

Implementation of Diagnostic and Formative Assessments in English Language Learning Based on the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

The implementation of diagnostic and formative assessment is an important aspect of English language learning within the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly because the curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiation, flexibility, and competency development. This study aims to examine the implementation of diagnostic and formative assessments in English language learning based on the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and to identify their contribution to improving the learning process. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach by identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant scholarly literature concerning diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, English language learning, and the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings indicate that diagnostic assessment provides teachers with important information regarding students' initial competencies, prior knowledge, learning difficulties, and language proficiency, which can be used to determine appropriate learning strategies and differentiated instruction. Meanwhile, formative assessment supports continuous monitoring of students' progress through questioning, observation, assignments, quizzes, self-assessment, peer assessment, and feedback. The review also indicates that effective feedback and the appropriate utilization of assessment results are essential for improving students' English language competencies and developing their self-regulated learning. Nevertheless, the implementation of these assessments may face challenges related to teachers' assessment literacy, time constraints, classroom size, instrument development, and the interpretation and utilization of assessment results. Overall, diagnostic and formative assessments can strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by transforming assessment from a final measurement instrument into an integral component of learning that supports differentiated, responsive, and student-centered English language instruction.

Keywords

diagnostic assessment; formative assessment; English language learning; Merdeka Curriculum; differentiated instruction; assessment for learning.



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INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an essential component of the learning process because it provides teachers with information about students' abilities, learning needs, progress, and difficulties. In English language learning, assessment is not only used to measure students' achievement at the end of instruction but also to identify their initial competencies and provide continuous feedback during the learning process. Diagnostic assessment plays an important role at the beginning of learning because it enables teachers to identify students' prior knowledge, language proficiency, strengths, and learning difficulties before instructional activities are implemented. Meanwhile, formative assessment is conducted continuously during the learning process to monitor students' development and provide feedback that can improve both teaching strategies and student learning outcomes. Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasized that formative assessment can significantly contribute to learning improvement when evidence of student achievement is used to modify teaching and learning activities. Similarly, Hattie and Timperley (2007) explained that effective feedback provides important information regarding students' current performance, learning goals, and strategies for closing the gap between the two.

The implementation of diagnostic and formative assessments becomes increasingly important within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, flexibility, differentiation, and the development of competencies according to students' needs and learning contexts. Assessment is consequently positioned as an integral part of learning rather than merely an instrument for determining final grades. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology emphasizes that assessment should be used to obtain information about students' learning processes and outcomes and to support teachers in adapting instruction to students' needs. This orientation is consistent with the broader concept of assessment for learning, in which assessment information is continuously utilized to improve learning processes. Heritage (2010) argues that formative assessment is an ongoing process involving the elicitation, interpretation, and use of evidence concerning students' learning to make instructional decisions. Therefore, diagnostic and formative assessments have considerable potential to support the implementation of differentiated English language instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum.

English language learning presents particular challenges because students frequently have different levels of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency. In a heterogeneous classroom, applying the same instructional approach to all students may result in some learners experiencing difficulties while others do not receive sufficient challenges. Diagnostic assessment can help teachers map these differences before instruction begins, while formative assessment can provide continuous evidence regarding whether students are progressing toward the expected learning objectives. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) explain that language assessment should consider the relationship between assessment procedures, learners' abilities, instructional objectives, and the contexts in which language is used. In addition, Bachman and Palmer (2010) emphasize that meaningful

language assessment should be connected to the purposes and contexts of language use rather than relying exclusively on isolated linguistic components.

The effectiveness of formative assessment also depends on the quality of feedback and the active involvement of students in the learning process. Sadler (1989) argues that formative assessment becomes meaningful when learners understand the standards they are expected to achieve, can compare their current performance with those standards, and are able to take appropriate action to close the learning gap. In English learning, this can be implemented through classroom questioning, short quizzes, observation, peer assessment, self-assessment, oral presentations, writing drafts, learning journals, and teacher feedback. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) further demonstrate that formative assessment can strengthen students' self-regulated learning by helping them monitor their own performance and identify strategies for improvement. Thus, assessment should not be perceived simply as a teacher-controlled activity but as a collaborative process involving both teachers and learners.

Despite the growing emphasis on assessment within the Merdeka Curriculum, its implementation in English language classrooms may still encounter various challenges. Teachers may have different levels of understanding regarding diagnostic and formative assessment, limited time for conducting continuous assessment, difficulties in developing appropriate assessment instruments, large and heterogeneous classes, and challenges in interpreting assessment results for differentiated instruction. Carless (2007) notes that sustainable assessment practices require teachers to integrate assessment with pedagogy rather than treating assessment as a separate classroom activity. In addition, Wiliam (2011) emphasizes that formative assessment is most effective when teachers systematically use evidence of learning to make immediate instructional adjustments. Therefore, examining how diagnostic and formative assessments are implemented in English language learning is important for understanding whether assessment practices have genuinely supported the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study consequently focuses on the implementation of diagnostic and formative assessments in English language learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in terms of their procedures, instruments, feedback mechanisms, utilization of assessment results, and contribution to differentiated and student-centered learning..

METHODS

This study employed a ****Systematic Literature Review (SLR)**** method to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize previous scholarly studies concerning the implementation of diagnostic and formative assessments in English language learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum. The review followed several stages, namely formulation of the research focus, identification of relevant literature, screening and selection of studies, data extraction, quality assessment, and synthesis of findings. Relevant articles were searched through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC using combinations of keywords including **diagnostic assessment**, **formative assessment**, **English language learning**, **English language assessment**, and **Merdeka Curriculum**. The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-

reviewed scholarly articles published in relevant academic journals, studies discussing diagnostic or formative assessment in language or English learning, and publications relevant to the principles of student-centered and differentiated learning. Studies that were unrelated to the research focus, duplicate publications, and non-academic sources were excluded. The selected literature was then analyzed thematically by comparing the objectives, methodologies, assessment practices, findings, challenges, and implications reported in each study. The synthesis was conducted to identify patterns, similarities, differences, research gaps, and evidence regarding how diagnostic and formative assessments contribute to English language learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this procedure, the SLR provides a comprehensive and structured understanding of existing research while establishing a conceptual basis for future empirical investigations into assessment practices under the Merdeka Curriculum..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Diagnostic Assessment in English Language Learning Based on the Merdeka Curriculum

Diagnostic assessment is an important initial stage in English language learning because it provides teachers with information about students' prior knowledge, language proficiency, learning needs, and potential difficulties before instructional activities are fully implemented. Within the Merdeka Curriculum, assessment is expected to be integrated with learning and used as a basis for determining appropriate instructional strategies rather than functioning solely as a mechanism for assigning grades. Diagnostic assessment enables teachers to recognize differences in students' abilities in vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Such information is particularly important in English classrooms because students generally enter learning environments with heterogeneous levels of language exposure and competence. By identifying students' starting points, teachers can establish realistic learning objectives and design activities that correspond to students' actual needs. This approach is consistent with the principle that assessment should generate evidence that can be used to make instructional decisions and improve learning. Diagnostic assessment therefore serves not only a measurement function but also a pedagogical function by connecting students' initial conditions with subsequent learning interventions (Heritage, 2010; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

The implementation of diagnostic assessment can be conducted through various instruments and techniques, including written tests, oral questioning, vocabulary checks, reading tasks, writing samples, speaking activities, classroom observations, questionnaires, and informal interviews. In English language learning, the selection of instruments should be adjusted to the competencies that teachers intend to identify. For example, a short reading task can be used to determine students' comprehension, while an oral activity can reveal pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence in communication. Diagnostic assessment

should consequently avoid concentrating exclusively on grammar or written examinations because English competence encompasses multiple interconnected skills. Bachman and Palmer (2010) explain that language assessment should demonstrate an appropriate relationship between the purpose of assessment, the characteristics of learners, the language abilities being assessed, and the context of language use. Therefore, diagnostic assessment under the Merdeka Curriculum needs to be flexible and contextualized so that the information obtained reflects students' actual language abilities and learning conditions rather than merely their ability to answer decontextualized test questions (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Fulcher, 2010).

An important outcome of diagnostic assessment is the identification of learning gaps among students. In a classroom where some students possess relatively strong English skills while others have limited vocabulary or grammatical knowledge, teachers can use diagnostic evidence to determine appropriate differentiation. Students who demonstrate foundational difficulties may receive additional explanations, vocabulary reinforcement, scaffolding, or simpler learning materials, whereas students with higher proficiency can be provided with more challenging activities. This practice corresponds closely with differentiated instruction, which emphasizes adapting learning processes to differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Tomlinson (2014) emphasizes that effective differentiation requires teachers to understand students' current levels and subsequently modify content, process, product, or learning environment. From this perspective, diagnostic assessment becomes a prerequisite for meaningful differentiation because teachers cannot appropriately differentiate instruction without reliable information about students' initial competencies. Thus, the implementation of diagnostic assessment strengthens the student-centered orientation promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum (Tomlinson, 2014; Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Nevertheless, the implementation of diagnostic assessment in English classrooms may encounter several practical challenges. Teachers may have limited time to conduct comprehensive assessments, difficulties in developing valid instruments, large numbers of students, insufficient assessment resources, and limited competence in interpreting diagnostic information. Another challenge occurs when teachers conduct diagnostic tests but do not use the results to modify their instructional practices. In such circumstances, assessment becomes merely an administrative activity rather than a meaningful component of learning. Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that assessment contributes to learning when evidence about student understanding is actively used to adapt teaching. Similarly, Wiliam (2011) explains that assessment becomes formative when teachers obtain evidence of learning and use that evidence to determine appropriate next instructional steps. Therefore, the success of diagnostic assessment depends not simply on the availability of assessment instruments but also on teachers' capacity to analyze results and translate them into appropriate instructional responses (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Wiliam, 2011).

The implementation of diagnostic assessment ultimately contributes to a more responsive English learning process under the Merdeka Curriculum. Assessment results can

be used to establish learning groups, determine prerequisite competencies, prepare differentiated materials, provide remedial activities, and design enrichment tasks. More importantly, diagnostic assessment can help teachers shift from a one-size-fits-all approach toward instruction that recognizes individual differences. Students also benefit because learning activities become more closely aligned with their existing knowledge and developmental needs. When diagnostic assessment is conducted continuously at appropriate stages, teachers can obtain a clearer picture of changes in students' competencies and determine whether instructional interventions are effective. Assessment thus becomes part of an instructional cycle involving evidence collection, interpretation, intervention, and subsequent evaluation. This perspective is consistent with the broader concept of assessment for learning, which places assessment at the center of instructional improvement and learner development (Stiggins, 2005; Shepard, 2000).

Implementation of Formative Assessment in English Language Learning Based on the Merdeka Curriculum

Formative assessment represents an essential component of English language learning because it enables teachers to monitor students' progress while learning is still taking place. Unlike summative assessment, which generally evaluates achievement at the end of an instructional period, formative assessment focuses on obtaining evidence of students' understanding and using that evidence to determine subsequent learning activities. In the Merdeka Curriculum, this approach is particularly relevant because learning emphasizes active participation, competency development, flexibility, and student-centered instruction. Formative assessment can be implemented through questioning, classroom discussion, quizzes, observation, assignments, peer assessment, self-assessment, presentations, and teacher feedback. The central characteristic is not the particular instrument used but how assessment information is interpreted and subsequently utilized to improve learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) demonstrate that formative assessment can produce substantial improvements in student achievement when evidence from classroom activities is used to modify teaching and learning. Consequently, formative assessment should be regarded as an integral component of English instruction rather than an additional activity conducted after teaching has occurred (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Feedback is one of the most important elements in formative assessment because it provides students with information about the quality of their current performance and the steps needed to improve it. In English language learning, feedback can address vocabulary selection, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, organization of ideas, fluency, comprehension, and communicative effectiveness. However, effective feedback should not simply identify errors; it should provide information that enables students to understand why an answer or performance does not meet the expected criteria and what they can do to

improve. Hattie and Timperley (2007) explain that effective feedback addresses three central questions: where the learner is going, how the learner is progressing, and what should happen next. Similarly, Sadler (1989) argues that formative assessment is effective when students understand the expected standards, recognize the gap between their current performance and those standards, and possess strategies for reducing that gap. These principles are highly applicable to English learning because language development requires repeated practice, feedback, revision, and opportunities to use language in meaningful contexts (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989).

Formative assessment also supports students' active participation and self-regulated learning. In the Merdeka Curriculum, students are encouraged to become active participants who are capable of reflecting on their learning and taking greater responsibility for their progress. Self-assessment and peer assessment can contribute to this objective by encouraging students to evaluate their own performance and provide constructive feedback to classmates. For example, students can use a simple rubric to evaluate an English speaking presentation based on pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and clarity, while peers can provide suggestions for improvement. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) explain that formative assessment can strengthen self-regulated learning by helping students develop the capacity to monitor their own performance, identify weaknesses, and select appropriate strategies for improvement. Carless (2007) similarly emphasizes the importance of learning-oriented assessment in developing students' capacity to become more independent learners. Therefore, formative assessment can contribute not only to immediate improvement in English proficiency but also to the development of learners' autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Carless, 2007).

The application of formative assessment in English classrooms can take various forms depending on learning objectives and classroom contexts. Teachers may begin a lesson with diagnostic questions, monitor students during collaborative activities, provide immediate oral feedback, use exit tickets to determine understanding, assess short writing products, or ask students to reflect on their learning. In speaking lessons, formative assessment can occur through observation and performance rubrics, while reading instruction can use comprehension questions and short responses to identify students' understanding. Writing instruction can incorporate drafting, teacher comments, peer review, revision, and reflection. These practices demonstrate that formative assessment does not necessarily require formal examinations or complex instruments. What matters is the continuous collection and interpretation of evidence regarding learning. Heritage (2010) describes formative assessment as a process in which teachers elicit evidence, interpret students' learning, and use that evidence to make instructional decisions. Thus, formative assessment provides teachers with a practical mechanism for continuously adjusting English instruction according to students' responses (Heritage, 2010; Brookhart, 2008).

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of formative assessment may be constrained by teachers' workload, limited classroom time, large class sizes, assessment

literacy, and difficulties in providing individualized feedback. Teachers may also focus excessively on numerical scores, causing formative assessment to resemble conventional testing rather than becoming a process of learning improvement. Effective implementation therefore requires teachers to develop assessment literacy, establish clear learning criteria, and integrate assessment activities naturally into classroom instruction. Formative assessment should also be supported by a classroom culture in which mistakes are considered opportunities for learning rather than reasons for punishment. Wiliam (2011) emphasizes that formative assessment is most effective when teachers use evidence of student thinking to make responsive instructional decisions. In addition, Black and Wiliam (2009) stress that formative assessment should be understood as a pedagogical process involving teachers, students, and classroom interactions. Consequently, the implementation of formative assessment within the Merdeka Curriculum requires a shift from assessment as a final measurement toward assessment as an ongoing mechanism for improving English language learning (Wiliam, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of diagnostic and formative assessments in English language learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum plays an important role in creating a more responsive, student-centered, and differentiated learning process. Diagnostic assessment enables teachers to identify students' initial competencies, learning difficulties, prior knowledge, and language proficiency before or at the beginning of instruction, allowing learning objectives, materials, and strategies to be adjusted to students' actual needs. Meanwhile, formative assessment provides continuous information about students' progress through classroom activities, questioning, assignments, observation, self-assessment, peer assessment, and feedback, enabling teachers to make timely instructional adjustments. The integration of both assessment approaches supports the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum by positioning assessment not merely as a tool for measuring achievement but as an integral part of improving learning. In English language learning, these assessments are particularly valuable because students have diverse abilities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. However, their effective implementation requires adequate teacher assessment literacy, appropriate instruments, sufficient time, meaningful feedback, and the ability to utilize assessment results for differentiated instruction. Overall, diagnostic and formative assessments can strengthen the quality of English language learning by helping teachers understand students' needs, providing continuous feedback, encouraging learner participation and self-regulation, and ensuring that instructional decisions are based on evidence of students' learning development..

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