CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with the background of the study that describes the reasons for choosing the topic and the aims of the study. This chapter also includes the significance of the study, research questions, and the brief description of the research methodology that contain research design employed in the study, which is presented in relation to data collection and analysis. In addition, clarification of the key terms is also delivered to clarify some specific terms. Last but not the least, the organization of the paper is explained at the end of this chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

Teaching cannot be separated from assessing. Assessment is needed to help teacher make decisions about their ability and achievement (Shaaban, 2001; Pinter, 2006; Harmer, 2007). Young learners are the poor test taker; the younger they are being evaluated, assessed, or tested, the more mistakes they made (Katz, 1997). The mistake that frequently happen to children is probably on writing since writing is considered as the most challenging skill because it is a difficult subject to learn by the students. The difficulty in writing is caused by a low writing frequency, even in students’ own language (Harmer, 2004). Moreover, some beginners are more difficult to begin to write their ideas into a piece of writing than to develop their writing where it needs a long time to make a good writing even in the writer’s own language (Alwasilah & Alwasilah, 2007). Since young learners are the poor test taker and writing is the most difficult subject, assessing writing for young learners should be carried out appropriately, because the success of any assessment depends on the
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TEACHERS’ TECHNIQUES IN ASSESSING WRITING SKILLS OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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effective selection and proper interpretation of students’ performance. (Shaaban, 2001).

Therefore, assessing young learners is different from assessing older learners because of several reasons. Firstly, children learn from direct experiences as a simple one; what they experienced is a lesson for them. Then, they are learned from hands-on physical activities, meaning that they learn from what they see, hear, and feel. In other words, they have their own ways of doing things and so with learning. Hence, assessment for young learners should be handled with care and child-friendly method with regards to their ways of learning (Pinter, 2006).

Before considering specific techniques to assess young learners, a teacher has to understand learners’ characteristics first. Young learners’ first language and cognitive abilities are still developing, so they have relatively short attention span, by means they cannot concentrate on the lesson for a long period. The assessment itself should be given in the form of interaction because they learn through social interaction and mostly it relates with things that attractive to them such as pictures, colors, stories, and plays (Hughes, 2003). In short, in assessing young learners, teacher have to be aware of age, content of language learning, methods of teaching, aims, and learning theories (Cameron, 2001). Nevertheless, every effort made by teacher must allow students to perform at their best by creating conditions to support teaching and learning activities for students.

Basically, assessment is needed because it is important to check students in achieving the objectives of learning. Assessment by teacher is concerned with what the students will be able to do, say or write as the result of their teaching (Brown, 2001; Moon, 2005; Pinter, 2006). Before teacher starts developing and applying techniques to assess young learners, they have to know the restriction of assessment for their students’ level. In young learners’ case, assessing writing only focuses on
mastering Roman alphabet, handwriting, spelling, and basic sentence formation (Georgiou and Pavlou, 2003).

In terms of assessing writing for young learners, Shaaban (2001) in his study also stated that the younger the kids being assessed, the greater the risk of assigning false labels to them. It explains why the technique that is used must be proper and suitable for children. In addition, Brumen et. al (2009) that conducted study in three countries found that among four skills, mostly teachers are giving big portion to the assessment for listening and speaking skills, even though the national guidelines clearly stated that the four skills should get equal attention. According to Rea-Dickens and Rixon (2000), different proportion occurs because the content of many testing for young learners are focused on grammar vocabulary items where it can be tested by traditional assessment that easy-to-mark procedure, meaning that assessing grammar vocabulary items in form of listening and speaking skills tested are more practical compared to writing. Widya (2012) found that strategies in assessing writing of young learners are alternative assessment such as portfolio, observation and K-W-L strategies. Portfolio chosen because it is easy to be used; teacher could give any comments on the works, and most importantly it is suitable because the teacher knew the students’ mistakes. Observation was chosen because the students could easily be assessed without disturbing any activities because teacher only have to prepare the point for assessing and it can be done during the teaching-learning process and students also could not cheat on exam. From the previous researches, it can be concluded that the teachers generally had principles in conducting the assessment, it regards to the suitability, practicality, and comprehension.

Having some information about those issues, this study specifically is designed to discover what techniques that appropriate to use for assessing writing especially for young learners case. This study attempts to investigate how those techniques are designed by the teacher since the success of assessment depends on the effective selection of the techniques. In accordance with the purpose of the study, this study
would be limited only to find out what and how the techniques designed by the teacher.

1.2 Research Questions

1) What types of assessment techniques do the teachers adopt in assessing students’ writing ability?

2) How do the teachers design the instrument of assessment techniques to assess young learners’ students writing ability in English classroom?

1.3 Aim of the Study

The purpose of the research is to find out the teacher’s techniques and its instruments in assessing students’ writing ability to explore teachers’ knowledge of assessment for young learners. This research focuses on two major objectives. Firstly, it is aimed to find out about what assessment techniques the teachers adopt to assess students’ performance especially in writing skills. Then, the research is intended to find out how the teacher design the instrument of the assessment techniques used.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study comprises two parts of discussion concerning the techniques in assessing writing for young learners. It investigates the types of techniques that are used to assess writing ability, and the teacher’s way in designing the assessment to assess writing of young learners.
1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the findings of the research are expected can help teachers to explore the teachers’ knowledge of assessment for young learners. Thus, this study would be a reference for English students who investigate the similar variables, in this case related to the assessment for young learners.

Practically, the findings could provide information on what and how the English teachers assess their students’ performance especially in writing skills. Moreover, the findings would also help English students to know how to effectively design assessment techniques and its instruments for young learners since appropriate techniques that are chosen determine the way teacher design the assessment that would be used in the classroom later.

1.6 Research Methodology

1.6.1 Design

This study used qualitative method in order to reach the objectives of the study. The research used qualitative method because it deals with assumptions, motives, reasons, goals, and values which are being the focuses of the writer’s questions. Moreover, qualitative method is more concerned with understanding situations and events from the point of view of the participant, and the participant usually involved directly in the research process itself (Fraenkle, 2012).

A descriptive study is applied as an approach of the study to explain the investigated and interpreted data. Descriptive study is chosen in order to describe explicitly what and how the teachers designed the assessment. To
obtain the answer, the research used two main instruments, those namely document analysis and interview.

Document analysis was applied to acquire information regarding the assessment techniques applied in the classroom. Interview was used to acquire information from the teacher regarding the participant’s background, the idea and opinion about how the teacher developed the assessment. Interview was also employed as the way to reveal the factors and reasons that lead the teacher in designing those kinds of assessment techniques.

1.6.2 Site and Participant

The research takes place in one of junior high schools in Bandung. Two different English teachers from the school are being involved in the research. The teachers are English teacher who teach 1st grade of students in the school. The schools are selected based on two main reasons; those are the school qualification in accreditation, and the accessibility of the school.

1.6.3 Data Collection

As mentioned above, in this research, the data is collected by using document analysis and interview.

Document analysis

Document analysis is intended to find out the data regarding the teachers’ instrument of assessment. It covers the form of assessment techniques applied in the classroom includes the syllabus and lesson plans.
Interview

Interview is conducted to get some information and more focused to the ideas on how the teacher developed the assessment techniques that are usually used in the classroom to assess students’ writing, and teachers’ knowledge of teaching-learning and assessing students in English class. The teacher is also asked about some questions regarding their reason and opinion about the techniques chosen to support the data collected.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, document analysis is the first step to be done, and then interview is followed afterwards. Document analysis is conducted to analyze syllabus, lesson plan, and instruments of assessment that has been given to the students. Interview is conducted to acquire more information regarding teacher’s techniques and reasons in assessing their students. It also provides information about how and why the teacher chooses the assessment techniques. The data is analyzed, described, and synchronized with each of instruments to find the result and findings.

1.7 Clarification of Key Terms

Assessment; it refers to the process of data analysis that teachers use to get evidence about their learners’ performance and progress in English (Pinter, 2006). In this study, the assessment focuses on writing assessment only that has been done by the teachers to their students in the school. Techniques; in this research, it is defined as any of variety of exercises, activities, or tasks used for administering the assessment in the classroom. Writing; writing here is defined as any kind of students’ work in form of written mode. Young learners; young
learners in this research refers to the 1st grade of students in junior high school since their rate of age are in 11-12 years old who are considered as young learners according to Pinter (2006).

1.8 Organization of Paper

This paper is organized into five chapters as follows

CHAPTER I: Introduction

It contains background of the study, research questions, aim of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

CHAPTER II: Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter consists of related theories from the experts that sited by the writer in this study. The theories are related to the topic about assessing writing of young learners.

CHAPTER III: Research Methodology

This chapter describes and elaborates more about the methods that used in doing the research which covers research design, site and participant of the research, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER IV: Findings and Discussion

This chapter portrays the result and the findings of the study that will be explained literally and discussed in the discussion section.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion and Recommendation

This is the last chapter that consists of conclusion of the study and the recommendation that is synchronized with the result of the study and the findings.