

Modified Cloze Test, Essay Test, Personal & Collaborative Writing Tasks in EFL Composition Class at Universitas Andalas

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Abstract

*This retrospective study reports a quantitative analysis of two types of assignments and two test forms used to measure improvement of student's writing skill in two composition classes at Universitas Andalas, West Sumatera, Indonesia. This project aims to identify the different roles of the two test forms used as well as the relationship and learning effects between the two test forms and weekly personal writing task or in-class group tasks. In this research, two EFL classes of Composition with two different groups of students in two successive academic years were observed. The classes' activities, held through fourteen meetings for learning activities and two meetings for mid-term and end-of-term examinations, consisted of weekly assignments of composing paragraphs or short essays individually and collaboratively. The first composition class used an integrative test, i.e. cloze test, as the mid semester examination and a short essay test as the final semester examination. The second class used only essay test for both exams. The individual weekly writing task was assigned in both classes while the collaborative writing task was assigned only in the first class. The Pearson *r* correlational analyses on scores of the assignments and the tests in both classes shows that the modified cloze test appeared to still correlate weakly with the essay test but, through *t*-test analyses, still significant in detecting the learning effect. Personal weekly writing assignments correlate strongly with essay test while the collaborative work appeared to have less significant learning effect on the student's writing competence.*

Keywords: *Cloze Test, Modified Cloze Procedure, Essay Test, Writing Class*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of learning and teaching writing skills in English language in the level of higher education, testing instruments are as important as the learning and teaching methods because they serve as the device detecting and measuring the attainment that learners have achieved. At the same time, testing instruments can also inform teachers whether their method works well in helping learners improve their writing skill and identify their level of progression. Choosing a particular testing battery is undoubtedly essential for any writing class in higher education but having a comparative result from a different type of testing instrument may also be necessary to provide additional support for validity and extra information about the student's current level of writing skill. Such comparison may also help clarify the different roles these two different test forms play in assisting teachers helping students to write better through class activities. In terms of teaching and learning English composition, there are two forms of test that can be used to examine the learners' progress, namely cloze and short essay tests. This paper attempts to assess

the different functions these two tests serve in relation to learning writing in English composition class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

On cloze test

Firstly introduced by Wilson Taylor (1953; 1956), many studies had proved Cloze Test to be a highly reliable, valid, and efficient measure for general language ability (Cziko, 1981; Soudek & Soudek, 1983; Laesch & Kleeck, 1987; Connelly, 1997). Its practical and yet robust design has apparently become the reason for its wide use in other areas such as psychology as the instrument to assess intelligence (see Ackerman et al., 2000; Esfandiari & Ekradi, 2014) and neurolinguistics (e.g. Schuster et al. 2021). Extensive studies on cloze tests have also been done especially in language testing area (see Brown, 2013) by focusing on the validity, reliability, and interpretability of cloze test scores over proficiency levels. Unlike the more traditional test like discrete-point test, cloze procedure is considered to be integrative because it measures integrated language skills used by test takers to deal with the test's problems (Cziko, 1981). The cloze procedure demands test takers to employ their overall capability to close missing information in the text by integrating different aspects of their language repertoire such as vocabulary source, morphosyntactic knowledge, and discursive competence.

However, this test form is rather broad in its focus of measure (Weir, 1990; Connelly, 1997; Dastjerdi & Talebinezhad, 2006). Its integrative nature enables cloze test to provide a general description of test takers' overall language ability but it is probably too general to detect specific productive language competences, such as writing skill, but may be more appropriate to be used in identifying receptive competence such as reading and comprehension skill (e.g. Page, 1977, Kintsch & Yarbough, 1982; Kobayashi, 2002). More importantly, cloze procedure still involves rather passive activity from the side of the test takers since they only fill in the missing words instead of combining words to form sentences and then paragraphs as in the essay test. Nonetheless, a careful and relevant selection of text modified for the cloze test may compensate for such general nature of the test since the text can represent the domain or the universe (Cziko, 1981, p. 34) of which they test takers should have the knowledge about when instructed to write about it.

Since many studies on cloze procedure had been dedicated in teaching reading (e.g. Suryani, 2014; Medyazarefsi et al., 2022), only a very few studies were done on cloze test in teaching writing (Lee, 2008) and as a valid predictor for writing competence (Stubbs & Tucker, 1974; Hanania & Shikhani, 1986; Lee, 1997). While Lee (2008) proved that a combination of cloze test and discrete-point test of college entrance could predict student's writing proficiency better than the college entrance test alone, it was not clear whether the use of cloze test could also be used to predict any learning effects on student's writing skill. Let alone, those previous studies applied the conventional cloze procedure where word deletion was done automatically and mechanically (every nth word) instead of rationally, i.e. chosen based on targeted syntactic class or function (Greene, 1965, pp. 213-214). This conventional principle may look like demonstrating a fair random procedure but it may also result in indiscriminate and disproportionate but redundant words being deleted. To avoid such redundancies, this study used a modified cloze

procedure for a brief text. The modified cloze test scores were statistically compared with the essay test and weekly task scores so that different and, yet any possible, complementary roles between the results of modified cloze test, short essay writing test, and weekly writing tasks in two composition classes at English Department of Universitas Andalas could be identified.

Test forms and assignments in Composition class at English Department of Universitas Andalas

This study is retrospective in that data of the students' test scores were acquired from two classes of Composition 1 conducted respectively for freshmen in 2003 and 2004. Composition 1 class was the first compulsory writing class at English Department curriculum that trained freshmen to write simple and various paragraphs in English. Freshmen were divided in three parallel class based on their student number instead of the result of their English language proficiency. The absence of the student's language proficiency scores could be (Gamaroff, 1998) and was then compensated by the cloze test administered individually in class by the lecturer in mid semester examination.

Additionally, the test was also used to prepare the students for regular writing practices whose topics were chosen to be closely related to their common activities, stories, or situations. The test was intended to measure students' bank of vocabulary on a topic which all students were presumably familiar with. Once the students' general English language proficiency was identified in mid test, topics for weekly writing tasks could be selected more appropriately to support the improvement of students' paragraph writing quality. Additionally, two collaborative writing projects were also given to pairs of students in class. At the end of the semester, students' paragraph writing skill was then tested through short essay test. Unlike cloze test, the essay test does not only measure student's bank of vocabulary but also demand students' active movement by using vocabulary source, grammatical competence, and discursive knowledge to deliver their ideas through sentences and paragraph(s). The essay test activates whatever cloze test can identify by redirecting the test takers' focus on producing ideas in written forms. For any writing class, the essay test form is appropriate and inevitably required to measure learners' attainment or improvement.

Research Questions

When using cloze and timed short essay test in the 2003 class, an uncommon condition was discovered. Most students earned high scores in cloze test but lower score in the essay test in the end of semester, which seemed to indicate that either learning effect was not evident or that cloze test was easier for the student. Then, in 2004, only short essay test forms were conducted for mid and end of term tests. For this study, scores from all tests and weekly tasks from both classes were statistically analysed to answer the following questions:

1. How easy is cloze test for students when compared to assignments and short essay test?
2. Does cloze test correlate strongly and significantly with essay test? Can cloze test predict the progress in the essay test?

3. Can weekly individual and collaborative writing tasks significantly and strongly predict students' final progress?
4. Is there significant learning effect of the weekly assignments on students essay test scores?
5. Do essay tests for both exams test better than a combination of cloze and essay tests? Which test forms detect the learning effect better?

METHODS

Respondents

The assessment record from two classes of Composition 1; one commenced in 2003 and another in 2004; was used. The first class consisted of 27 students (7 males and 20 females). Five personal assignments and one group assignment were given before the mid-term test (cloze test) while four personal tasks and the other group work were given afterwards. Their learning progress then was assessed by a short essay test in the end of the semester. In the other class, there were 30 students (10 males and 20 females). There six personal assignments before the mid test (short essay), which were collapsed as personal assignment 1, and another six personal tasks before the final essay test collapsed as personal assignment 2. There was no group assignment in this 2004 composition class. All assignments in both classes were scored, returned, and discussed in class. Individual assignments were taken home and group assignments were completed in class. All these scores are put in appendix 1 and 2 with the students are coded by number.

In cloze test form, the variable ratio deletion was applied rationally in which missing words were chosen randomly and supplied in a table. Students were instructed to put them in the gaps by numbers. This was meant to save more time for students. Since previous studies on cloze test or procedures were uniformly mechanical in their principles of deleting the words in the text, this study follows the modified version of cloze procedure by using rational rather than mechanical procedure (Greene, 1965) where the words deleted were chosen carefully by representing almost all syntactic classes (noun, verb, auxiliary, preposition, pronoun, adverb). The modified cloze test was attached as appendix 3. As to the short essay test form, students were given three topics. They must choose and write short paragraphs about two topics within one hour time range. All examination papers were marked, commented, and returned to students.

Having all scores laid on the table, statistical analyses were performed by means of SPSS. A simple descriptive statistical analysis was firstly run between personal task, group task, cloze test, and essay test for both classes. The result is presented as Table 1. Then, two Pearson *r* correlational analyses were performed to identify significant correlation between the scores for both classes. These analyses were respectively presented as Table 2 and 3. Then, a t-test were also performed between cloze-essay tests for Composition 1 of 2003 and between two essay tests for Composition 1 of 2004, whose result was shown as Table 4. The final t-test was run between personal or group tasks with mid/final examinations and presented as Table 5.

RESULTS

To identify how easy the tests and assignments in Composition 1 class were, a descriptive statistical analysis was run and shown in the following table:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
total personal assignment class 1	71.0741	8.55267	27
total group task class 1	69.4444	13.69260	27
cloze test raw score class 1	93.4815	8.81594	27
essay test raw score class 1	77.3333	9.01281	27
total personal task class 2	64.4333	6.82128	30
raw score mid test class 2	66.2000	8.37237	30
raw score final test class 2	77.3333	9.20769	30

In table 1, cloze test was found to be the easiest task than other learning/testing activities in both classes. For Composition 1 class of 2003, most students could get relatively high score (mean 93.4815) in the cloze as compared to the essay test (mean 77.3333). In terms of assignment weight, students scored higher in personal task (mean 71.0741) than they did in the group task (mean 69.4444). Nevertheless, mean values of both assignments were lower than of the final essay test. In the second class, there appeared to be a normal score distribution. Personal assignment score was lower than the essay test score in mid test and the mid test score itself was lower as well than the final test score. An increase in mean values of essay test scores in both classes may indicate that a learning effect or progress was possibly predictable.

Table 2. Tests of correlation in the first class

		total group task class 1	total personal assignment class 1	cloze test raw score class 1	essay test raw score class 1
total group task class 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.393*	.039	.196
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.042	.847	.328
	N	27	27	27	27
total personal assignment class 1	Pearson Correlation	.393*	1	.402*	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042		.037	.001
	N	27	27	27	27
cloze test raw score class 1	Pearson Correlation	.039	.402*	1	.315
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.847	.037		.110
	N	27	27	27	27
essay test raw score class 1	Pearson Correlation	.196	.607**	.315	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.328	.001	.110	
	N	27	27	27	27

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

After verifying the degrees of easiness for assignments and tests in both classes, Pearson *r* correlation analysis can now be run to see the correlation among cloze test, essay test, and assignments. As shown in Table 2, there seemed to be a weak and non-significant correlation of $r=.315$ between cloze and essay tests. A weak correlation of $r=.402$ and *p* value of 0.037 for cloze test and personal assignment was also found. Likewise, cloze test correlated weakly ($r=.039$) and non-significantly (*p* value of 0.847) even with collaborative / group task. Personal task correlated quite stronger ($r=.607$) and more significantly ($p < 0.01$) with essay test than it did with cloze test ($r=.402$ and *p* value of 0.037). None of the tests strongly or significantly correlated with group assignment. Correlation between personal and group assignments was also found weak at $r=.393$ but significant at $p > 0.05$.

Table 3. Tests correlation in the second class

		total personal task class 2	raw score mid test class 2	raw score final test class 2
total personal task class 2	Pearson Correlation	1	.573**	.645**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000
	N	30	30	30
raw score mid test class 2	Pearson Correlation	.573**	1	.614**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.000
	N	30	30	30
raw score final test class 2	Pearson Correlation	.645**	.614**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	30	30	30

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Test of correlation on the second class indicates that personal writing task has a strong (at .573) and significant (*p* value of .001) correlation with essay test in the mid- term exam. The correlation was even stronger with the final test at $r=.645$ and *p* value of .000. Similar trend was also evident with the mid test exam that was correlated at .573 and *p* value of .001 with personal task and grew stronger at .614 and *p* value of .000 with the final test. This statistical result shows that individual writing task showed more consistently and stronger positive correlation with the essay test than it did with cloze test and collaborative task.

To assess whether essay test could detect learning effect better than cloze test and whether personal assignments could facilitate learning effect, two t-tests were administered and the result is presented in the following table:

Table 4. T-test for cloze and essay test in both classes

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	cloze test raw score class 1 - essay test raw score class 1	16.14815	10.43553	2.00832	12.01999	20.27631	8.041	26	.000
Pair 2	raw score mid test class 2 - raw score final test class 2	-11.13333	7.75813	1.41643	-14.03026	-8.23640	-7.860	29	.000

Means of cloze and essay tests in the first class and two essay tests in the second class were compared. It was evidenced in Table 4 that the difference between the two pairs of tests was significantly real, i.e., $p = 0.001$. Both tests could significantly detect learning effect in both classes, even though cloze test measure learning effect negatively due to its position in the statistical calculation.

Finally, personal assignments were compared to each class' examination in both classes (Table 5) to see whether individual assignments had real effect on students' score in both exams. The t -test result shows significant differences in students' scores between personal assignments and both tests. Personal task did not make significant difference only with the mid test in the second class, $p = .187$.

Table 5. T-test for personal assignments and examinations in both classes

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	total personal assignment class 1 - essay test raw score class 1	-6.25926	7.79345	1.49985	-9.34225	-3.17627	-4.173	26	.000
Pair 2	total personal assignment class 1 - cloze test raw score class 1	-22.40741	9.49599	1.82750	-26.16390	-18.65092	-12.261	26	.000
Pair 3	total group task class 1 - cloze test raw score class 1	-24.03704	15.99394	3.07804	-30.36403	-17.71004	-7.809	26	.000
Pair 4	total group task class 1 - essay test raw score class 1	-7.88889	14.84622	2.85716	-13.76186	-2.01592	-2.761	26	.010
Pair 5	total personal task class 2 - raw score mid test class 2	-1.76667	7.15196	1.30576	-4.43725	.90392	-1.353	29	.187
Pair 6	total personal task class 2 - raw score final test class 2	-12.90000	7.09225	1.29486	-15.54829	-10.25171	-9.962	29	.000

DISCUSSION

Results of the statistical analyses proved that cloze test appeared to be too easy for the students who could get high score mostly. Such easy score may result from the rational modification made to the cloze procedure where the missing words were supplied in the test form so that students could easily pick up the more appropriate ones. This modification was violating the modification that Greene

(1965) suggested because of supplying the words in a list to save time. This time-saving orientation for the modification appears to have compromised the test's validity and reliability. The test takers may not have to use their critical reading skill and integrative knowledge of the text any longer to deal with the blank spaces. They could simply use their syntactic intuition or cognitive skill in tactically deciding the appropriate words to fill in the slot. The easiest parts can be filled in firstly so that the more difficult blanks can be easily dealt with.

Despite such flaw in the test design, the analysis also reveals that cloze test's high scores did not measure possible high scores in essay test, perhaps due to its generalizability. Cloze test is fairly general that it shares so few variances with the essay test. Cloze test's weak correlation with essay test shows that it could not reliably predict high score in essay test in that both tests measure different constructs. However, further t-test operation on cloze test indicates that it is significant enough to predict learning effect in the course.

Likewise, group assignment in form of collaborative learning activity also had weak correlation with cloze and essay tests. This type of assignment seemed to have less significant learning effect on the student because their mean score was higher than the personal task. This may show that writing collaboratively was not easy to be done since the compromise and agreement could at times hard to achieve under time pressure. While writing is individual work, collaboration could help refine the result of the individual writing process. To replace the individual writing process under the short period of time for in-class assessment was not giving the students facilitative access to improve their writing. Instead of producing an agreed piece of writing, the dominant student may take over the process or they both could not solve the problem and complete the task. As the result, students obtained the low score in average for this task.

On the other hand, assigning students with small tasks on weekly basis seemed to make differences. These small individual tasks, i.e., weekly writing assignments, served also as treatment that affects students' final score positively as evident in the *t*-test results. The more students write, the better their writing skill will become. Surprisingly, personal assignments in the second class did not seem to promote learning effect as measured by the mid semester test. It was not clear yet where the problem occurred. Nevertheless, gradual improvement of personal task scores could more strongly and more significantly indicate improvement in the essay final test. Therefore, for the coming composition classes, essay tests may be more appropriately used as the test battery due to its greater correlation with other tests and tasks. Additionally, improvement in weekly task instruction could clearly and positively facilitate the learning effect and promote development for students' writing skill.

CONCLUSION

Cloze test is proven to be a practical and strong predictor of a learner's language proficiency especially in reading modality. Testing the use of cloze test in writing modality is necessary to find evidence for its sufficiency to predict writing proficiency. This retrospective quantitative study on the use of cloze test in two writing classes for freshmen has proven that, despite its modification and weaker correlation with essay test, cloze test can significantly still predict learner's writing

competence even though it may not be able to detect the learning effect on the learner's writing competence. The cloze test could still correlate with the individual weekly writing assignments which clearly becomes more appropriate writing tasks in composition class as compared to collaborative writing assignments. Essay test correlates strongly with individual weekly writing assignments which makes them both an effective pair of activities in such early writing classes as Composition 1.

LIMITATION AND SUGGESTIONS

Future validation studies can clarify the results of this study by applying conventional cloze test with the more standardized and piloted texts. While individual writing task format can still be maintained, collaborative assignments may also be modified so that it focuses on proofreading activities rather than producing collaborated writings. Such modifications in the group work may help improve writing skill more effectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Assignment and Test Scores for Composition 1 (2003)

No.	Student	Personal Assignments									GA		25% Cloze Test	25% Essay Test
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2		
1.	03 - 077	75	75	82	90	85	84	75	83	82	-	65	25	22
2.	03 - 075	90	60	62	-	69	-	60	75	64	63	65	15	16
3.	03 - 061	90	95	75	78	77	-	78	81	64	85	70	25	21
4.	03 - 071	77	85	95	78	81	81	70	83	85	90	82	25	24
5.	03 - 066	62	62	63	73	70	77	70	-	60	73	82	24	19
6.	03 - 080	60	62	87	78	68	-	72	75	64	82	67	25	17
7.	03 - 073	60	63	75	80	75	76	73	75	63	75	70	23	20
8.	03 - 084	84	75	73	83	80	77	74	80	73	73	82	21	20
9.	02 - 082	63	95	89	78	90	81	77	75	73	-	82	24	19
10.	03 - 069	70	72	70	90	70	82	81	78	67	74	80	22	17
11.	03 - 062	62	60	60	81	79	77	73	75	60	62	67	19	19
12.	03 - 063	60	62	67	81	82	81	75	81	63	62	67	24	16
13.	03 - 058	70	50	75	62	66	75	68	81	78	63	65	22	19
14.	03 - 059	60	87	73	83	81	85	78	78	83	84	70	23	21
15.	03 - 083	84	75	83	83	83	81	75	80	66	85	70	25	25
16.	02 - 083	75	67	75	75	85	81	68	85	70	64	80	25	19
17.	03 - 082	60	60	70	78	70	81	-	78	60	85	-	24	19
18.	03 - 068	70	75	78	83	89	82	72	83	78	90	70	25	21
19.	03 - 060	56	75	81	78	69	81	77	78	64	85	70	24	20
20.	03 - 070	85	78	81	81	81	81	85	82	66	82	67	24	19
21.	03 - 067	90	70	68	66	60	-	64	80	64	75	70	25	17
22.	03 - 065	60	90	87	83	85	77	73	82	67	85	67	23	20
23.	03 - 078	85	70	63	87	71	82	-	75	67	74	80	23	22
24.	03 - 076	57	85	82	79	81	77	73	80	70	85	70	24	21
25.	03 - 064	85	78	85	73	68	-	78	75	78	64	82	25	16
26.	03 - 079	-	-	-	62	85	81	83	80	64	83	-	24	17
27.	03 - 057	84	66	75	62	80	77	74	75	66	84	70	23	18

Appendix 2 - Assignment and Test Scores for Composition 1 (2004)

No.	Reg.No.	PERSONAL TASK			30% Mid Test	30% Final Test
		1	2	3		
1.	04 - 097	50	50	50	20	25
2.	04 - 111	50	60	50	17	23
3.	04 - 066	55	50	-	20	23
4.	04 - 103	50	50	50	18	19
5.	04 - 070	50	60	60	21	22
6.	04 - 112	66	56	50	20	20
7.	04 - 078	50	50	55	21	24
8.	04 - 071	50	57	50	18	22
9.	04 - 081	50	50	70	21	26
10.	04 - 075	50	67	65	18	25
11.	04 - 068	66	85	80	24	26
12.	04 - 074	50	55	50	18	20
13.	04 - 083	50	60	50	15	22
14.	04 - 094	70	60	60	21	25
15.	04 - 090	65	66	60	21	27
16.	04 - 077	60	66	65	21	26
17.	04 - 091	60	50	-	19	23
18.	04 - 107	50	50	60	23	24
19.	04 - 101	50	56	55	18	24
20.	04 - 089	70	60	75	26	26
21.	04 - 102	60	50	50	21	24
22.	04 - 086	-	50	68	22	22
23.	04 - 099	60	70	55	18	25
24.	04 - 108	50	50	50	17	17
25.	04 - 073	50	50	50	20	24
26.	03 - 095	55	55	60	17	20
27.	02 - 084	55	-	60	20	21
28.	02 - 017	70	75	75	26	27
29.	02 - 031	85	85	85	23	19
30.	04 - 079	50	50	-	18	17

Appendix 3 – Modified Cloze Test

Fill in the blank spaces in the following paragraphs with the words listed above it!

1. early
2. from
3. to
4. who
5. is
6. comes
7. end
8. are
9. sacred month
10. all
11. themselves
12. doing
13. During
14. prepare
15. have

Ramadhan is a _____ for Moslems. It is the month when Moslems devote _____ in an intense worshipping activity in order to get closer Allah. The process of Ramadhan ritual _____ very simple. It is not every Moslem that has _____ conduct this ritual. In fact, It is only the “baligh” Moslems _____ are formally obliged to perform the fasting. Those qualified persons should wake up _____ in the morning: around 3 or 4 a.m. The mothers commonly _____ food for “sahur”, that is the meal before fasting activity, for the whole family. _____ this morning time, Moslems can do _____ kinds of activity like drinking, eating, smoking, and even having sex to married couple at latest 10 minutes prior to Subuh prayer. As soon as the Subuh time enters, all those activities _____ absolutely banned. All Moslems _____ to keep themselves free from _____ such deeds as eating, drinking, having sex for the whole day. This kind of fasting will _____ when the Maghrib time _____. This ritual is unique and significantly different _____ Christian way of fasting.