



PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN WRITING SKILL DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF INDONESIA

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Abstract

Formative assessment in writing aims to monitor students' progress on an ongoing writing activity. Several studies reports that online formative assessment can improve students' writing skill and teacher has the main role of the assessment process. In the other hand, as the novice educator, preservice EFL teacher is still lack of knowledge and expertise. Therefore, this study aims to find out the perception of preservice EFL teachers about their own experience in applying online formative assessment for writing skill during teaching practicum program. Three preservice EFL teachers who had experienced in applying online formative assessment for writing skill during COVID-19 pandemic at secondary schools in Indonesia were recruited as the research participants. This study uses narrative case study research design. Online written interview was conducted to collect the data as the information to answer the research question, the interview data then analysed by using thematic analysis. The findings show several perceptions toward online formative assessment for writing skill such as problems in assessing writing skill, tools in online writing formative assessment, and the benefits of formative assessment for writing skill.

Keywords : Preservice EFL Teachers perception, Online Formative Assessment, Writing Skill.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the world is experiencing a pandemic because of the COVID-19 outbreak. This pandemic has an impact on education where learning in schools are carried out online. One of the central part of learning is assessment. Zia *et al.*, (2019) reports that the main purpose of assessment is to find students' learning styles, strength, weaknesses, and their leaning needs. Assessment has many types and formative assessment is one of them. Specifically, (Black & William, 2006) stated that formative assessment aims to measure all activities practiced by teachers to give information to students as feedback for evaluating the teaching and learning activities. Formative assessment is progressively acknowledged as crucial for language evaluation (Lee & Coniam, 2013). This is because the language learners and teachers may take the





information collected from formative assessment to make a judgment of the activity and strategy for the learning.

Since writing is the central elements of English language (Suleiman, 2000; Zia *et al.*, 2019), improving EFL learners' writing skill is important. According to Andrade, Wang, Du, and Akawi (2009), assessment is commonly recommended as a tool for improving writing instruction. Specifically, acquiring appropriate writing skills are essential for EFL learners. Formative writing assessment enables students to be more appropriate in conveying their thoughts and ideas through text (Graham, Harris & Hebert, 2011; Zia *et al.*, 2019). Formative assessments also can monitor students' progress on an ongoing writing activity (Graham *et al.*, 2011; Zia *et al.*, 2019). In the other hand, the teachers as the main role of the formative assessment in writing have lots of challenges and limitations because (Brown, 2004) stated that the assessment of writing is not easy task. (Zou *et al.*, 2021) also reports that there is a low level engagement with online formative assessment in EFL writing among preservice teachers, since as the novice in teaching activity, pre-service EFL teachers may not have more experience, knowledge, expertise, fluency, and efficiency in the teaching field as what the experience English teachers have (Gün 2014; Kola, 2019; Li & Weicheng, 2017).

In addition, assessing students' writing ability through formative assessment also conducted in several countries. Mohamadi (2018) reports using technology and techniques in online formative assessment in Iran EFL context can improve student's writing skill. In addition, in ESL Pakistan context, Zia *et al.*, (2019) reports that formative feedback during COVID-19 pandemic improves students' essential writing skills like vocabulary, grammar, spelling and creativity. In addition, Fernando (2020) reports the used of Moodle Quizzes as the formative assessment of academic writing ability during COVID-19 pandemic in UK can provide students' specific needs, and makes the students enjoy the learning. Furthermore, in China EFL context, Zou *et al.*, (2021) reports various engagement with online formative assessment in EFL writing, the engagement are negative and positive respons. In addition, Nurhayati (2020) reports Indonesian EFL students in secondary school believe that formative assessment can improve their writing skill. Drawing on the previous studies above, the preservice teacher perception in online formative assessment is under explored. To fill this void, the author tried to analyze a pre-service teacher' perception in applying online formative assessment in writing skill during Covid-19 pandemic.

The research questions were outlined by the researcher based on the previous background of research :What are pre-service EFL teachers perception toward online formative assessment in writing skill during online teaching practicum program?. Based on the research questions above, this study is purposed to explore pre-service EFL teachers' perspective towards the process in experiencing applying their online formative assessment in students' writing skill in teaching practicum program during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also proposed to seek out what are their techniques and media that they used for assessing students' writing skill. This research also proposed to explore the their challenge and limitation.

METHODS

This study aims to explore pre-service EFL teachers' experiences applying online formative assessment in writing skill in teaching practicum program during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative approach was used in this study, a research design



used by the researcher is a narrative case study since the case study can be used to analyze a particular process (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and the phenomenon that the researcher had explored was related to professional practice which acknowledges participants' reflexivity as a main instrument for gathering, interpreting and representing the data, based on participants' history, context, culture, language, experience, and understandings (Etherington, 2004).

The participants in this study are three Indonesian students college in Karawang who had experience in pre-service professional training program in some secondary schools in Indonesia. The participants in pseudonym are Wati (21 years old), Riri (23 years old) and Nina (21 years old), they are English education department students' in one university in Karawang. The author chosen pre-service English teachers because the phenomena or problem was occurred when the participants taught English for secondary school during pre-service professional training program from campus in Covid-19 pandemic. The participants give more formative assessment toward their students' writing skill since the school did not allow the virtual meeting tools (e.g. Zoom and Google Meet) during the online learning. This rule makes it difficult for participants to give assessments of other language skills.

The data of this research were interview taken from pre-service English teachers about their experience in applying online formative assessment during their teaching practicum program. In this study, the researcher used online written open-ended interviews for collecting the data. The online written interview was conducted via Google form. In addition, In collecting the interview instruments, the researcher adopts William Thompson's (2008) theory about formative assessment. The data instruments will be provided in Bahasa Indonesia to help the participants more understand about the list of the questions. The data will be conducted on online written interview via Google Form that supported via WhatsApp. The author uses thematic analysis procedures by Braun & Clarke' (2012) as the main methodology to analyze and interpret the data. Furthermore, the steps are; (1) Familiarisation:, (2) Coding:, (3) Finding themes:, (4) Reviewing themes, (5) Defining and naming themes, (6) producing the report.

FINDINGS

1. Problems in assessing writing skill

Several problems faced by a pre-service English teacher during assessment process through online, such as students were lack in involment and focus during learning and the authenticity students' writing product that affected to the assessment of writing process. First problem indicated that during online learning students involment and focus are lack, this is also affected to their their skill improvement specifically their writing skill. This problem become the challenge for preservice teachers as the main role of the assessment process. The interpretations from a pre-service English teachers were pointed below:

Vignette 1, Wati.

"When entering the online learning, students' critical thinking are decreasing, students' activity in learning also decline, of course it also complicate me as a teacher to give assessment and feedback. This is not what I expected, many of students don't involve in assessment process, they don't do their assignment."

Vignette 2, Riri.

"The biggest obstacle is receiving students' focus toward the answer that I expected. Sometimes students don't get the point of my question and out of context."



The strong point of the problems that preservice English teachers faced are from the students. In online learning activity, students' involvement and focus are crucial, the interaction between teachers and students is needed. But in reality, students have lack of motivation in learning during online learning activity, it effected to their assessment process such as they do not do the assignment and not focus in answering the question. These problem makes the teacher can not give the feedback well, it will impact to learning activity, students' critical thinking, and students' writing skill.

Second problem indicated that during online learning and online assessment, students often do plagiarism in writing, this is also affected to their their writing skill improvement because they just copy it from the internet. This problem become the challenge for preservice teachers. The interpretations from a pre-service English teachers were pointed below:

Vignette 3, Nina.

"Measuring students' writing is difficult because I don't know if the students' work is pure of their result of thinking or the result of the plagiarism from the internet. Beside that, I can't give direct feedback on what should be revised (if students are not honest)."

In writing the authenticity (reliability and validity) is important. In writing assessment process, students' own work is the core point. In the online assessment, plagiarism in students' work is one of the biggest problems because in online learning activity teacher can not monitor how students get their answer. It is become problem when students' conduct their assignment for assessment from internet plagiarism, teacher can not assess their writing skill properly because it is not students' work. The students' plagiarism also make teacher can not revise their work and can not give feedback for their learning. In addition, teachers also difficult to know which students' answer are plagiarism or not.

2. Tools in Online Writing Formative Assessment

In online formative assessment process using the appropriate and accessible tool is important. Internet connection has the main role in online learning activity, choosing the appropriate media in online learning activity is a must. In giving online formative assessment, most of the preservice English teachers use Google Form as the media of the assessment for writing skill. Most of preservice teachers also use giving an assignment as the technique of the assessment. The first tool that highlights this finding is the media of the assessment.

Vignette 4, Wati.

"I use Google Form since it is accessible, students also can use it properly and write their answer directly. The collecting data from the Google Form also easy to get and to evaluate. It does not need lots of internet quota, it also can be used in poor internet condition"

Vignette 5, Nina.

"I will give my response towards students' writing that collected on Google Form, then students will accept my feedback through their own email."

The media that used by preservice English teachers in giving assessment is Google Form. Google form used since this media accessible for both of teacher and student, students also can use Google Form properly and write their answer directly. Beside of it is useful for students, Google Form also helps preservice teachers to get the data for their assessment, evaluate the data and giving feedback directly to students that



supported via email. However, Google Form also do not need lots of quota internet and can be accessed in low internet condition, students can use it anytime and anywhere.

The second tool that appear from the data is the technique of the assessment. There are a lot of technique in formative assessment, some of them are assignment and portofolio. All of the participants used assignment as the technique of formative assessment process. The assignment technique use as the tool to monitor students' writing skill. The collected assignment will be conducted in portofolio. These techniques are useful in online formative assessment process. The interpretations from a pre-service English teachers were pointed below:

Vignette 6, Wati.

"I usually use formative assessment with pretest, asking students' understanding and students will answer it in written in classroom group. I will ask my students about what they do not understand during the learning, I will ask my students to write a resume of their learning outcomes as the assignment."

Vignette 7, Nina.

"In giving assessment, I use assessment with product and assessment with assignment. With this technique, I can monitor students' writing skill"

Vignette 8, Riri.

"I use Portofolio technique, and look up to students others work. I can collect students' written work during the learning, I can see students' writing skill development using this technique."

The technique that used by preservice English teacher in online formative assessment are assignment and portofolio. All of the preservice teachers agree that assignment in writing can helps teachers to monitor students' writing skill. The teacher also use pretest and informal formative assessment to enggage students teacher interaction during learning by asking students' understanding. The preservice teacher use assignment to acquire students' work and product in writing. All of the product will be collected in portofolio, so the teacher can easily monitor students' development from one work to another work.

3. The Benefits of Formative Assessment for Writing Skill

The online formative assessment for writing skill is important to conducted. The reason why it is important because it is beneficial. The preservice English teacher explore the benefits of formative assessment for writing skill are (1) determining students' gap, and (2) improving students' writing skill. The first benefit is determining students' gap in writing, teacher can know where students' skill and understanding at writing. The interpretations from a pre-service English teachers were pointed below:

Vignette 9, Riri.

"Because there are so many things that have not been touched in this writing topic. There are many gaps to be examined."

Vignette 10, Wati.

"That is by observing, at what point students mostly make error, then choose the gap between one student and another student, and then it will be classified into several levels of knowledge and determine their learning needs. In the next lesson, I will give different feedback in accordance with the learning needs."

The finding analyzes that online formative assessment in writing skill is beneficial for determining where the students is at. Teachers realized that formative assessment can examine students' gap in writing. Teacher observed students' error through formative assessment process. The result of the assessment, teacher can examine students level of



knowledge and determine students' learning needs. Students' gap will appear through students' learning needs. Moreover, teacher can give the appropriate feedback according to students' learning needs. It can be effected to students' writing skill.

In addition, the main purpose of conducting formative assessment for writing skill is to improve students' writing skill. All of the participants argue that formative assessment process can improve students' writing skill through several writing practice, assignment and feedback. The interpretations from a pre-service English teachers were pointed below:

Vignette 11, Wati.

"When giving pretest before learning, students' skills are very minimal, after I give feedback students writing skills are getting better, students are confident when answering questions and making sentences."

Vignette 12, Nina.

"Previously, students did not know the structure of writing a text consisting of any component, but after learning they know it."

Vignette 13, Riri.

"Before teaching process, students seem confused and do not know what to process, after that students can start writing from the broadest step to the narrowest."

The preservice teachers use formative assessment for improving students' writing skill. The teachers compare students' writing ability from the beginning of the learning and after getting feedback and learning. The findings show that students know the structure of writing, can start writing from the broadest step to the narrowest and students are confident in writing sentence. The formative assessment process formed students' writing skill for getting better.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Problems in assessing writing skill

Based on the findings of the data, the author found out there are several problems that preservice EFL teachers faced during applying online formative assessment for writing skill. the problems are students' involmment and focus; and students' writing authenticity. Students' are lack of motivation during online learning and online assessment process, it affected to their involmment and focus.the teacher as the assessor has difficulties in assessing students' writing skill if students' involmment and focus are low. During online learning students' critical thinking and enggement also decrease. The other problem in assessing students' writing skill is their authenticity in writing. Students often do plagiarism from the internet for writing product. Challenge in online assessment is complexity of validity and reliability issues (Gikandi et al., 2011). Validity of online assessment is defined as whether the assessment promotes learning or not (Black & Wiliam, 2009). If the students do plagiarism in writing, the teacher is difficult to give a good feedback.

2. Tools in Online Writing Formative Assessment

According to the findings of the data, the author found out there are several tools in applying online formative assessment for writing skill such as the media and the technique for the assessment. the preservic EFL teachers use Google Form as the online media for assess students' writing skill. the media choosen by the preservice teachers because Google Form is an accessible media that easy to use and suitable for poor internet condition. Choosing the right media for online writing assessment is important. Teacher can use online writing platform to improve students' writing achievement



(Graham & Perin, 2007). The other tool that use by the preservice teacher is the technique. The preservice choose assignment and portofolio as the technique of the assessment because this technique can monitor students' writing skill development. Formative assessments can monitor students' progress on an ongoing writing activity (Graham et al., 2011; Zia *et al.*, 2019). Teacher will give students assignment in every meeting, the collected assignment will be in portofolio, teachers can use portofolio to monitor students' writing development.

3. The Benefits of Formative Assessment for Writing Skill

Based on the findings of the data, the author found out that there are several benefits of formative assessment for writing skill. The first benefit is determining students' gap in writing. The formative assessment can examine students' learning needs, teachers can provide students' learning needs in writing and assessing students' understanding. This finding is in line with (Sadler 1998, William Thompson 2008) who stated that one of the elements in formative assessment is determining where the student is at. The other benefit of the formative assessment is improving students' writing skill. Formative assessment provides the good feedback during learning process, teacher can monitor students' improvements in writing. This finding is in line with Zia *et al.*, (2019) who reports that formative feedback during COVID-19 pandemic improves students' essential writing skills like vocabulary, grammar, spelling and creativity.

CONCLUSION

Applying formative assessment is important in writing activity. Since formative assessment is the complex process, the formative assessment process has many challenges especially in online learning condition. According to the findings and discussion data, the experiences of pre-service English teachers in applying online formative assessment for students' writing skill in secondary school in Indonesia show as following : (1) the problems in assessing writing such as students' involvement and focus during online learning; students writing's authenticity, (2) tools in online writing formative assessment such as media and technique, and (3) the benefits of formative assessment for writing skill such as determining students' gap and improving students' writing skill. the author concludes that formative assessment is important to be carried out for assess students' writing skill since it can monitor students' writing ability during an ongoing learning activity.

SUGGESTION

Since the author only involved three participants of pre-service English teacher from one university in Indonesia, so that the story is just by limited views. It could be more interesting to know the other pre-service English teachers' experiences if the future researchers have more various participants in the study. Moreover, the data just collected by online written interview, if the future researcher collects the data through the observation, direct interview and/ or self-reflective journal, it could be much better investigation toward the pre-service English teacher's experience in applying online formative assessment towards writing skill.

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