

SURVEYING PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT: IMPLICATION FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Critical to the educational process, assessment outcomes are among the most trustworthy measures of the efficacy of the teaching-learning process. Nevertheless, there has been little attention on how pre-service EFL teachers interpret assessment. This study seeks to fill a need by investigating how pre-service EFL teachers conceptualize their conceptions of assessments while working in classrooms during their practicum experiences. The study also aims to identify any connections between various conceptions of assessment purposes. The participants that took part in this study were 42 pre-service EFL teachers who willingly agreed to take part. Descriptive statistics revealed that, of the two conceptions, improvement conception was the most valuable and irrelevance conception the least. According to the correlation data, there was a strong and positive relationship between improvement, school accountability, and student accountability. Conversely, the ideas of irrelevance and progress were inversely related. These findings suggest that in order to accomplish shared objectives, teachers, elected representatives, and curriculum developers will need to work together with the government. There has to be harmony in the emergence of national and school assessment policies so that they do not clash with the values and pedagogical stances of the future English teachers.

Keywords – assessment, conceptions of assessment, pre-service EFL teachers, teacher education program

Introduction

Recognized as an indispensable component of the educational process, assessment is a major responsibility for teachers. Teachers dedicate more than half of their time in the classroom to administering assessments that monitor student advancement towards established learning objectives and offer constructive comments to enhance teaching and learning (Zaim & Arsyad, 2020; Rahman et al., 2021; Prastikawati et al., 2024). Accordingly, teachers must be well-versed in many areas in order to provide valid assessments of their students. Reason being, the evaluation of the whole learning and instruction process is dependent on the assessment. The outcome of the assessment carried out by teachers is expected to have a legitimate influence on the quality of instruction and learning (Opre, 2015; Postareff et al., 2012). As a

consequence, teachers must be proficient in assessment information.

Teachers in Indonesia encounter difficulties due to the nation's extensive use of standardized tests for assessment and decision-making (Widiastuti et al., 2020; Zulaiha et al., 2020). Such concern suggests that educating and training teachers to be proficient in evaluation is a challenging endeavor. Currently, teacher education programs include assessment course and practicum to ensure pre-service teachers are literate in assessment (Sevimel-Sahin & Subasi, 2021; Brown & Ramesal, 2012). In order to close the gap between assessment theory and practice, they need to learn more about assessment, think critically about their own views on assessments, and put their convictions into practice. While it is crucial for future

teachers to have strong assessment skills, these abilities are not always easy to develop (Aziz, 2015; Brown, Gebril, & Michaelides, 2019; Lutovac & Flores, 2022).

There has been limited attention given to preservice teachers' ideas and conceptions of assessment in studies (Remesal, 2011; Rashid & Jaidin, 2014; Brown & Remesal, 2012). A significant amount of data highlights the significance of comprehending teachers' views on assessment, which influence their assessment methods and students' learning and results. Given the extensive time spent in school as students, aspiring teachers are evaluated. The fact that initial teacher education marks the start of their professional development and is essential for the development of their professional identities, it may be that one of the most significant changes that pre-service teachers need to undergo involves their conceptions, that is, their understanding, beliefs, and attitudes towards the uses of assessment (Levy-Vered & Nasser-Abu Alhija, 2015; Izci & Caliskan, 2017)). Furthermore, recommendations for initial teacher education have been derived from the research on the perspectives of practicing educators (Fulmet, Tan, & Lee, 2019; Monteiro, Mata, & Santos, 2021). Nevertheless, there is a lack of adequate understanding concerning the specific perspectives of pre-service teachers (Brown & Remesal, 2012; Xu & He, 2019).

In the same vein, Vardar (2010) did a study to explore teachers' conceptions on assessment in Turkey. He found that students' accountability was considered the most important aspect. Zaimoğlu (2013) aimed to uncover the beliefs about assessment held by instructors and students in an EFL preparatory school. The study revealed that the concept of improvement was highly valued. Yüce (2015) supported Zaimoğlu's (2013) findings by highlighting pre-service English language teachers' views on

assessment, showing that they primarily utilized or intended to utilize assessment for enhancing performance.

Research also has demonstrated that pre-service teachers' conception of assessment change. This is due to pre-service teachers has get more familiar with the assessment procedures in teacher education program (Xu & He, 2019; Rusznyak & Bertram, 2015; Levy-Vered & Alhija, 2015). The way assessment conceptions are understood has a substantial influence on how individuals engage with and apply assessment in classroom settings. Nevertheless, not enough research has focused on how pre-service EFL teachers evolve, despite understanding the essence of teachers' assessment ideas (Aghabarari & Rahimi, 2020; Atjonen, 2022). Explicitly, an examination of the progressive development of these pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions on assessment can provide valuable insights into the complex matter of how to effectively equip future teachers to employ assessment as a learning instrument.

Regettably, in Indonesia only a small number of researchers have investigated the issue of conceptions of assessment (Arrafii, 2020; Aziz, 2015). Moreover, most studies highlight in-service teachers while none of them focuses on pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions. To fill this gaps, this present study scrutinizes pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment. The implications of these findings for teacher preparation programs could be substantial in the future.

Point to that, the primary aim of the current study is to explore pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment and the relation of each conception.

Literature Review

Assessment in Teaching and Learning Process

The process of teaching and learning a language relies heavily on assessment. It provides data on how effectively students learn, comprehend, and retain material as well as data on how well instructors teach it (Öztürk, 2021). As a result, teachers may assess and, if needed, revise their practices and supplementary materials, and students could reconsider their approach to learning.

Beliefs in Teachers Education Program

Teachers' beliefs have been discovered to impact various aspects of their work, including lesson design, student learning, and teacher decision-making (Giraldo, 2024). Students' beliefs have long been thought to influence their learning and, by extension, their ability to become effective educators. More generally, pre-service teachers' beliefs shape their self-perception and their understanding of the world (Coombe, Vafadar, & Mohebbi, 2020; Lam, 2015). Because of this, beliefs are an essential component of teacher education. Both the learning that pre-service teachers do in their first year of teacher preparation and the knowledge that they bring to the classroom in the future may be hindered by deeply held views that originate from their time as students (Levy & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). Thus, it is widely recognized that beliefs derived from personal experiences play a significant role in teacher education. Changing beliefs is difficult due to their stability, however research indicates that pre-service teachers' beliefs can be altered through chances in teacher education (Yastıbaş & Takkaç, 2018; Kremmel & Harding, 2020). Therefore, beliefs and conceptions, although distinct, are both important aspects of teacher development in early teacher education.

Conceptions of Assessment

The term conception of assessment (CoA) refers to a shared knowledge of the many ways in which students' learning and its outcomes are evaluated and tested (Berry

et al., 2019). Thus, teachers need to constantly expand and deepen their CoA if they are hoping to be assessment literate. This is due to the CoA mediates conflicts in context, helps teachers assimilate assessment knowledge, and provides an interpretative framework for their own practice.

Conceptions of assessment might include emotional and mental responses. The teacher's beliefs about what is true and false in assessment make up the cognitive dimension (Malone, 2013). The degree to which a teacher integrates their latest thoughts into their existing knowledge impacts their response to new material in the knowledge base. Teachers deepen their understanding of assessment and learn new assessment approaches that align with their present ideas (Sellan, 2017; Rashid & Jaidin, 2014).

The second dimension that it might be connected to in terms of emotional tendency is the affective dimension. Teachers' opinions on many aspects and uses of assessment are reflected in these emotions (Prastikawati et al., 2024). The evaluation process can evoke a range of emotions in present and future teachers, depending on their personal experiences with it. This suggests that their perceptions of assessment are firm enough that they will not change.

There are four basic approaches to assessment: improvement, to hold the school or the student accountable, to hold the student accountable, and to be irrelevant (Brown & Ramesal, 2012). As the first essential premise, assessment enhances both classroom learning and student progress. Secondly, school accountability takes into account the ways in which assessments might ascertain whether a teacher, a school, or a system adequately utilized the surrounding communities and system's allocated resources. This concept leverages test scores to honor outstanding educational institutions and teachers while holding underachievers accountable. The third

assessment notion asserts that for an assessment to be valid, students must be held accountable for their learning. Providing stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and prospective employers, with grades is an integral part of assessment and grading administration (Barnes et al., 2017). The third guiding premise of the assessment idea is that students' educational experiences should not include assessments of their progress. Some people think that the idea that evaluation is meaningless on its own is connected to the claim that testing is detrimental to education.

Conceptions of assessment, according to Deneen and Brown (2016), significantly affect teacher preparation programs. According to their findings, developing assessment literacy requires more than just learning about assessment theory and practicing assessment skills. The authors stress again how time-consuming it is to shape students' conceptions of assessment, and how disappointing it is that students' knowledge and skill improvements from a short training course cannot coincide with improved conceptions of assessment, which in turn hinders students' assessment literacy accomplishment.

Methodology

The study is conducted using quantitative research design and methodologies. Quantitative design is employed to assess more rigorous evaluations of assumptions. In this study, survey research was utilized to collect data from a sample of the population to verify current conditions based on many variables.

This study took place in Universitas PGRI Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Forty two pre-service EFL teachers who enrolled in the sixth semester volunteered as the participants. The participants were those who were conducting teaching practicum at some schools in Semarang. They were varied in the school levels.

The data was collected using an instrument called TCoA-III. The inventory comprises 27 items adopted from Brown (2006). This instrument was structured in a Likert scale with a range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A higher score in response to an item indicates a stronger agreement with the statement with their assessment conceptions. Cronbach's alpha values were determined as 0.87 to assess the reliability of the instrument in this study.

Prior to distributing the inventory, pre-service EFL teachers were given the study's objectives, details on the survey forms, survey schedule, and their response confidentiality. Point to data collection, participants were required to sign a consent form that was placed to the front of each inventory. The data collection process took 20 minutes.

The data was inputted into the SPSS 23 for additional analysis. Two specialists in the field identified and corrected negatively worded items. The data was analyzed to observe its dispersion and the results clearly showed that it followed a normal distribution. Reliability analysis was conducted on the scale.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics were applied to the data afterwards. All items and subscales had their mean values computed and analyzed. The next step was to use the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to examine the data and find out how strong the relationships were between all of the dependent variable.

Finding

Pre-service EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment

The results of a questionnaire on conceptions of assessment delivered to pre-service EFL teachers indicate that pre-service EFL teachers believe that assessment is used to enhance the teaching and learning process. Moreover, they

believe that assessment serves both student and school accountability.

Table 1. Pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment

Purposes in CoA	N	Mean	Std. D
Conception of Improvement (IMP)	42	4.47	.81
Conception of School Accountability (STA)	42	4.01	.78
Conception of Student Accountability (SCA)	42	3.52	.91
Conception of Irrelevance (IRR)	42	3.41	.51

Table 1 presents that pre-service EFL teachers' show their highest rank on conception of improvement ($M= 4.47$; $Std.D= .81$) among all the conceptions of assessment. After improvement conception, the conception of school accountability has the second rank ($M= 4.01$; $Std. D= .78$). Meanwhile, student accountability conception show the low rank ($M= 3.41$; $Std. D= .91$) followed by irrelevance conception as the lowest one ($M=3.41$; $Std. .51$).

In order to know the relation between each conception of assessment, Table 2 displays the result.

Table 2. Result of relationship among Pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment

CoA Inventor y	1	2	3	4
IMP	-			
SCA	.641**	-		
STA	.519*	.591*	-	
IRR	-.138*	-.091	.045	-

First analyses were done to give insurance to the normality and linearity assumptions. Improvement conception and school

accountability conception levels were strongly correlated ($r = .64$, $n = 42$, $p < .05$ with 42.20% variance of the coefficient of determination) as were student accountability conceptions ($r = .51$, $n = 42$, $p < .05$ with a 29.70% variance of the coefficient of determination). Also, student and school accountability also correlated strongly ($r = .59$, $n = 42$, $p < .05$, 32.72%). Concepts of relevance and improvement were negatively connected to a minor extent ($r = -.138$, $n = 42$, $p < 0.5$, -2.08% variance of the coefficient of determination).

Discussion

With a moderate level of agreement, the study indicated that pre-service EFL teachers should use assessment to improve teaching and learning, and the idea of improvement had the highest mean value across all arguments. According to Brown (2002), this idea is put up with the intention of raising the bar for both student learning and teacher quality. Consistent with previous research, the present study found the same thing. Results from a study by Yüce (2015) on the opinions of future educators regarding assessment and assessment methods showed that participants were somewhat in agreement with the notion of improvement. Participants have the option of using assessments to gauge how well they are doing in class and make adjustments as needed. This view was borne out by research on students' assessment beliefs conducted by Brown and Hirschfeld (2008). Their hypothesis was that students would do better on assessments when they believed the questions were designed to gauge their individual progress.

Based on the initial findings, it appears that pre-service EFL teachers consider assessment to be a promising approach to enhance the quality of both teaching and learning. While they were participating in their teaching practicum, they came to the realization that

assessment is not just about testing, but also about improving the quality of teaching in order to improve the learning process for students. This aligns with the assessment improvement approaches proposed by Postareff et al (2012). The purpose of student assessments is to provide trustworthy data that leads to improvements in teaching tactics to enhance student success. This conception of assessment perceived by pre-service EFL teachers also in line with the philosophy of assessment. The philosophy states that teachers have grounds in viewing assessment as ineffective or just superficially linked to supervising educators, educational institutions, or students unless the assessment leads to improvement.

This study's second finding reveals a significant positive association between improvement and school accountability, as well as improvement and student accountability. This outcome is consistent with Yüce's (2015) research. She discovered good and strong relationships between improvement, school accountability, and student accountability in her study. Additionally, Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) said that students who perceive evaluation as a source of personal accountability for their learning are more likely to succeed. This is because they see assessment as a way to track their progress. In a similar vein, Vardar (2010) discovered that all three concepts were connected to one another in a moderate manner, with the exception of irrelevance, which demonstrated linkages that were not significant with the other levels. The findings suggested a high correlation between progress, school accountability, and student accountability, with participants acknowledging their beneficial interdependence. The consistent results in these investigations may be attributed to the educational system and cultural norms in Indonesia. The Indonesian school system is highly competitive. Parents want both their

children and their schools to be accountable. Students' academic performance, their rankings in national exams, and their school's performance are crucial factors in determining success and failure. This emphasizes the idea that assessments should enhance the teaching and learning process and ensure accountability for both the process and outcomes.

Conversely, the idea of irrelevance was discovered to have minimal or insignificant connections with other assessment levels. The correlation analysis showed a slight negative link between improvement and irrelevance conceptions. School accountability and irrelevance conceptions were negatively associated and had a non-significant connection. The results align with Vardar's (2010) study, showing that the idea of irrelevance in assessment did not have significant correlations with other levels of assessment concepts.

Implications for Teacher Education

Our findings highlight the need of including diverse understandings of assessment within preservice teachers' curricula. It might be especially useful to investigate these ideas indirectly, in light of other topics covered in teacher education. The three components of the constructive alignment triangle—learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment—are closely tied to one another (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2007). So, by talking about those other two things, we may get the ideas for assessment.

The current study also indicates that pre-service EFL teachers should focus on current conceptions of assessment for both learning and as a learning tool. To add, customizing language assessment course syllabus to meet the individual requirements of pre-service EFL teachers

is essential for achieving effective classroom assessment practices.

Conclusions

The results of this study lead to the conclusion that pre-service EFL teachers shared the idea that assessment should be utilized to enhance teaching and learning. They said that their comprehension of the goals of evaluation was mostly shaped by an irrelevant perspective of it. Then, the findings demonstrated that there was a substantial positive correlation among improvement, school accountability, and student accountability conceptions, but improvement and irrelevance conceptions were inversely related.

With the highest mean value and agreement level of all the conception levels, the improvement conception showed that future English teachers are keen to use assessment to enhance the teaching and learning process. Thus, accounting for improvement conception coupled with school and student accountability should be used to arrange and update textbooks, assessment techniques, etc.

Furthermore, despite having the lowest mean value of all, the notion of irrelevance continues to exist in the minds of student teachers. For all teacher candidates, then, assessment-related courses should be varied and stressed throughout their undergraduate studies.

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