Language Assessment Course: Impact on Pre-service EFL Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy

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Abstract. Being an assessment literate has never been as critical and crucial as it is today. The existence of a language assessment course has been obligatory for the English education department to support the development of pre-service EFL teachers' language assessment literacy. This study is intended to examine the impact of a language assessment course on pre-service EFL teachers' language assessment literacy. A total of 134 pre-service EFL teachers completed Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI) as pre-test and post-test of assessment literacy measures. To measure the significant difference in language assessment literacy, a series of dependent sample t-test was carried out. The result revealed a significant improvement in language assessment literacy after pre-service EFL teachers completed their language assessment course. Certain aspects of Standard in assessment literacy were in non-significant development.

Keywords: language assessment course; language assessment literacy; pre-service efl teachers; teacher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment has been regarded as an essential part of the teaching and learning process. The assessment role in educational policy has shifted in recent years and it turns to be a prominent metric in educational evaluation systems (Garrett & Steinberg, 2015; Maulidhawati et al., 2019; Salma & Prastikawati, 2021). Point to that, many teachers are expected to be more responsible for the assessment processes; developing the assessment, implementing the assessment, and interpreting the result of assessment (Beziat & Coleman, 2015; DeLuca et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2014). At the same time, many teachers admit that they are not skillful to carry on the assessment without proper and sufficient assessment literacy training (Balch & Springer, 2015; Zulaiha & Mulyono, 2020). An assessment course is then highlighted as a necessary need to improve the teachers' assessment literacy.

In English language teaching, language assessment literacy is also a salient concept in the language assessment process (Lam, 2015; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). Language assessment literacy enables EFL teachers to incorporate their language assessment apprehension and skills into their assessment practices (Barnes et al., 2017; Mellati & Khademi, 2018; Y. Xu & Brown, 2016). Their literacy on language assessment makes a crucial impact on the language learning quality so that it is a must for EFL teachers to

keep improving their language assessment literacy. Stiggins (1991) supported by Pastore and Andrade (2019) mentioned that to be language assessment literate, the EFL teachers must be skilled in some competencies such as defining the objectives, understanding assessment substance of assessing different achievements, choosing the appropriate method of assessment, gathering performance-based achievement, and avoiding the assessment bias. Assessment literacy can also be defined as teachers having adequate knowledge to determine which decision will be executed based on assessment objectives; additionally, they have the ability to choose which assessment technique to utilize, based on these objectives (Deluca & Klingerb, 2010; Fulcher, 2012; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). Essentially, EFL teachers who possess excellent assessment literacy are aware of the appropriate methodology for gathering dependable information on performance of student, using assessment result to improve learning, and effectively and accurately communicating assessment results to students and parents.

There have been studies undertaken in dissimilar settings, and the findings show that teacher assessment literacy is noteworthy and significant. The study that was done by Yamtim and Wongwanich (2014) on primary school teachers in Thailand found that their assessment literacy levels are still low. Meanwhile, Rahman

(2018) recently found that teachers' views on assessment could be placed into the summative assessment. Further, it was discovered that there was a significant disconnect between teachers' beliefs and their actions in the classroom.. In the context of foreign language teaching, Shim (2009) explored the perceptions and practices of primary school English teachers in Korea and their views on assessment literacy. This study scrutinized that the English teachers had good language assessment literacy levels, but in fact, they did not practice the knowledge of language assessment well in the classroom. In the same vein, Djoub (2017) delivered online surveys to foreign language teachers and looked into the effect of foreign language teacher assessment literacy on their practices of assessment in the classroom. He revealed that the foreign language teachers are lack language assessment literacy so that they just conducted an assessment for grading the students instead of making an improvement for students' learning and teaching quality. Further, many have reported that teachers do not feel confident in terms of their classroom assessment practices (DeLuca et al., 2013; Koloi-Keaikitse, 2016; Odo, 2016). Those studies had a significant fact that most teachers had admitted their lack of assessment literacy was due to limited assessment training and course when they were in their teacher preparation program.

The facts on previous studies above were also supported by a body of literature highlighting the insufficient preparation for teachers to implement a worthwhile assessment in the real classroom context (Campbell & Collins, 2007; Edwards, 2020; H. Xu, 2017). This inadequate preparation on assessment leads to ineffective teaching and learning (Volante & Fazio, 2007; Wiliam, 2011). For that reason, assessment course is a condemnatory need for all levels of teacher education programs to develop assessment literacy. In the absence of adequate training, teachers often assess their students in the same manner as they were assessed in school (Popham, 2011; Rahayu Saputra et al., 2020; Siegel & Wissehr, 2011; Solnyshkina et al., 2016; Throudi et al., 2015) leading to inaccurate assessments and miscommunications. This is why assessment course in teacher education program is a mandatory.

In the English language teaching context, many English teacher education programs have created and deployed questionnaires intended to gauge the extent to which their students understand assessments, and how they view their assessments' utility (Koloi-Keaikitse, 2016; Pereira et al., 2017). Moreover, some focused on the classroom assessment context (Lee & Son, 2015; McGee & Colby, 2014) and used some specific theories and applications such as individual and peer tutoring as their assessment techniques (Odo, 2016). For institutions that choose to offer their own standalone classroom assessment course, the courses can be designed to educate teaching practices specifically for classroom assessment at either the graduate or undergraduate level (Sondergeld, 2014). These approaches endeavor to provide adequate assessment courses for both in-service and preservice EFL teachers through university graduate or undergraduate-level courses. Further, Kruse et al., (2020) had proven that the assessment training which was conducted for 17 weeks had changed some aspects of pre-service teachers' assessment literacy such as their ability in choosing the method of assessment and in interpreting the result of the assessment.

Certainly, the previous studies have agreed that assessment courses, training, and workshops are beneficial for both pre-service and in-service teachers' assessment literacy. Many previous studies have concentrated on the assessment literacy of in-service teachers, but pre-service teachers' assessment literacy has not received the attention it deserves. Further, in the Indonesian context, study on assessment courses in teacher education programs is limited. For that reason, this current study is trying to fill the gaps by investigating the impact of language testing and evaluation course (the assessment course) on preservice EFL teachers' language assessment literacy levels. This current study follows the research question: "How is pre-service EFL teachers' language assessment literacy after completing language assessment course in sixteen weeks?".

METHOD

Research Goal

This study is intended to investigate the changes in language assessment literacy of preservice EFL teachers after completing an assessment course for sixteen weeks. To reach that goal, a pre-posttest quasi-experimental design without a control group was chosen as the research design of this current study. A prequestionnaire (pre-test) of Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI) was given to the group of 134 EFL pre-service teachers before they started their assessment course that is named Language

Testing and Evaluation. Meanwhile, the postquestionnaire (post-test) of Assessment Literacy Inventory was given after the assessment course was completed.

Sample and Data Collection

134 pre-service EFL teachers who enrolled in the assessment course (Language Testing and Evaluation) were involved in this study. Those 134 pre-service EFL teachers were from four different classes taught by similar team lecturers of the assessment course. All pre-service EFL teachers had never taken the assessment course.

In collecting the data, the Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI) was used as the instrument of this study. The ALI was developed and improved by Mertler and Campbell (2005). The ALI consists of 35 questions that compromise five scenarios in which each scenario consists of seven multiple-choice questions. This ALI is closely related to the seven Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment for Students.

Table 1. The ALI Alignment to Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment for Students (1990)

Standards of ALI	Items in ALI
Choosing the assessment method	1, 8, 15, 22,
(Standard 1)	29
Developing the assessment method	2, 9, 16, 23,
(Standard 2)	30
Administering, scoring, and	2 10 17 24
interpreting the result of assessment	3, 10, 17, 24, 31
(Standard 3)	31
Using the assessment result for	4, 11, 18, 25,
decision-making (Standard 4)	32
Developing valid pupil grading	5, 12, 19, 26,
procedures (Standard 5)	33
Communicating assessment results	6, 13, 20, 27,
(Standard 6)	34
Recognizing unethical, illegal, and	
otherwise inappropriate assessment	7, 14, 21, 28,
methods and uses of assessment	35
information (Standard 7)	

Multiple pilot tests and revisions of the ALI have been conducted to determine the instrument's suitability as an assessment tool for preservice teachers. This has contributed to the assessment's internal structure validity being very

strong (KR20= .74). Moreover, the reliability of the ALI reaches .75, and the mean of item difficulty is .64 (C. Mertler & Campbell, 2005)

For scoring, participants receive seven subscale scores (5 points possible per subscale) and a total score (35 points possible).

Data Analysis

There were two possible outcomes for ALI data: correct (1) or incorrect (0). We then computed a score for each subscale by calculating the average of the scores on each subscale. Each subscale had a maximum score of 5 points and 35 points for a total score. The descriptive statistics for the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire were analyzed. A series of dependent t-test using SPSS 20 was applied to examine the significant difference in pre-service EFL teachers' language assessment literacy over the assessment course. Moreover, logical assessment criteria were implemented to evaluate each standard score. There were five items in each standard which were ranging from 0 to 5 points. After the average score for each standard was calculated, it was consulted to the grading criteria (A for 5pts-4pts; B for 3.99pts-3pts; C for 2.99pts-2pts; D for 1.99pts-1pt; and F for1pt-0pts)

- RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics in table 2 had shown the initial level of pre-service EFL teachers' level of their language assessment literacy. In the prequestionnaire result, it revealed that pre-service EFL teachers (n=134) showed the high score of ALI for Standard 1 (Choosing the Assessment Method; M=3.69, SD=1.06), Standard 4 (Using the Assessment result for decision-making; M=3.51, SD=1.05), Standard 5 (Developing valid pupil grading procedures, M=3.37, SD=1.08), Standard 7 (Recognizing Inappropriate Assessment Methods and Uses of assessment information; M=3.31, SD=1.15), and Standard 2 (Developing the Assessment method; M=3.15, SD=1.06). Meanwhile, pre-service EFL teachers got the lowest score of ALI for Standard 6 (Communicating Assessment Result for Decision-Making; M=2.66, SD=1.29) and Standard 3 (Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting the Result of Assessment; M=2.33, SD=1.05).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-service EFL Teachers' level of Language Assessment Literacy before Completing Assessment Course (n=134)

Standards of Assessment Literacy Inventory	Pre-Questionnaire	
	M	SD
Choosing the assessment method (Standard 1)	3.69	1.06
Developing the assessment method (Standard 2)	3.15	1.18
Administering, scoring, and interpreting the result of assessment (Standard 3)	2.33	1.05
Using the assessment result for decision-making (Standard 4)	3.51	1.05
Developing valid pupil grading procedures (Standard 5)	3.37	1.08
Communicating assessment results (Standard 6)	2.66	1.29
Recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise		
inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment	3.31	1.15
information (Standard 7)		
Total Average	3.14	0.59

^{*}M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation

Based on table 2, it can be seen that preservice EFL teachers were low in communicating the assessment result for their decision-making in the teaching and learning process. This might be due to their lack of experience in conducting an assessment since they admit that it was the first time for them to have a course concerning assessment in the context of English language teaching. Therefore, they were not able to correlate the relationship between the assessment result and their decision-making in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Further, they were at a low level in administering, giving a score, and even interpreting the result of the assessment for they have not practiced yet the entire process of assessment in the classroom.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-service EFL Teachers' level of Language Assessment Literacy after Completing Assessment Course (n=134)

Standards of Assessment Literacy Inventory	Pre-Questionnaire of ALI	
	M	SD
Choosing the assessment method (Standard 1)	4.06	1.08
Developing the assessment method (Standard 2)	3.46	1.09
Administering, scoring, and interpreting the result of assessment (Standard 3)	2.94	1.02
Using the assessment result for decision-making (Standard 4)	4.00	1.03
Developing valid pupil grading procedures (Standard 5)	3.63	1.08
Communicating assessment results (Standard 6)	2.78	1.10
Recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information (Standard 7)	3.62	1.12
Total Average	3.5	0.40

Table 3 has presented the descriptive statistics on the post-questionnaires given to pre-service EFL teachers after they had completed the course of language testing and evaluation (assessment course). In table 3, some standards in ALI still reach the highest value. Pre-service EFL teachers still showed the highest score of ALI in Standard 1 (M=4.06, SD=1.08). The other Standard which got high and moderate scores were Standard 4

(M=4.00, SD=1.03), Standard 5 (M=3.63, SD=1.08), Standard 7 (M=3.62, SD=1.12), and Standard 2 (M=3.46, SD=1.09). On the other hand, the lowest score was showed in Standard 3 (M=2.94, SD=1.02) and Standard 6 (M=2.78, SD=1.10). The result in table 3 has presented some closest scores of ALI such as in Standard, 1, Standard 4, Standard 5, Standard 7, and Standard 2 compared to the result presented by

table 2.

On the whole, table 4 presented average scores changed significantly before and after p<0.001).

In terms of effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.56$), participation in the assessment course accounted for 56 % of the variance in the average all score average.

Table 4. Dependent t-test and Inferential Result of Pre-service EFL Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy Change (n=134)

Standards of Assessment Literacy Inventory	t-statistics	η^2
Choosing the assessment method (Standard 1)	3.024**	0.26
Developing the assessment method (Standard 2)	2.326*	0.20
Administering, scoring, and interpreting the result of assessment (Standard 3)	5.189***	0.45
Using the assessment result for decision-making (Standard 4)	4.036***	0.35
Developing valid pupil grading procedures (Standard 5)	2.214*	0.19
Communicating assessment results (Standard 6)	0.940	0.08
Recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information (Standard 7)	2.454*	0.21
Total Average	6.504	0.56

Each standard of Assessment Literacy Inventory had a large effect size (η^2 ranging from 0.19-0.45), with participation in the assessment course accounting for 19% -45% of the variance in these Standard scores. The exception was found in Standard 6 (Communicating the Assessment Results) with a medium effect size (η^2 =0,08) with 8% of the variance in this Standard score

The results of this current study agree with research which concludes preservice teachers are poorly informed about assessment standards before receiving specialized training (DeLuca et al., 2013; Deluca & Klingerb, 2010; Kruse et al., 2020; C. A. Mertler, 2004; Volante & Fazio, 2007). Further, this study confirms that the assessment course proved to be essential in increasing preservice teachers' assessment literacy, which, as the study noted previously, is a prerequisite for earlier research findings (Lee & Son, 2015; McGee & Colby, 2014; Wang, & Huang, 2008; Mclellan, 2004). Even though, the growth level for each of the seven Standards in the Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI) varied widely, ranging from substantial to minimal growth.

At the beginning of the course, pre-service EFL teachers earned high marks for Standard 1 (Choosing the Assessment Methods). They also

had high score for Standard 7 (Recognizing Unethical and Inappropriate Assessment Methods). This may be due to the prior experiences that students have had when they were students, and the ability to apply those experiences to their futures as teachers. Most preservice EFL teachers are likely to be aware of the practice of unethical assessment and incorrect scoring (Kruse et al., 2020; Sultana, 2019). As well, pre-service EFL teachers have been exposed to assessment practices to the point where they can make an informed decision about assessment methodology.

According to the growth of pre-service EFL teachers' language assessment literacy, Standard 3 (Administering, scoring, and interpreting the result of assessment) and Standard 4 (Using the assessment result for decision-making) were the most significant growth. An increase in learning growth across these two Standards is to be expected as preservice EFL teachers received instruction on skills such as administering, scoring, interpreting, and based on the assessment results, using their discretion for classroom decision-making during the assessment course. In addition, the items on the ALI assessing Standard concepts such as interpreting 3 include standardized test results, understanding the meaning of percentile rank, and calculating standard deviation. The growth that pre-service EFL teachers showed in Standard 3 was expected because all those topics were also found in the statistics course. Thus, it is suspected to be another reason pre-service EFL teachers practiced higher on this Standard.

Preservice EFL teachers also had moderate growth for Standard 2 (Developing Assessments) Standard 5 (Developing Procedures). Moderate growth appears to be reasonable because preservice teachers have been able to retain and implement the assessment skills that they learned while taking the assessment course. Students received numerous important tests throughout the course that required preservice ESL teachers to design and implement performance-based, formative, and traditional assessments while they completed practicum, which was all covered under ALI standard 2 items. To evaluate these vital assessments, teachers before service had to devise grade level and/or quality assurance methods that align with Standard 5 items from the ALI. As mentioned by the previous studies, both preservice and in-service teachers are expected to meet the challenging tasks of developing the assessments and the procedures of grading (Howley et al., 2013; C. A. Mertler, 2009). Hence, we can infer that this practice of building reliable assessments and grading systems as well as an iterative feedback loop to help learners improve their skills would enable significant and practical growth in the standards that address assessment literacy.

Pre- and post-test scores improved in all ALI subsections, but this growth was not significant for Standard 6 (Communicating Assessment Result). The lack of practice on how to communicate the assessment result was expected to be the main reason for this. During the assessment course, the lecturers did not provide enough instruction on this concept. Further, the skills of communication assessment result may expose more in the real context such as in the teaching practicum (Yuan & Lee, 2014) in which pre-service EFL teachers are given the opportunities to practice this skill to students, parents, or other educators.

Some teacher preparation programs do not require a separate course on classroom assessment, while others incorporate theoretical aspects of assessment (e.g., reliability and validity) into other educational courses (Sondergeld, 2014; Volante & Fazio, 2007). These preservice teachers do not have access to the opportunity to learn how to construct and utilize classroom assessments from a hands-on

perspective. Even a majority of pre-service EFL teachers in this study had noticed some assessment aspects in the other education courses (Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Curriculum Material Development, and Microteaching), yet they were discovered to have low scores on the score of the pre-test (pre-questionnaires) assessment literacy scores.

Nevertheless, after taking Language Testing and Evaluation as the assessment course, the preservice EFL teachers' language assessment literacy scores improved remarkably. For this reason, a well-designed classroom assessment course is needed to give pre-service EFL teachers a chance to practice designing and implementing language classroom assessments while also receiving feedback, which could lead to a noteworthy improvement in language assessment literacy.

CONCLUSION

Based on previous result of this study, it is concluded that an assessment-focused course helps future teachers acquire the competency in assessing student learning. Therefore, an assessment course is a major part of a language teacher training program. A core component of this assessment course is likely to play a crucial role in assisting prospective teachers to comprehend methods of classroom assessment and how to apply them in their future real teaching context. Having knowledge and confidence to make instructional decisions based on data about students' performance will become more critical as standards and accountability increase in influence on education policy and practice.

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