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A Computer-Based Model for Assessing English Writing Skills for Vietnamese EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the computerized assessment of English learners' writing ability in the writing tests in view of the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) for Vietnamese learners of English as a foreign language (Vietnamese EFL learners) in Vietnam. It explores the possibility of using computers to assess learners' writing abilities to prepare language learners for the standardized tests through the analysis of data from the posttests and the theoretical interpretation of second language acquisition (SLA). The focus of the study was on a survey of intermediate level students of English taking writing posttests at a Vietnamese university. The writing tests were collected, scored and categorized into five-point levels. The results of the study showed the statistical significance for the writing tests ($p < 0.05$). The effective implementation of a scoring model was suggested to assess students' writing performance and may provide the foundation for further research in the computerized assessment in semantic aspects to design and implement innovative technology-mediated tasks for assessing academic English proficiency.

Keywords: computerized assessment, language conventions, model, posttests, standardized tests, subjective and objective tests

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1. Introduction

The comprehensive knowledge of English has become the key to being successful in finding good careers since the use of English has expanded into many areas. A good command of English requires a great deal of effort in learning and an effective assessment of students' levels. An investigation into the possibility of integrating computer-assisted language learning (CALL) into the assessment of learners of English, upon their completion of English language courses, suggests that language instructors should take into consideration a fair way to assess them. In addition, this summative assessment will help language instructors to judge the success of their teaching and will help English language learners identify areas to improve their writing skills.

In this article, the author suggests a model for a computerized assessment of English writing tests after investigating the Vietnamese (L1) students' English (L2) performance at a Vietnamese university. There has been significant research on the application of CALL and the linguistic theories regarding SLA to determine how to assess students' performance (Chapelle & Douglas, 2006); however, there is still the need to draw up models that are consistent with the computer processing abilities. This study aims at exploiting the theory of SLA by interpreting the linguistic concepts of Halliday (1985), Martin (1992) and Eggins (1993) in relevance to the use of CALL. In this study, language conventions (i.e. topic addressing, organization, coherence and language use) are mentioned with a reference to the benchmark scale of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as the foundation on which a computerized assessment of English learners' writing abilities is developed. This investigation is merited for two reasons: 1) the students' writing performance should show a relationship between the writing posttest and the application of CALL in English courses; 2) if such a relationship exists, it may be possible to deploy a computerized assessment for writing abilities. This study will lead to forming an objective computerized scoring method, which does not involve the participation of many scorers, especially when the individual human factor is always subjective.

2. Literature Review

The literature review in this study analyzes some investigations of computer software programs and the relationship between the issues of CALL and SLA theory. This article discussed written discourse that includes aspects of language development (Richards, Platt &

Platt, 1999) regarding Vietnamese EFL learners' writing skills with technological support. From this theoretical background and the survey of intermediate level students of English taking writing posttests at the end of a language course, a model was built to assess students' writing performance in order to prepare them for the standardized tests such as TOEFL iBT. The model in this study was the comparison between the sample dataset and students' writings after the analysis of software programs and the explanation of language theories. This could contribute to transferring the manual scoring to automatic scoring with the higher accuracy. This high accuracy was enhanced based on the improvement in the comparison of the documents not only in structure and vocabulary but also in the whole document layout. In addition, this model may help learners raise their test scores in standardized tests.

The connections between CALL and SLA in Jung's (2003) were relevant to three perspectives: (1) learners' acquisition, (2) outcome, and (3) interaction. These connections are strengthened by Chapelle (2009) who discussed the multiple theoretical perspectives related to language use in social contexts and the development and evaluation of CALL materials and tasks. Accordingly, theory and practice in L2 learning can be matched together by the use of modern technology. In addition, the development of technology has led to the indispensable incorporation of this medium into the instruction process. The computer has become an integral part of the learning activity, through which learners can learn language skills (Nomass, 2013, p. 111).

The philosophy of CALL puts a strong emphasis on student-centered lessons that allow the learners to learn on their own using structured or unstructured interactive lessons. Computer and its attached language learning programs can give L2 learners more independence from classrooms and allow language learners to have the option to work on their learning material at any time of the day. It can be said that multimedia are resources that make the most effective use of computer technology by providing simulations, multiple representations, and informative and immediate feedback to learner's actions at the interface (Gilakjani, Ismail, & Ahmadi, 2011).

Science and technology now play an important and active role in the teaching and learning of a language, and several software programs have been designed to assist teachers and learners in acquiring a good command of English, but there is no specific evidence of positive or negative reasons in the pedagogical use of technology. As for the negative aspects, the use of machine scoring systems to read and evaluate students' writing has raised concerns in parents, teachers, school administrators, and students as whether these systems can meet the learning outcomes (Sweeney et al., 2010). The studies reviewed by Chen and Cheng (2008)

have showed that the validity of the automated writing evaluation (AWE), also referred to as automated essay scoring (AES) system, has not been thoroughly ascertained. The ability of AES to improve students' writing significantly in either form or meaning is still limited. The concerns also reflect the computer ability in terms of limiting students' writing ability to features recognizable in their writing and compelling teachers to teach what the least important things are, gauging the development of ideas by counting the number of words and the length of essays. Moreover, research by Perelman (2012, pp. 121-150) and Vojak, Kline, Cope, McCarthy and Kalantzis (2011, pp. 97-111) explained that AES limits the creativity and assesses only surface features of writing such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation (as cited in National Council of Teachers of English, 2013). With AES, humans have to be trained to score like computers and students become dependable on machine-tricking strategies. Furthermore, AES may be against students who are not much familiar with technology (National Council of Teachers of English, 2013).

However, AES can be used as a positive supplement in writing classes in different learning contexts. The study by Li, Link, Ma, Yang, and Hegelheimer (2014) showed the usefulness of AES holistic scores for classroom purposes, and also showed that instructors used Criterion scores (by ETS) strategically to gauge language students' writing needs. Choi (2010), in the research on the impact of AES on improving English language learners' essay writing, indicated that AES could effectively assist students in writing when it was integrated with a writing instruction as a formative assessment tool. Lu (2012) proposed a framework to the validation of all AES systems when the author mentioned the validity of scores produced by the Intelligent Essay Assessor (IEA) for the writing tasks from the Pearson Test of English (PTE) Academic, in which the framework could facilitate the systematic collection and examination of empirical evidence and the theoretical rationale. Lu also suggested that the further studies should develop a larger and more sophisticated array of linguistic and rhetorical features.

Though they seem to be positive in some aspects, tools to review SLA through computer technology still do not meet the requirements of the standards of educational software for written communication such as assessing writing tests (Chapelle & Douglas, 2006). In view of teaching and learning language on the computer, the natural language processing on computers is going through some critical issues, one of which is the appropriate and objective assessment of students' language performance. Pilliner (1968, pp. 16-35) stated that subjective tests were different from objective tests with regard to scoring procedures (as cited in Bachman, 1997). Writing tests that involved the use of rating scales should be subjectively

scored since it was difficult to evaluate writing tests objectively in the scoring procedure, and standardized tests may consist of both objective and subjective factors. Moreover, the score on a given test which is considered as an indicator of students' language ability must be reliable and valid (Bachman, 1997).

As far as the theory of SLA is concerned, Hubbard (2006, p. 5) proposed the development of CALL software in teaching and learning languages from the theory in instructed SLA. Eggins (1993), in her research, following the studies by Halliday (1985) and Martin (1992), worked out a theoretical linguistic model that can be referred to in constructing an assessment model through the clarification of some conceptualizations in the systemic functional linguistic theory such as cohesion. In this sense, cohesion refers to how the bits of the discourse are bound together to create coherence in forming a text which is not a collection of clauses, but a unit of discourse patterns of cohesion (lexical relations, syntactical structures, references and conjunctions) and a unit of semantic patterns ("experiential" showing actions, "interpersonal" expressing attitudes and "textual" incorporating contexts). The outcome measures, therefore, are based on the analysis of texts at the lexico-grammar level and discourse-semantics (Cao, 2004).

As for computerized assessment, according to Attali and Burstein (2005, pp. 2-4), the new version e-rater v.2.0 was developed with twelve features: four features in identifying errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, and style, two features in organization and development, three features in lexical complexity, two features in pro-specific vocabulary usage, and one feature in essay length. However, Attali and Burstein (2005, p. 20) stated that e-rater v.2.0 still needed to be improved in three ways: (1) supplying more different writing aspects through the theories of writing, (2) modifying the model process, and (3) identifying different kinds of essays.

This study considered language structures in lexical-grammatical aspects, and two dimensions of an essay, which are coherence and cohesion and the identification of different essays. Consequently, this study suggested the building of a model to support examiners in scoring writing tests and to help improve Vietnamese EFL students' writing skills to prepare for the taking of standardized tests such as TOEFL iBT.

From the perspectives of the CALL and the SLA issues, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of the scoring standards in rating Vietnamese EFL learners' writing ability in their second language acquisition?

2. What is a suitable computer-based model, based on this investigation, to assess Vietnamese EFL learners' writing skills to prepare for standardized tests?

3. Method

This study was conducted to primarily investigate a relationship between the posttest (scored in accordance with ETS rubrics) and the application of CALL in the English courses together with the theories of writing, and then suggested a computer-based model for writing skill assessment. All the research questions were addressed by quantitative data. Before carrying out the research, the researcher, instructors, and administrative staff met to discuss the intervention and data collection. All students received treatment. Before and after the research intervention, all students had pretests and posttests, which were essay-writing tasks. The tests were administered by the researcher and the instructor of each class to control the testing conditions between classes. The investigation involved test-takers and a posttest,

3.1. Participants

The population that was accessible to this study consisted of students at intermediate English level taking posttests. Because of the large number of students who take the test every month (i.e. approximately 200) and the test satisfying the subjective and objective requirements of the testing philosophy, a simple random sample of 50% was chosen for inclusion in this study. This resulted in a sample size of 500 participants. While the study sample could not be considered representative of all students, the major purpose of this study was to determine whether a prototype could work in an accessible context, based on the mentioned language conventions similar to those set by ETS.

3.2. Measures

The measures used in this study were posttests since pretests were the entry tests in which students were required to get the score of the pre-intermediate level to get into the intermediate level according to the scoring standards. The posttests which were the two kinds of writing tests (integrated and independent) were aligned within a single theme or content area, reflecting how students naturally acquired and used the language in the classroom or in the real world. Each item provided the information and elicited the linguistic interaction that was necessary for students to complete the subsequent item. In the integrated task, students were required to perform three skills (reading a passage, listening to a lecture, and then writing a response). In the independent task, students were asked to write a response in the form of an essay on a given topic. All the writing tasks were administered similarly to

the Internet-based writing tests. Ratings were given on a 0-to-5 response scale where 0 meant “rejecting the topic” and 5 meant “effectively addressing the task”.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

All the participants took the computer-based exams. On the computer screens appeared a user-friendly interface, which was a two-way communicative dialog box. The participants gave an integrated writing response in the allotted time of 25 minutes. After they finished the integrated part, they went on to implement an independent task for 30 minutes. In this section, the dialog box showed an essay topic only for the participants to give responses. The responses were printed out and scored by language instructors with a reference to the five-point rating rubrics designed by ETS (2005a). To prevent raters’ bias based on the mode of responses, raters independently scored answer items for each student. As part of an overall strategy to summarize results on all items in terms of meeting the passing-failing requirement of the author’s university, the ratings were converted to a scaled score of 0-30 in reference to converted score by ETS (2005a). The two raters’ converted scores were then compared. If the discrepancies were not significant, the raters reevaluated responses and reached a consensus on a score. However, the agreement between human raters may be lower than desired, and agreement between human scorers, thus, may not always be accomplished sufficiently (Sweeney et al., 2010).

3.4. Research Design

A posttest-randomized design was used in this study. The major data in this study included 1,000 manually scored writings (i.e. 500 integrated and 500 independent writing responses). To ensure the objectivity of the survey, the scored writings were chosen randomly. All the test results dealt with are within the jurisdiction of the university and the consent was obtained from the university authorities. To ensure the confidentiality, candidates’ names were removed prior to the data entry; the raters’ names were not revealed; and the permission of the school authorities was acquired. Therefore, the test scores were affected by such factors as communicative language ability, test method facets, personal attributes, and random factors (Bachman, 1997). The scored writing responses were classified according to the points earned after a survey of errors made in the scored writings against language conventions. After the collected data were analyzed, the construction of a computerized scoring model was suggested.

In this posttest design, the two types of writing responses received a *p* value that emphasized the probability of facts. All the participants taking the writing tests (posttests) were measured after the intake. The randomized experimental design ensured the internal

validity. The p value should show a statistical significance for the tests and the test-takers. In this study, the scores earned by the test-takers were assessed through a one-sample t test, and the percentage of the test-takers was assessed through the one sample t test.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

The author analyzed the participants' writings and compared the scores of both integrated and independent writings. Reliability was assessed when the raters made judgments on the language produced by the test-takers. The inter-rater reliability was estimated when the scores were produced by two raters and a correlation coefficient was calculated between them (Brown, 1995). The objectivity was ensured since all the test-takers sat the tests of the same format at different times and the tests were collected randomly, and there was a causal relationship between student performance and writing instructions, so internal validity was ensured.

4. Results

The results are discussed in terms of the components of the scored writings, the linguistic characteristics of which are lexico-grammar and coherence, to see that the participants' awareness of CALL and linguistic features and the posttest results were related. The writings were divided into levels corresponding to the criteria similar to those of ETS (2005b). Potential difficulties were that the test results might get involved with subjective factors due to the unavoidable elements of human intervention, so the survey results might create variables.

The first research question concerns the effects of the scoring standards in rating learners' writing ability in terms of test scores earned for integrated and independent responses. All the respondents gave responses to the questions on various topics in the test, and all the questions were answered in the same format. For integrated responses, test scores were found to range from 3.0 to 3.5, for topic addressing (3.5), organization (3.5), coherence (3.0) and language use (3.0). For independent responses, the test scores were found to range from 2.5 to 4.0, for topic addressing (4.0), organization (3.5), coherence (2.5) and language use (2.5). The statistics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Test scores in integrated and independent writing responses

	Integrated responses	Independent responses
Addressing topic	3.5	4.0

Organization	3.5	3.5
Coherence	3.0	2.5
Language use	3.0	2.5

For the mode of delivery of the posttest, a one sample t test showed that the differences in response scores between integrated writing responses ($N = 500$, $M = 3.250$, $SD = 0.790600$) and the independent writing responses ($N = 500$, $M = 3.125$, $SD = 1.687400$) were statistically significant, $t(3) = 8.2216$, $p = 0.0038$, and $t(3) = 3.7039$, $p = 0.0342$, respectively. The statistics are clearly presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison between integrated and independent responses

Mode of delivery	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p
Integrated responses	3.250	0.790600	3	8.2216	0.0038
Independent responses	3.125	1.687400	3	3.7039	0.0342

The second research question is answered based on the survey of the tests performed by the test takers to show how students' linguistic competence in writing was acquired in terms of the percentage of respondents acquiring test criteria in giving integrated and independent writing responses. For integrated responses, 70.2% ($N=351$) of the respondents were found to address the topics (earning 3.5 points). 60.4% ($N=302$) of the respondents could arrange the essays in good organization (earning 3.5 points). 40.6% ($N=203$) of the respondents could write coherently (earning 3.0 points). 41.6% ($N=208$) of the respondents could acquire the language use (earning 3.0 points). Similarly, for independent responses, 74.2% ($N=371$) of the respondents were found to address the topics (earning 4.0 points). 40.4% ($N=202$) of the respondents could arrange the essays in good organization (earning 3.5 points). 45.8% ($N=229$) of the respondents could write coherently (earning 2.5 points). 56.8% ($N=284$) of the respondents could acquire the language use (earning 2.5 points). The statistics of the survey are clearly presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Percentage of respondents acquiring test criteria

	Percentage of integrated respondents	Percentage of independent respondents
Addressing topic	70.2%	74.2%

Organization	60.4%	40.4%
Coherence	40.6%	45.8%
Language use	41.6%	56.8%

As for the percentage of integrated and independent respondents, a one sample *t* test showed that the difference in response scores between their integrated writing responses ($N = 500$, $M = 53.200$, $SD = 14.539$) and the independent writing responses ($N = 500$, $M = 54.300$, $SD = 14.919$) were statistically significant, $t(3) = 7.3182$, $p = 0.0053$, and $t(3) = 7.2794$, $p = 0.0054$, respectively. The *p* values can calculate the possibilities of the scores being the foundation for future implementation as they are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Comparison of percentage of integrated and independent respondents

Percentage of respondents	Mean	SD	df	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i>
Integrated responses	53.200	14.539	3	7.3182	0.0053
Independent responses	54.300	14.919	3	7.2794	0.0054

From Tables 2 and 4, it is clear that the findings indicate that the amount of exposure to a foreign language with the guidance and support in using CALL integrated into the school curriculum has a positive effect on students' performance. Though integrated and independent respondents gave different responses to the questions on various topics at different testing times, the statistics remain significant. It appears that the intensity of using CALL in the total instruction designed in the curriculum leads to a good performance in the tests. Thus, the results support the author's hypothesis about a positive relationship between the application of CALL and Vietnamese EFL learners' language acquisition.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study investigated the effects of the scoring standards in rating the learners' writing ability in relation to CALL and SLA intervention. It also examined whether the percentage of the test-takers could meet the necessary requirements on which an automated, integrated performance assessment would be built for students of intermediate levels of language proficiency with CALL and SLA intervention taken into account. As for the posttest score, the respondents gave responses to the questions of which the scores range from 3.0 to 3.5 for integrated responses, and from 2.5 to 4.0 for independent responses. Though this means that

the respondents' level reaches above the average and satisfies the requirements, the scores earned by respondents in "coherence" are rather low (3.0 for integrated responses and 2.5 for independent responses) as compared with other conventions (addressing topic, organization and language use). The number of respondents writing with coherence was also low (40.6% or 203 respondents for integrated responses, and 45.8% or 229 respondents for independent responses). As for the respondents who acquired test criteria (from 3.0 to 4.0), the percentage of integrated respondents ranges from 41.6% ($N=208$) to 70.2 % ($N=351$), and the percentage of independent respondents ranges from 56.8% ($N=284$) to 74.2 % ($N=371$). This also means that the assessments imposed on language learners reach the accuracy to some extent.

The statistical findings in this study indicate that there is no significant difference and that there is a statistical significance for the two kinds of writing tasks with the t values and p values for integrated responses (8.2216 and 0.0038), and independent responses (3.7039 and 0.0342) respectively. In the same way, there is a statistical significance for the proportion of test-takers assessed with the t values and p values for doing integrated responses (7.3182 and 0.0053) and independent responses (7.2794 and 0.0054) respectively. The slight differences in Vietnamese EFL learners' achievement of both integrated and independent tasks when compared under investigation seem to indicate a good match between the writing posttests and the amount of knowledge learned in the courses. Students in intermediate courses appear to have learned enough in those courses to make up the numbers of scores that reflect the relationship between the obtainment of the language conventions like those set by the ETS. This observation helps to ensure that the students merit their testing scores. In fact, this match may be widespread at institutions that incorporate computer technology into language learning.

The reason for the students to have been able to finish the writing tests positively may be that they had been given clear and systematic instructions of CALL and linguistic knowledge in advance of how to take the tests, and they had spent an adequate amount of time familiarizing themselves with their work on the computer. The competence and experience of the students in specific assignments may have contributed to their outcomes. The flexible integration of both computer and humans (teacher and student) can increase learners' autonomy and raise their awareness of writing conventions by working with the software independently. Moreover, this can help to enhance the cooperation between instructors and raters, especially in team-teaching.

Although AES has indicated a number of limitations in the design, such as the partial evaluation of some certain lexical and grammatical aspects and the lack of recognizing

incoherent and illogical writing (Chen & Cheng, 2008, p. 107), this study showed that students' positive perception of effective facilitation of CALL is realized. Their in-class knowledge of language conventions can help them write with cohesion to some extent. Therefore, it can be said that the integration of computerized assessment brings about some advantages that language teachers and learners can benefit. Accordingly, language teachers can give impartial feedback to students after the tests and language students can be assured of their performance in the tests as this can increase their self-confidence in writing. In spite of the fact that computer-generated feedback was considered to provide only formulaic and generic information that can hardly solve students' individual writing problems (Chen & Cheng, 2008, p. 107), the prior teaching of language conventions together with the awareness of CALL may drive away this phobia.

Some AES programs that are said to improve students' writing through a continuous, iterative process of writing and revising, only define writing as formulaic and by social endeavors (Rothermel, 2006, as cited in Chen & Cheng, 2008), these programs, however, will benefit students in effective written communication if they are used properly. This study was limited to the investigation of the intermediate level students who learned basic writing micro-skills such as writing sentences and paragraphs, and are aware of how to write an essay to meet certain requirements of writing. The research tried to meet part of these requirements by visualizing an automated assessment that can give a fair assessment of students' performance without human subjective involvement in grading tests. The assessment may not be a good choice for those students who want to communicate thought in a creative and original way (Chen & Cheng, 2008), but it has created a foundation for further studies.

In this study, language instructors and test raters were different. The former attempted to make students aware of the use of language and CALL, and the latter tried to assess whether students had met the requirements through their writings and to give methodological and content feedback to the teacher in charge. As technologies may be changing the way students write and the way teachers assess writing, it is encouraging that computerized assessments should be used because writing assessment technologies enable instructors and students to succeed in getting authentic writing contexts for teaching and learning (Neal, 2011, p. 12). It is possible to capture more of the different writing aspects through the theories of writing (Attali & Burstein, 2005). Accordingly, the concepts initiated by Halliday (1985), Martin (1992) and Eggins (1994) indicated that the meaning of essays could be expressed using cohesive devices as part of language conventions.

The significant difference between the two kinds of scores of integrated and independent tasks means that the scoring model can be set up. The model (Table 5) is in the form of a tool parser that processes the language input in the order of (1) Input of the word document, (2) Analysis of the document, (3) Scoring process, (4) Result (Scores). The tentative scoring system accordingly analyzes and reviews the tasks by considering the entire segment in the texts and matches them with the criteria. More specifically, after the test-takers have completed both the writing tasks, the computer software processes lexical and syntactical errors along with the style, format and meshes them with the programmed content, calculates according to the scoring standards similar to those of ETS, and then notifies the candidates of the scores right on their computers.

Table 5

The model for computer-assisted scoring system

INPUT OF THE WORD DOCUMENT (1)	ANALYSIS OF THE DOCUMENT (2)	SCORING PROCESS (3)	SCORES (4)
Writing tasks (integrated or independent)	Checking errors against language conventions	Scoring: comparing tasks and sample dataset based on structure and vocabulary and identification of different essays	Providing converted scaled scores

The proposed model, which is standards-based, performance-based, developmental in nature, and integrative, should be used in accordance with the scoring rubrics that rate language learners' performance in terms of whether it would meet the expectations, exceed the expectations, or not meet the expectations for the tasks. Therefore, it can be said that the performance assessment is reliable and valid. This prototype is a comprehensive performance assessment for assessing the progress that language learners are making in preparation taking standardized tests such as TOEFL iBT as well as in developing their language proficiency.

6. Conclusion

The study contributes to not only the construction of a model to support the processes of identifying language errors which have an impact on the course outcomes, but also the provision of necessary feedback to work out the appropriate methods to improve Vietnamese EFL learners' weaknesses in writing to prepare for standardized tests. The proposed model can allow users with little knowledge of information technology to access the process of

information. The model is user-friendly, which means it is a highly communicative interface network between the tool and the user.

The investigation of this study ascertains students' beliefs that they are competent to use computers in their choice of taking writing tests on the computer. Computer self-efficacy can exert a significant influence on students' expectations of the CALL outcomes and their emotional reactions to actual computer use (Compeau & Higgins, 1995). The existence of such a reliable and valid measure of self-efficacy has implications for teaching and learning languages in making it possible to give students a fair assessment. The deployment of language conventions in this study can help improve language learners' performance from basic interpersonal communicative skills to the level of context-reduced of academic language with the help of technological advances, and help maintain the linguistic knowledge that Vietnamese EFL learners can acquire and use in all modes of communication via computers.

Although the proposed model can carry out the assessment of productive language skills, it is cannot completely replace human raters. The model for writing test automated scoring is supposed to be an open source so that language instructors can adjust their criteria to be suitable for specific requirements. The study may serve to exemplify how research and practice can be more closely arranged, and how standards-based classroom instruction and computer-assisted assessment practices can meet to form a seamless connection. The model suggested in this article can help language teachers to overcome the time-consuming tasks of scoring and to achieve a fair assessment of learners' writing ability. The further research could use this research as the basis to improve the implementation of this model in the direction of processing the contextual semantics of the writings for academic English proficiency.

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The Attitude of Hotel Department Students towards Learning English in Relation to their Learning Strategies and Achievement in Indonesian Context

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Abstract

English is taught as a compulsory subject at vocational high schools' curriculum in Indonesia. One of the departments available at the vocational is Hotel Department. The alumni are prepared to have good English communication skills to support them to get better job in the future. In the realm of EFL teaching at vocational senior high school level, students' attitude toward English seems to be neglected by both educators and researchers. However, based on individual differences theory, students' attitude towards learning English and learning strategies are among the determinant factors in their success. This mix-method design study was an attempt to investigate students' attitude towards learning English, learning strategies, and their relation between language learning strategies and achievement.

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The research participants were forty four students of a vocational high school in South Sulawesi which is very close to Tana Toraja, an important tourism destination in Indonesia. The data were collected using attitude scale, strategy inventory for language learning, and semi-structured interview. To address the research questions, quantitative data were first tabulated and classified according to the given score ranges, then categorized in regard to the given criteria. The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were used to support the quantitative data. The result of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that the students had positive attitude towards learning English, the dominant language learning strategies that the students used was metacognitive strategy, and there was no relation between the students' language learning strategies and their achievement.

Keywords: Vocational high school, EFL learning attitude, language learning strategies

1. Introduction

In learning English, students are employing language strategies that they use to improve their achievement. The same as the attitude, the strategies are different among students' individually. The students' strategies choice can facilitate them to internalization, storage, retrieval, or use the new language. Oxford (1990) stated that the strategies are tools thereby can be said that learning strategies are important tools in building students ability in communication. This is supported by O'malley and Chamot (1990); Chamot (2004) argued that that learning strategies are the thoughts and behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information.

It cannot be denied that language learning strategy plays a significant role in foreign language learning. Although learning strategies are used by students themselves, teachers play an important role in helping students develop and use strategies in more effective ways. This is in line with Oxford's (1990) opinion that the teacher is traditionally identified like parents, a director or even judge, but in this case teacher should change the role to be a facilitator, helper, guide, consultant or adviser. In addition, the teacher has to give opportunities to students to choose strategies that best suit their learning objectives.

People could learn effectively by using learning strategy. Especially in vocational high schools that have potential students in work field based on their departments. The advantage of vocational school is the students have basic skill that they need in order to work, thereby after graduating they could make their own job field and employ people or they could work

with other people. That's why they require language skill to communicate with people in order to develop the huge work field.

This research was important to find the students' attitude towards language learning because there is still less information about the students' attitude in learning language especially for Hotel Department students in vocational high school. The teachers need the research result to help them make the suitable or relevant English teaching and learning for Hotel Department. The relevant English learning and teaching will prepare Hotel Department students who are hoped that after graduating from the school, they have special competence to face the real workplace.

The researcher assumed that students' attitude towards learning is the crucial problem nowadays. It is shown that many vocational high school students have unfavorable attitude such as fighting, bullying, or thoughtless about their learning. Therefore this research correlated the students' attitude and the students learning strategies to help the teacher to make a good classroom management based on students' department and help students to reach good achievements.

English is a compulsory subject in vocational high school. Hotel department students of vocational high school have to learn English because they need English for communication in the job. They are prepared to have the huge opportunities after graduating in vocational high school. Therefore, this research was feasible to be conducted in vocational school in order to find out students' attitude towards learning English in relation to their learning strategies and achievement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Attitude towards Language Learning

Attitude is one of the pivotal factors in foreign language learning. Every student tends to react in response to people or things by positive or negative attitude. If the students have positive attitude, it becomes the good beginning for the learning and teaching process. Student's good or poor attitude makes life easy or difficult in the foreign language classroom (Smith, 1971). Teachers who match their teaching style to students' learning can enhance students' academic achievement and students' positive attitude (Felder & Henriques, 1995). This is meaningful to teacher and learning materials as well as students' positive attitude in language learning.

Positive attitudes towards learning of language can increase motivation of students and they are enormously constructive in language learning (Merisuo-Storm, 2007). The students who suffer from strained learning will not advantage greatly in the language learning (Smith, 1971). Therefore, teachers need to adopt approach activities to avoid embarrassment (Jones, 2011). The more motivating classroom activities in the learning of English as a foreign language are leading to the higher students' motivation and the students' attitude achievement.

Attitude as a set of beliefs strengthened in a specified sociocultural background and reinforced in a particular learning environment. It is widely considered that positive attitude can facilitate learning. A learner who is hesitant or having negative attitude lacks enthusiasm to learn. Students who are enthused and those who are discouraged to learn have different visions on their learning process. A personal perception of the class and the teacher, and curriculum affects attitude of students towards learning. The attitude of teachers plays a significant part in the current context. However, in the certified courses, the role of teachers has been changed from being the controller to the facilitator of the class. The professional teachers accept mistakes of students in the language use as an essential element of learning a language. They facilitate and stimulate students to use language to a greater extent every day. Learning results of students are subjective to their understanding on interpersonal behavior of teachers. If students believe that the teacher associates and empathizes with them, cares for their learning outcome, understands their problems, they act in positive response and play a role to increase their motivation in the classroom.

The role of teachers in the era of paradigm shift has shifted from being a stern authoritarian to a facilitator. The teacher is required to challenge the students to be fearless in doing assignment, especially in learning of English as a Foreign Language. The teacher needs to consider that anxiety could lead students to be demotivated. Obviously, discouragement might drive English learners to be incompetent on English language skills. The teacher should monitor the problem of learners in English language learning and how the problems can be solved. It is also important to consider the relation between grammar mastery and students perception about learning a language. Teachers need to consider some vital aspects, such as what a learner wants, the reason of a student learning English, and students' attitude toward teachers. Students need an inspiring teacher who can inspire them to speak frequently in the classroom and educate them the way of using language outside of classroom. In addition, students need a smart and capable English teacher in correcting their mistakes by keeping respects as well as creating a comfortable atmosphere in classroom.

2.2. Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies was introduced worldwide to the literature of second language in 1975 on the good language learner research (Rubin, 1975). Creating successful learners should consider correspondingly the teachers with regard to teaching style and students with regard to learning strategy. Preliminary researches aimed at documenting the good-language-learner strategies. In the 80s, the prominence moved to language-learning strategies classification. In the beginning, strategies were classified based on direct or indirect, and later were divided into cognitive and metacognitive categories (Hosenfeld, O'Malley, & Chamot, 1992). However, the term of language learning strategies refers to the conscious processes and actions deployed by language learners for helping them learn or use more effective language (Rose, 2015). Cohen (2014) defined language learning strategies as thoughts and actions, deliberately preferred and practiced by language learners, assisting them to accomplish numerous tasks from the exceedingly beginning of learning to the mainly complex stages of language performance. In addition, Rose (2015) revealed that the term language learner strategies as incorporating strategies in language learning and language use is occasionally used while both of them are in distracted lines since the use of second language can offer learning opportunities as well.

Oxford (1990) stated that learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Chamot (2004) states that learning strategies are the special thought or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Oxford (1990) classified learning strategies into two categories; they are direct strategies and indirect strategies. Language learning strategies that directly involve the target language are called direct strategies. Indirect strategies support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. The direct strategies consist of three strategies; they are memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Then indirect strategies consist of metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) stated that there are some factors that can influence the use of language learning strategies; they are degree of awareness, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, sex, nationality/ethnicity, motivation, and purpose for learning the language.

Lee and Oxford (2008) found that strategy use was strongly attached to strategy awareness and English language learning through self-image. Strategy awareness and English language learning through self-images are measured as metacognition in English language

learning. As a result, the considerable authorities of strategy awareness and English language learning through self-image on strategy use involve the way of teaching English effectively. In this case, teachers are expected to promote and encourage self-image and strategy awareness in teaching students to learn strategies for successful learning.

Zimmerman and Pons (1986), using scheduled interview, found that self-regulated learning develops an assurance for describing the students' learning strategies in natural settings. Resembling every instrument which is not based on a performance and reasoning subsequent self-descriptions requires further validation. It needs to be eventually validated and aligned with actual performance of students on academic assignments in authentic settings. The current results suggest that conceptions theory of students as initiators, planners, and observers their individual instructional practices encompass empirical and practical worth.

2.3. Achievement of Students

The students' achievement is closely related to the academic success (Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000; Harris, 1940; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; Zimmerman, 1990). Every student wants to gain the best achievement in learning and teaching process, and on the other hand the teacher wants that students have the best achievement too. Achievement is very important for the students, so the good student will have good preparation for learning. Bouangeune, Sakigawa, and Hirakawa (2008) revealed that numerous inspiring implications in students' achievement for English language teaching in Laos. Laos secondary students experience basic vocabulary problem. Furthermore, vocabulary skills appear to have a considerable consequence on reading comprehension that requires the emphasis on basic vocabulary learning before reading comprehension practice. Additionally, the revision of the textbook content is expected to focus more on basic learning using Lao language, rather than English in instruction or explanation. Students' achievement in grammar are also little influencing the students' achievement in reading comprehension that requires the emphasis on basic grammar before dealing with reading comprehension.

The achievement of English learners is a vital issue since vocational secondary schools concentrate on setting up students to be successful to pass the university entry test and or to be ready to work in a company. It is extensively accepted that the incredible increase of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in U.S is poorly anticipated (Brisk, 2010). In addition, the increase of ESL students promotes content spot teachers by means of strategies and techniques to formulate reasonable subject matter whilst developing English language

proficiency. However, there is no fact that advanced teaching can be successfully open in enclosure programs that are closely separated with the foremost literacy program.

Enlargement of the school day or year for these students might be one way to fill in the space. Skills of teachers create a huge divergence as well. Learners of English language require teachers who are able to deliver the powerful, open, and encouraging reading instruction revealed to be mainly successful, and these teachers need demanding qualified development. Providing extra time and making certain that every child obtains proficient instruction are luxurious. However students are not able to learn the untaught materials. Converting learners of English language into achievers of good readers entails enlarged resources and dedication that run the schools and they benefit from the payment of the citizens and communities.

In the students' home language, academic teaching is supposed to be the element of the instructive program of English-language learners. The achievement of students in reading skills is more successful in the context of English as native language in the EFL through English immersion program for children. As a matter of fact, evidence proposed that literacy and additional skills shift across languages. It is easier to learn something in native language than in a second language because learners always attempt to recognize the learning materials in the native language. The extra advantage of primary-language instruction in helping to maintain the first language that studies have deeply established is a bilingual education.

3. Method

This research used a mixed-method design in which the quantitative data were collected first and followed by the qualitative data. The research was conducted at a vocational high school in Indonesia. The total number of participants in this research was forty four Hotel Department students. The selected department was Hotel Department because this department used more English than the other departments.

This research used attitude scale, interview, and strategy inventory as instruments. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively as follows.

Table 3.2.
Likert Scale

Positive statement score		Negative statement score
5	Strongly agree	1
4	Agree	2
3	Undecided	3
2	Disagree	4

Categorizing the students' attitude towards learning English in the following:

Table 3.3.
The Rating Score of Attitude classification

Interval Score	Category
63 – 75	Strongly positive
51 – 62	Positive
39 – 50	Neutral
27 – 38	Negative
15 – 26	Strongly negative

In order to show the profile of students' result on the SILL questionnaire, the sum of each students result as shown in the table above, then, was put into the table as following:

Table 3.5.

Profile of Students' SILL Results

STUDENTS	PART A	PART B	PART C	PART D	PART E	PART F	AVERAGE	OVERALL AVERAGE
1								
2								
3								
Etc.								

(Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995)

After tabulating and analyzing the data from the two data collection instruments, the data analysis were continued to the correlational analysis between the language learning strategies, used by the students, and their English achievement.

4. Results

4.1. Research Questions 1: What is the attitude of Hotel Department students of SMK Negeri 3 Parepare towards learning English? The finding is shown in the following table:

Table 4.1.

Percentage of Students' Attitudes

Interval score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
63 – 75	Strongly positive	7	16
51 – 62	Positive	36	82
39 – 50	Neutral	0	0
27 – 38	Negative	1	2
15 – 26	Strongly negative	0	0
Total		44	100

Table 4.1 shows that 98 % of the students have positive attitude towards learning English. This finding is supported by student's good or poor attitude that makes life easy or difficult in the foreign language classroom (Smith, 1971). The result of this research showed that the students have positive attitude towards learning English. This finding is supported by Smith (1971) finding that students who suffer from strained learning will disadvantage significantly in the learning of language. This means that the students have positive attitude towards learning.

For many reasons, the students of Hotel Department of SMK Negeri 3 Parepare like to learn English. The interview result affirmed the finding that the students were interested in learning English because they chose Hotel department and realized the importance of learning English. This is reflected in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 1:

M: "Why are you interested to learn English?"

W: "It is because I choose Hotel department that using English more"

(W interviewed on 17th, April 2015)

Excerpt 2:

M: "How do you think about the importance of oral and written English?"

H: "I think it is very important, because in my department there are often such forms that have to be filled. So if I do not know English I could not fill the form"

(H interviewed 15th, April 2015)

The students like their teacher when he helped to solve the problem. It can be realized that English as a foreign language sometimes makes the students confused in learning, and the fact that, the interview result shows that the English teacher has an important role to motivate the students in learning English. It is supported by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) that the students who have experienced success in learning have developed confidence in their ability to learn.

4.2. Research Question 2: What learning strategies do they apply based on their attitude?

The finding is shown in the following table:

Table 4.2.

Students' Language Learning Strategies Based On Their Attitude

No.	Learning Strategies	Strongly Positive		Positive		Negative	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Memory	0	0	3	8.33	0	0
2.	Cognitive	1	14.29	4	11.11	0	0
3.	Compensation	1	14.29	4	11.11	0	0
4.	Metacognitive	4	57.14	13	36.11	1	100
5.	Affective	1	14.29	5	13.89	0	0

6.	Social	0	0	7	19.44	0	0
	Total	7	100	36	100	1	100

Table 4.2 shows that the dominant learning strategy of students is metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies according to Oxford (1990) are actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process. Metacognitive strategies help learners focus in learning target language. This research is similar to research by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) who assessed the use of language learning strategies worldwide and Wu (2008) who conducted a research about language learning strategies use of Chinese ESL learners of Hong Kong.

4.3. Research Question 3: What is students' achievement relating with their strategies?

1. The Students' English Achievement

The students' English achievement of Hotel department is shown in the table below:

Table 4.3.

The Classification and Percentage of Students' English Achievement

No.	Category	Interval Score	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Very Good	9.0 – 10	0	0
2.	Good	7.5 – 8.9	31	70.45
3.	Average	6.0 – 7.4	13	29.54
4.	Poor	0 – 5.9	0	0
	Total		44	100

Based on the data from the teacher, students' learning achievement in English subject showed good score of the students. Most of the students have good score; 70.45 % students got good score and 29.54 % students got average score.

The correlation between students' LLSs and their English achievement can be seen in a statistical analysis below:

Table 4.4 LLSs and Achievement Cross-Tabulation

		Achievement		Total
		Good	Average	
Strategies	Memory	2	1	3
	Cognitive	3	2	5
	Compensation	3	2	5
	Metacognitive	13	5	18
	Affective	6	0	6
	Social	4	3	7
Total		31	13	44

Table 4.5 Chi Square Tests Result

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3,685 ^a	5	,596
Likelihood Ratio	5,302	5	,380
Linear-by-Linear Association	,181	1	,670
N of Valid Cases	44		

a. 10 cells (83,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,89.

The table above shows that Pearson Chi square value was 3.68 and the significance was 0.58. Because the significant test is larger than 0.05, therefore H0 is accepted. It means that the dominant categories of language learning strategies that the students use do not correlate with their English achievement. Hence, it could not be assumed that a certain category of language learning strategies is only used by students with certain level of English achievement. This research supports Djamarah and Zain (2006) statement that purpose, teacher, learner, learning and teaching process, evaluation tools, material for evaluation, and situation of evaluation are the factors that can affect the students' achievement.

5. Conclusion

The students have positive attitude towards learning English. They realized that they need English in their department for their future. The students used all language learning strategies in learning English although they have different attitude towards learning English. The achievement is different among the students, no matter that they use language learning strategies or not, but they had different result in learning with different strategies. The researcher addresses suggestions that students understand the need of English in their department; therefore, the teacher should direct the students to practice their English more based on their needs in department. Teachers should help the low achiever students to maintain their motivation and confidence in learning target language through different learning strategies. Teachers should understand the students' strategies towards learning English to create the suitable activities in learning and teaching process.

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