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## **WRITING ASSESSMENT: STUDENTS' RESPONSE AND INSTRUCTORS' RESPONSE TOWARDS FORMATIVE & SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*In education, assessment is an important reporting instrument for students' performance. It gives a strong implication on students learning. According to Gibbs & Simpson (2003), assessment can influence students learning, either in a good or bad way. They highlighted five conditions which assessment can either support or obstruct students learning. The five conditions are; quantity and distribution of student effort, quality and level of students' effort, quantity and timing of feedback, quality of feedback, and students' response to feedback. This study is conducted as an effort to identify students' and instructors' responses towards writing assessments in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Identifying the responses of students and instructors towards assessment is crucial as it can analyse how well the writing assessment in the course is supporting the students' learning. A survey using the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) has been administered to 185 students. Besides, Interviews were conducted with the instructors of the EAP course to identify their response. The finding of this study is hopefully will assist learning institution in improving the language assessment strategies especially in ensuring how the assessments can support students learning.*

**Keywords**

Writing Assessment, Students' Response, Instructors' Response, Classroom Assignment, Examination

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**1. Introduction**

Assessment is a vital element in the education system as it is a mechanism of how students' performance and achievement will be evaluated and reported. However, the role of assessment is far beyond than evaluating and reporting the performance as it is actually has a direct link to teaching and learning process. Assessment can be either summative or formative. Summative assessments usually are conducted at the end of the semester to assess what has been learned and how well students learned it, on the contrary, formative assessments measure students' progress throughout the semester (from beginning till end) while learning is taking place.

The arguments towards assessment, especially in language courses are never been silent. Most arguments are focusing on identifying the best assessment method that can hit the

objectives and requirements of all related parties; the learning institutions (schools, colleges, and universities), the instructors, the students, and the countries. However, this study is not focusing on the best method of assessment in fulfilling the need of the parties, but to identify how the assessments (summative and formative) can influence students' learning from the perspective of students and instructors in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Gibbs and Simpson (2003) highlight that, education and institution standards will be elevated by improving the students learning not through implementing the better measurement of limited learning while Rowntree (1987) strongly recommend that "if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures" (p.1).

The objective of this study is to identify the response of students and instructors towards assessments in EAP course. The findings of this study are answering the following research questions;

- What is the response of students towards amount and distribution of their effort in EAP assessments?
- What is the response of students towards assignments and learning in EAP course?
- What is the response of students towards quantity and timing of feedback that they received from their instructor in EAP assessments?
- What is the response of students towards quality of feedback that they received from their instructor in EAP assessment?
- What is the response of students toward the action taken by them towards the feedback in EAP assessment?
- What is the response of students towards the final examination in EAP course?
- What is the response of instructors towards summative and formative assessments in EAP course?

### **1.1 Formative Assessment vs. Summative Assessment**

The acceptance towards formative assessment or coursework is increasing as many studies found that formative assessment offers more advantages in students' learning in contrast with the summative assessment. Based on finding in the study conducted by Chansarkar & Raut-Roy (1987), courses that incorporated formative and summative assessments produce a higher average score in students' performance compared to courses that use summative assessment (examination) by itself. According to Conway (1992), efforts that students used in completing formative assessment bring a long term impacts in learning compared to revising for an examination. Warren (1971) points out that summative assessment is a weak predictor of long term learning and following performance compared to formative assessment.

### **1.2 Influences of Assessment on Students Learning**

There are endless arguments towards assessment and how it can influence learning. Based on the previous studies presented by Synder (1971) and Miller & Parlett (1974), remarkably found that assessment is the major influence on high-status university students learning instead of teaching. It seems that assessment can influence students learning; either positively or negatively (depends on how the assessment is conducted and how students respond to it). There are five categories of conditions which assessment can influence students learning (either support or obstruct) that have been proposed by Gibbs & Simpson (2003). They are; quantity and distribution of student effort, quality and level of students' effort, quantity and timing of feedback, quality of feedback, and students' response to feedback.

#### **1.2.1 Quantity and Distribution Effort**

According to Gibbs & Simpson (2003), how assessments are distributed to students may influence the learning as it will determine the amount of time and effort of the students in responding towards the assessments. The assessments should be scattered sufficiently throughout the semester as it allows the students to sustain the consistency of effort in learning. Students tend to allocate their time and effort at the end of the semester only, if the courses just use final examination (summative assessment) as the mechanism to evaluate students' performance. If the courses implement formative assessment but the submission date of the assignments or the evaluation is towards the end of the semester, the similar scenario may happen as well. Therefore

the assessment should be designed where the assessments are distributed systematically throughout the semester; such as weekly quizzes or process of writing which students will be evaluated in several stages. Berliner (1984) found a strong empirical evidence that shows a link between time allocation in a course, students' effort, and student performance.

### **1.2.2 Quality and Level of Students' Effort**

Besides the quantity and distribution effort among students towards the assessment, Gibbs & Simpson (2003) also include the quality of effort spent by students towards the assessments given as one of the conditions which assessment can influence on students learning. Students habitually focus on topics that related with assessment only. Therefore, it is crucial for a course to ensure that the assessments measure all the topics in the course to avoid the students from being selective in learning. Besides, the assessment designed should require a good quality and meaningful effort by the students. Some assessments require the students to spend long hours of ineffective memorization, these kind of assessments would not be considered as assessments that can positively support students learning. Kember et al. (1996) point out that, students' performance may not be directly associated with a number of hours that they spent to study, but the quality of students' effort is far more significant.

### **1.2.3 Quality and Level of Students' Effort**

One of the crucial aspects in the assessment is feedback. Not only important to the assessment, feedback is also important to the learning process. However, the timing of the feedback is vital as it will determine whether the feedback can be a positive or negative influence to the students learning. Feedback can be meaningful when it is precise, systematic and immediate. The feedback will not able to support the learning effectively if the feedback is delayed. This is because the feedback is unrelated to their ongoing studies.

### **1.2.4 Quantity and Timing of Feedback**

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### **1.2.5 Quality of Feedback**

Besides the timing of feedback, the quality of assessment feedback is also important. Feedback that provides comment or suggestion promotes a positive impact towards learning as it will give further information about things to be improved by the students. On the contrary, feedback that consists of grades without any comments may obstruct the learning process among students as it demotivates the students. Feedback may nurture understanding through explanation, promote learning through additional particular learning tasks, and fixing mistakes (Gibbs & Simpson, 2003).

### **1.2.6 Students' Response to Feedback**

Students' response towards feedback is also one of the conditions that shows how assessment can influence students learning. However, responses among students may be not the same. Ding (1998) points out that students take slight action in response towards the feedback, on the contrary, Brookhart (2001) highlights that smart students always take necessary action to improve their learning based on the feedback. Therefore, instructors should advise and guide students on how to take charge and respond towards the feedback which definitely can help the students in improving their learning.

## **1.3 Methodology**

A nonprobability sample design (Cohen & Manion, 1994) is applied in order to select the student population. There were 185 students and 3 instructors in the sample. The students were all undergraduates aged 20 to 23 years old and were enrolled in the EAP course, while all the instructors were the instructors for the EAP course.

### **1.3.1 Questionnaire**

The Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Gibbs & Simpson (2003) was modified and used in this study to collect responses from the students. The questionnaire was categorised into 7 parts which covered 45 questions. The first part was labelled as Part A and was used to collect respondents' demographic information. There were 7 questions in Part B which used to seek respondents' response towards time demands and student

effort. Part C consisted of 6 questions was used to identify respondents' response towards assignment and learning. Part D (7 questions) asked about the quantity and timing of feedback, while Part E contained 6 questions aiming for the response for quality of feedback. 6 questions in Part F were related to students' action towards assessment feedback. The final part of the questionnaire (Part G) contained 7 questions asking about the students' response towards the examination and learning. The Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire has been administered to the students after they completed their final examination for EAP course.

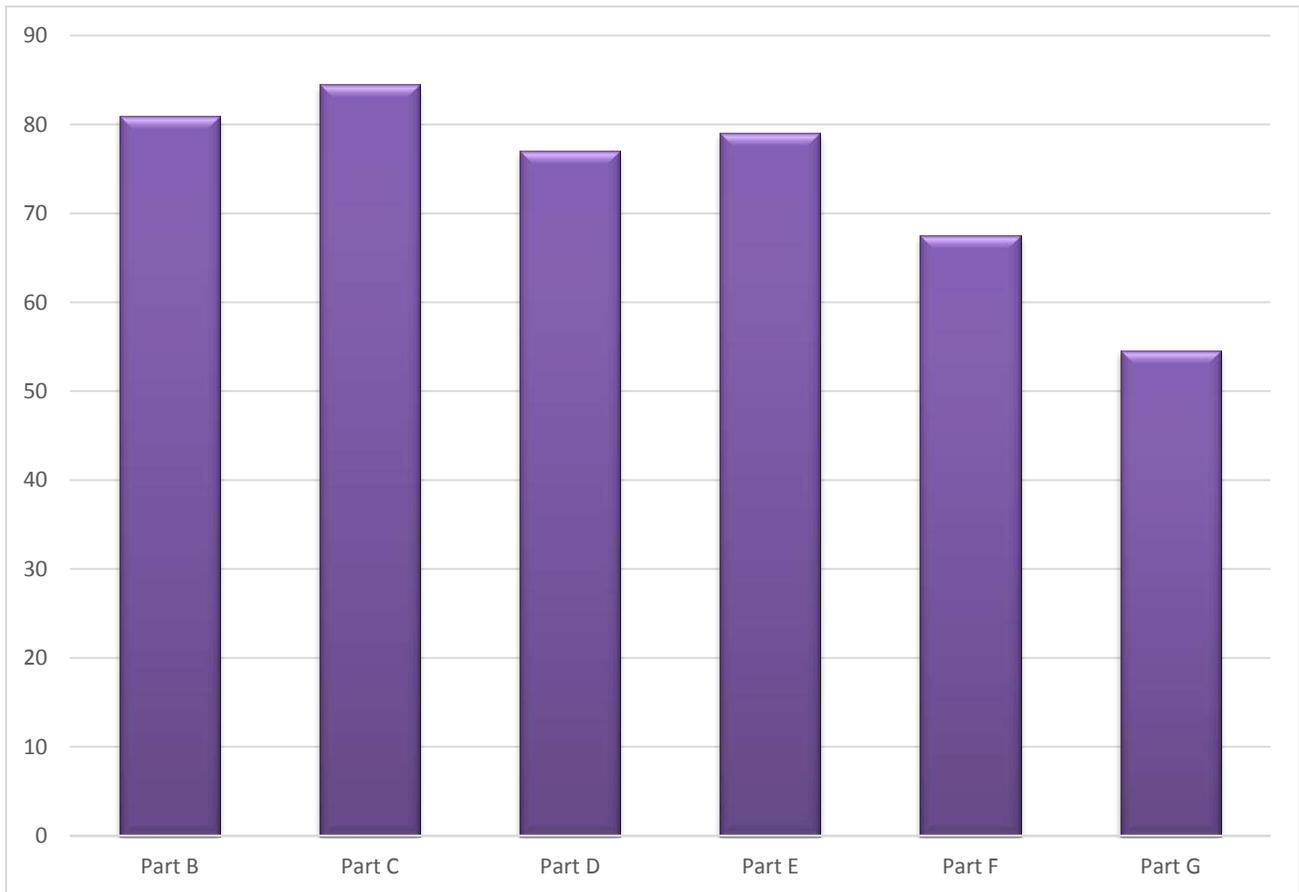
### **1.3.2 Interview**

Interviews were conducted with the instructor of the EAP course to identify their response towards how assessment can influence students learning.

### **1.4 Finding and Discussion**

Among the 185 respondents who involved in this study, 70 were male students and 115 were female students. Graph 1 shows the overall percentage of questions in Part B (time demands and students' effort), questions in Part C (assignment and learning), questions in Part D (quantity and timing of feedback), questions in Part E (quality of feedback), questions in Part F (students' action towards assessment feedback) and questions in Part G (the examination and learning). The 'low' scores are from 0%-39%, 'medium' from 40%-69% and 'high' from 70%-100%.

**Graph 1: Students' Response towards Assessment**



Among the six parts, Part C scores the highest percentage with 84.5%. It shows the respondents agree that the assignments (formative assessment) given to them in the course had reinforced their learning. Besides, it also points out that the respondents view assignment as motivating and cognitively demanding. On the other hand, Part G scores the lowest percentage of 54.55% only. It indicates that respondents have a neutral opinion on how the examination implemented in the course had supported their learning. The remaining categories, Part B, Part D, Part E, and Part F are considered as high scores as the percentage are in the range of 70% to 100%. The high score in Part B displays that respondents learn constantly across topics all through the semester, and understand that they have to actively participate in their learning in order to flourish in the course. Next, the high scores in Part D reflect that the respondents agree that they received fast and immediate feedback regarding their assessment performance from the

instructor, while the high scores in Part E illustrates that the respondents the feedback given to them help them in improving their learning and performance. Finally, the high scores for Part F displays that the respondents use the feedback from their instructor as guidance and reference for their learning as well as in completing their following assessments.

All of them have agreed that formative assessments support the students learning better compared to summative assessments. They point out that formative assessments allow them to measure the students' performance throughout the semester. They have better opportunity to identify students' weaknesses and strengths. By conducting a series of consultation sessions with the students, they can provide immediate and meaningful feedbacks. According to them, students showed improvement in their assignments task after each of the consultation sessions. The instructors also point out that formative assessment is a way better than summative assessment in term of how they can support students learning as students received better quality of feedback compared to summative assessment. In summative assessment, the students just received the grades without knowing which part should be improved.

Although all of the instructors showed positive response towards formative assessment, however, they did mention the limitations of it. They mentioned that not all students attended the consultation sessions and they just submitted the end product (the essay) at the end of the semester. Therefore, these students have not received feedback from the instructors. Besides, the instructors also point out that as the assignments were done in pair, some students were way too dependent towards their partners or some are more dominant. Moreover, they also highlight that as the assignments were completed outside of the classroom, instructors did not have the opportunity to monitor on how the students works in order to complete the tasks. This leads to several consequences; the assessment may not support the learning for students who participated less compared to those who were more dominant, those who contributed more may dissatisfy with the marks given, as the marks will be the same for both members of the group disregards the amount of participations among the members, and it was hard for the instructor to identify the actual performance for each of the students.

Based on responses reported from the students and instructors, assessment via assignments is favoured the most in term of how assessments can support the students learning.

The formative assessments provided to the students give appropriate opportunity for the students to allocate and distribute their effort and learning throughout the semester across the topics. It also allows the instructors to assess students' ongoing performance and provide necessary feedback. The feedback and comments were used by the students to recognise their mistakes and to improve their learning. Nevertheless, the summative assessment which is the final examination in the course seems not to be preferred by the participants as it does not support students learning as much as formative assessments (assignments). This is because summative assessment provides limited feedback since the feedback is in term of grades only. As a result, students would not be able to learn from their mistake and they would not be able to improve their learning.

### **1.5 Conclusion and Recommendation**

In essence, assessments can influence students learning, however, how the assessments are conducted will determine whether they can positively or negatively influence the students learning. By identifying the students' and instructors' responses, institutions can evaluate and the assessments that had been implemented. Necessary changes and amendments could be done in ensuring the assessments can support lifelong learning among students. Based on this study, the instructors should analyse the effectiveness of the summative assessment and the summative assessment should be restructured in order to make it meaningful to students learning.

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