessment of grammar can improve grammar instruction because if the assessment, curriculum, and instruction highly relate to one another, students' learning will also improve (Purpura, 2004:212–213).

Hinkel (2008:263) states that the most common approach to grammar teaching relies on presentations of particular structures or grammar points followed by exercises or asks that concentrate on them, one or two constructions at a time. The most common way of practicing grammar structures involves fill-in-the blank single-sentence tasks, and by the time learners reach the intermediate level of proficiency, they are well versed in blank filling. However, filling blanks in sentences or

choosing the correct option in multiple-choice exercises does little to improve the quality of L2 (and/or FL) text in essays and compositions. One of the most important reasons for the shortfall of L2 and/or FL grammar instruction is that learners see little connection between grammar exercises and text production.

The above explanation indicates that the teaching of English grammar to foreign students should consider the relationship between form, meaning, and function. The tasks in the form of filling blanks and choosing the most suitable option among multiple choices are not enough to develop the students' linguistic competence. The students need to work with the grammatical features in order to produce a meaningful sentence. In turn, they will be able to develop paragraphs, articles, or essays.

Many researches on grammar teaching and assessment have been carried out. Two of most related researches were Sysoyev's (1999) and Pennington's (2011). Sysoyev conducted a research in *The Tambov State University* (Russia) about the teaching of English grammar by using an integrative method. The research result showed that the integrative method could increase the students' participation in learning process and develop a positive attitude towards integrative instruction. The classroom procedures consisted of presenting sentences and finding sentence patterns by the students (*exploration*), explicit grammatical-rules instruction by the teacher, drawing conclusion about sentence patterns, and finding their references in a textbook (*explanation*), and the practice of producing meaningful sentences (*expression*).

Pennington (2011) found that direct grammar instruction followed by sentence modeling through related reading and a task on writing sentences (also called balanced approach) could improve students' grammar. The two researches inspired the writer to carry out a research on finding out the effectiveness of an integrated assessment on the students grammar ability.

### C. DATA COLLECTION, DESCRIPTION, AND DISCUSSION

The data were gained by administering a grammar test to the sample in the form of writing four simple paragraphs about their hobbies. The test was conducted twice, before and after the treatment. The treatment itself was in the form of giving an integrated classroom assessment by which the students were asked to underline grammatical features, completing sentences, arranging words into a correct sentence, describing pictures, making questions, identifying sentences, and doing both guided and free writing. To find a student's pretest score, each sentence that (s)he arranged to develop the paragraphs was analyzed in terms of the correct use of English grammar and appropriate choice of vocabulary. The number of correct sentences divided by the number of total sentences that a student wrote and then multiplied by one hundred became his or her score. The same procedures were done to get the posttest score.

The comparison of pretest and posttest data showed that there was a difference between the students' grammar ability before the treatment and that after the treatment. The pretest scores ranged from 0 to 57.69 and the mean score was 26.43. Meanwhile, the posttest scores ranged from

12.90 to 85.48 and the mean score was 50.12. Seen from the number of sentences that the students wrote, there was an increase from 2531 sentences in the pretest to 4971 in the posttest. The number of correct sentences increased from 708 in the pretest to 2625 in the posttest. In other words, the percentage of correct sentences increased from 27.97% in the pretest to 52.81% in the posttest. In short, the data can be depicted in the Table 1.

To know whether the difference between posttest scores and the pretest scores was significant, the data (gain scores) were analyzed by using a t-test for non-independent sample (see Gay & Airasian, 2000:489). The result of data analysis showed that the value of calculated-t was 18.905, while the value of table-t on the degree of freedom 109 and the level of significance 95% ( $\alpha = 0,05$ ) was 1,9837. It means the value of calculated-t was higher than the value of table-t. It could be concluded that the integrated classroom assessment gave a significantly positive effect towards the improvement of student's ability to write grammatically correct English sentences. In other words, the assessment could improve the students' grammar ability.

Table 1: Research Data

Statistic	Types of Test	
	Pretest	Posttest
Highest score	57.69	85.48
Lowest score	0	12.90
Mean score	26.43	50.12
Standard deviation	12.41	16.4
Median	25	50
Total written sentences	2531	4971
Total correct sentences	708	2625
% of correct sentences	27.973	52.806
Total sample	110	110

Compared with the previous classroom assessment that was commonly used, the integrated assessment has many strengths. First, the previous assessment only consisted of five types of task, i.e. (1)

underlining grammatical features, (2) completing sentences with correct grammatical features, (3) arranging words into a correct sentence, (4) making questions, and (5) describing pictures by

using the words provided; while the newly formed integrated assessment was added with two more tasks, i.e. identifying sentences and writing paragraphs. The more types of tasks the students do, the more knowledge and experiences they get.

The second strength deals with the advantages of two types of additional task. The first additional task (identifying sentences) gave an opportunity for the students to recognize the patterns of correct English sentence. This task was very useful to make the students aware that English sentence patterns are much different from the Indonesian sentence patterns. And the experience told that this difference was a problem for Indonesian students when they learnt English grammar. The second additional task (writing simple paragraphs) gave a chance to the students to work with grammatical features. In this task they could take adventure to use any grammatical features they had learnt.

The third strength deals with psychological matters. When the students are asked to tell about themselves or about things they know, they were so eager to do that. The satisfaction of being able to express something (in this case in writing form) makes them more confident and motivated to tell more.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The research result showed that the integrated assessment could improve the students' grammar ability. It was indicated by the increasing scores, the increasing number of written sentences, and the increasing number of correct sentences. The improvement was caused by the types of task that made the students aware about language differences and able to express something by using their own words. The finding implies that the success of teaching English grammar to adult foreign students might depend on the students' sensitivity about language differences and opportunity to work with the grammatical features.

In relation with the research finding, the English grammar teachers or lecturers in Indonesia are suggested to put the finding

into practice when they prepare and conduct the teaching learning process of English grammar. Materials and assessment developers are also expected to add various tasks that provide the students with an opportunity to recognize and use correct English grammar features. Furthermore, the students are expected to take any chance to learn that being aware of differences and doing things with language could make them more successful language learners.

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