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Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Formative Assessment Literacy in Indonesian

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Abstract. The current study investigates the formative assessment literacy of Indonesian pre-service English teachers by adopting a sequential mixed-method approach. The survey data revealed that participants had a moderate level of formative assessment literacy ($M = 3.02$), with varying scores across three components. The conceptual domain scored the highest ($M = 3.12$), followed by the socio-emotional domain ($M = 2.98$) and the practical domain ($M = 2.96$). The second finding gained from the second part of the survey and from interview sessions indicated five different challenges encountered by the participants in practicing formative assessment. The issues raised by the participants were related to limited support from their institution, their heavy teaching workload, lack of digital literacy, their students' low learning motivation, and the participants' inadequate assessment skills and knowledge. Although this study has several limitations, it provides several implications, such as the urgency of providing training for teachers to help them improve their assessment literacy.

Keywords: assessment literacy, formative assessment, pre-service teachers

Introduction

The fundamental concept of Formative Assessment Literacy (FAL henceforth) should be based on the core element, Language Assessment Literacy (LAL henceforth). LAL has been seen as one of the crucial components in language teaching and thus needs to be developed by language teachers (Giraldo, 2018). With regards this, Gu and Lam (2023) argued that training programs should be regularly organized to help language teachers improve their assessment literacy. This is for the purpose of enabling language teachers to apply different types of assessment, including Formative Assessment (FA henceforth). It is a systematic technique conducted by teachers which is intended to interpret

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students' learning progress and utilizing them to help improve learning process (Gu & Lam, 2023). In relation to this, Gezer, et al (2021) emphasized that FA should be a continual process and an essential guidance for teachers. Scholars find that there have been many types of formative assessment strategies which can be utilized for language teachers to achieve effective learnings. These include feedback, observation, journals, peer assessment, etc.

Scholars have mentioned that FA has been considerably a powerful teaching approach due to its benefits for students' learning. With regard this, Leenknecht, et al, (2021) highlighted that FA was one of important elements in language teaching which might help teachers to create innovative learning environment. Although FA has been considerably an effective assessment technique in language teaching, however, Wylie and Lyon (2015) found that not many teachers had the ability and skills to apply FA in the process of their teaching activities. Scholars found that FA was occasionally applied in several educational contexts. Despite this, many practices of FA were not considerably satisfactory (Yan & Brown, 2021). In addition, Wiley (2020) mentioned that the practices of FA by language teachers were not aligned with educational principles. Specifically, it was found that teachers have experienced barriers in understanding the value of assessment (Will, et al, 2019)

Due to the fact that FA can benefit students' learning, many education institutions have instructed language teachers to apply FA in the process of their teachings, including in Indonesian educational contexts. Moreover, the case of COVID-19 pandemic in early 2022 has made Indonesian government to stipulate a new curriculum, known as *Kurikulum Merdeka*. It is worth noting that this curriculum emphasized the implementation of FA in all education institutions across the nation. Therefore, all teachers including language teachers need to have adequate level of assessment literacy to effectively implement all types of assessment including FA. If teachers have limited amount of assessment literacy, it can be assumed that it will negatively affect students' learning progress.

Previous Research

Scholars have conducted a number of studies related to FA in the context of Indonesian education institutions. For example, Aria, et al (2021) explored FA skills and knowledge among 48 Indonesian secondary-level EFL teachers. By employing an online questionnaire, their findings reported a general overview of the teachers FA skills and knowledge. Despite insightful findings, their research data was not triangulated by other instruments such as interviews or teachers' documents. Similarly, Fitriyah, et al (2022) investigated FA skills and knowledge of 55 Indonesian secondary-level EFL teachers. Although their findings were considerably significant, they did not employ other instruments to ensure data triangulation. Likewise, Hutami and Putro (2023) examine FA skills and knowledge of 78 Indonesian secondary-level EFL teachers by administering an assessment test. Despite comprehensive research procedure, they did not conduct classroom observations to ensure the teachers' FA implementation.

Based on review of previous studies above, it is clear that further research concerning the implementation of FA need to conduct. The current study seeks to fill in this gap by examining the current state of FA literacy of Indonesian pre-service teachers (PST henceforth), and challenges they have encountered when practicing FA in their teaching process. To address the research purposes above, the following two research questions are outlined to guide the study:

1. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive their skills and knowledge of formative assessment?
2. What challenges do pre-service EFL teachers experience when implementing formative assessment?

It is expected that the current study will provide contribution both theoretically and practically for different stakeholders including teachers, policy makers, syllabus designers, material developers, and more.

Method

Research Design

To address the research objectives, this study adopted a sequential design of mixed-method approach which was conducted at University of Hamzanwadi, a state university in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Particularly, this study was carried out at the Faculty of Language, Arts, and Humanity, English Education Program Study.

Participants

100 pre-service teachers were purposively recruited to participate in this study. All of them had completed the apprenticeship program assigned by their university. The table below shows the information of the participants.

Table 1. Information of the 100 Participants

Information	Category	Number of Participants
Gender	Male	38
	Female	62
Age Range (in years)	15-25	88
	25-35	12
	35-45	0
Length of Learning English (in years)	1-10	59
	10-20	34
	20-30	7
	30-40	0

Instruments

To address the two research questions above, two different types of instruments were employed in this study. The first instrument was a survey called

TFALS (Teacher Formative Assessment Literacy Scale) which was adapted from Yan and Pastore (2022). This survey consisted of two parts; the first part contained 22 statements which the participants needed to rank through a Likert scale of one to six where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=slightly agree, 5=agree, and 6=strongly agree. Meanwhile, the second part of the survey contained 5 open-ended questions relating to challenges experienced by participants.

The second instrument employed in this study was semi-structured interviews. Each interview was started by raising a general question (ex: what do you know about assessment in language teaching?), followed by several questions to gain more specific information. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 45 minutes using Bahasa Indonesia to avoid language barriers.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study used IBM SPSS 12 Software to find out literacy level of teachers' formative assessment by calculating mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD). Based on the interval score proposed by Dixon and Massey (1987), the mean score (M) was categorized into the following criteria; 1) very high-level literacy ($M = 4.21 - 5.00$), 2) high level literacy ($M = 3.41 - 4.20$), 3) moderate level literacy ($M = 2.61 - 3.40$), 4) low level literacy ($M = 1.81 - 2.60$), and 5) very low-level literacy ($M = 1.00 - 1.81$). In addition, NVivo 12 Software was used to analyse data from the second part of the survey and interview process. This was followed by manual analysis of the researchers to ensure the validity of data generated.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings gained from both quantitative and qualitative data to address the two research questions.

Pre-Service Teacher Perception of Their Formative Assessment Skills and Knowledge

Table 2. Teachers Formative Assessment Literacy

Domains	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Conceptual Domains (CD)</i>		
I tell students foundational knowledge of FA	3.00	0.49
I know that FA can identify what students need.	3.10	0.56
I understand that FA should have linearities with students learning goals.	3.16	0.56
I believe that FA need to represent what students have learnt.	3.15	0.53
I understand that FA can help students achieve their learning goals.	3.17	0.50
I believe that FA should be able to engage students to learning.	3.11	0.60
I know FA strategies which allow students exhibit their learning process.	3.19	0.55

Average	3.12	0.54
Practical Domains (PD)		
I make use of different types of FA tools.	3.11	0.60
I apply peer-assessment activities	3.07	0.59
I apply self-assessment activities.	2.93	0.59
I provide feedback on my students' tasks.	2.79	0.61
I tell students what aspects need to improve for their learning progress.	3.01	0.60
I ask students to utilize my feedback to help their future learning.	2.88	0.57
I tell students my assessment purposes.	3.04	0.58
I inform the criteria of each assessment to students	2.88	0.57
Average	2.96	0.58
Socio-Emotional Domains (SED)		
I know that assessment concepts to be understood by both teachers and students.	3.01	0.59
I know how to get involved in students' emotional feelings towards assessment process.	3.04	0.55
I understand that students' beliefs influence their assessment attitudes.	2.87	0.56
I recognize positive impact of feedback for students' learning.	3.02	0.59
I know ethical factors in the process of assessment.	3.03	0.56
I acknowledge students' well-being in the practices of assessment.	2.96	0.61
I understand that students need to have benefits from the process of assessment.	2.99	0.53
Average	2.98	0.57
Total Average	3.02	0.56

It is clear from the table that the average value of the three aspects (conception domain, practical domain, and socio-emotional domain) is 3.02 with standard deviation of 0.56. According to the scale proposed by Dixon and Massey (1987), the mean value of 3.02 falls into the moderate category which means that the level of FA literacy of the participants is moderate.

In relation to conception domain, the highest mean value ($M=3.19$, $SD=0.55$) was gained by item 7 (I know FA strategies which allow students exhibit their learning process). This finding was similarly shown by data from interview process. PST3 and PST6, for example, argued:

PST3 : I have been realizing that FA can benefit students learning since it uses no tests to make decisions. My assessment trainer explained this few months ago when I participated in a training program. (Code: A-1-b)

PST6 : My colleagues told me many types of techniques in FA. Since then, mid- and final- tests are not the only way to assess students learning progress. (Code: A-1-a)

With regards practical domain, the highest mean value ($M=3.11$, $SD=0.60$) was gained by item 5 (I tell students what aspects need to improve for their learning progress). Likewise, the participants responded in the interview session:

PST8 : Many of my students have a very little motivation in learning English. Therefore, I often tell them what aspects need to improve to help them with their learning process. (Code: B-2-a)

PST10 : Since my students are predominantly passive learners, it is important that I tell them materials they should focus on at the very beginning. (Code: B-2-b)

As for socio-emotional domain, the highest mean value ($M=3.04$, $SD=0.55$) was gained by item 2 (I know how to get involved in students' emotional feelings towards assessment process). Similarly, the participants responded in the interview:

PST3 : Can you imagine teaching students with no learning enthusiasm? Not easy. Therefore, I often get involved in my students emotional feeling before conducting assessment. (Code: B-2-a)

PST5 : Since many of my students are shy learners, I often get involved in their responsive feeling during assessment process." (Code: B-2-b)

The findings gained from both quantitative and qualitative data above are in line with that of Hutami and Putro (2023). They found that 75 Indonesian high school teachers in their study were found to have fair level of literacy in FA with mean value of 13.29 for both teachers' assessment concept and practices. In addition, they reported that assessment courses had positive effects on the teachers' literacy and practices of FA. Differently, the teachers in the current study made efforts by communication with colleagues and participating in training programs to help them with their FA literacy. According to Basturkmen (2019), training programs were found as one of effective strategies to help teachers update with current trends in teaching activities. Therefore, the teachers in the current study utilized relevant information they have received from training programs to help them when practicing FA in their classroom activities. Similar finding was reported by Luthfiyyah, et al (2020). They found that assessment literacy of Indonesian EFL teachers in their study was in moderate level. Although their study provides us with insightful data of language assessment literacy, they did not focus their study on one type of assessment like the current study did. As argued by Marcu (2020), focusing on one research topic was found to become a more effective method to obtain more comprehensive data.

Challenges Experienced by Pre-Service Teachers in Formative Assessment Practices

Qualitative data obtained from part two of the survey and from interview process indicated that there have been four different types of challenges which have affected the PSTs practices of FA. The first challenge was found to have been relating with institutional support. The PSTs wrote in the survey:

PST1 : The school where I completed my apprenticeship program has never been providing teachers with assessment trainings. Therefore, I often relied on the internet when searching information about FA" (Code: B-1-a)

PST 3 : During the apprenticeship program I took last year, I mostly prepare assessment media myself. This is because the school provided very limited facilities for assessment process." (Code: B-1-b)

Similar data was shown in the interview. For example, PST2 and PST5 mentioned the struggle they had encountered:

PST 2: The internet was my main source of FA. I would say the school needed to facilitate teachers with assessment trainings before teachers began their teaching programs. (Code: B-1-a)

PST 5: Honestly speaking, the teaching facilities where I did my apprenticeship program were very limited. Because of this, I often applied summative assessment in my teaching for practicality reason. (Code: B-1-a)

This finding is in line with that of Chen, et al (2021). Their study revealed that support from institution was found to become one of challenging issues for teachers. Most of the teachers in their study experienced very limited teaching facilities which then negatively affected their assessment practices. The teachers in the current study utilized the internet to solve this issue. One of the teachers in the current study implemented summative assessment in his teaching for practicality purpose. Although this type of assessment provides teachers with some benefits, Ismail, et al (2021) argued that summative assessment is found to have been less effective in helping students' language learning progress.

The second challenge which has been found to become one of the challenging issues for the teachers was teaching workload. In the survey, the participants wrote their arguments about their heavy teaching workload:

PST 4: I was assigned to teach almost every day during my apprenticeship program. It was absolutely very tiring. In addition, my students' low learning motivation was also problematic. All of these negatively affected my assessment processes. (Code: A-1-a)

PST 7: The first issue I received during my apprenticeship program was my teaching workload. The second thing was administrative things including lesson plans I had to submit before teaching. (Code: A-1-a)

In the interview process, the participants similarly mentioned the negative effects of their teaching workload. PST6 and PST10 argued:

PST6 : It was frustrating to teach a total of 10 different classes in one week. I did not know why I was assigned to teach so many classes. (Code: A-1-a)

PST10 : I had to teach four different classes in one day, and teach three different classes in another day. It was so tiring. (Code: A-1-b)

The statements above clearly indicated that teaching workload has been one of challenging issues for the participants. This finding aligned with the data showed by Asare and Afriyie (2023). Aside from teaching workload, the teachers' assessment performances in their study were affected by other issues such as big size classes and the changes of curriculum policy.

Regarding digital literacy, the teachers wrote on the survey their experiences implementing digital FA:

PST2 : I participate in an online training few weeks ago. I received a lot of relevant information about using electronic devices in FA. (Code: A-2-a)

PST5 : Honestly, I often watch videos from YouTube to help me make use of digital tools in assessing my students learning progress. (Code: A-2-b)

Similarly, PST8 and PST9 mentioned in the interview their experiences regarding digital FA:

PST8 : I mostly check on google regarding relevant software I can utilize to conduct digital FA. (Code: A-2-b)

With regards the use of electronic devices in teaching English language, Rokenes and Krumsyik (2016) argued that it has been one of hindrance factors among teachers since many of them were found to have limited digital literacy. The participants in the current study realized the advantages of using technology in assessing their students' learning despite their low-level of digital literacy. This finding aligns with what Marcelo and Yot-Dominguez (2019) have researched. They found that two components which potentially have affected teachers' digital literacy development were teachers' self-confidence and educational trainings. Despite their limited literacy in using digital tools, the participants in the current study have participated in trainings and learned from the internet to help them improve their digital literacy.

In relation to students' issue, some participants wrote on the survey how they have encountered this challenge:

PST4 : Motivating shy students to participate in peer-assessment is not easy. Many of them enjoy learning individually. (Code: B-2-a)

PST6 : Some of my students reject group discussion activity. They seem to have preferred individual tasks. (Code: B-2-a)

The interview sessions support the statements above. PST3 and PST9, for instance, reflected:

PST3 : Many of my students seem to have reluctance when taking a part in classroom activities. They mostly rely on teacher's explanation. (Code: B-2-b)

PST9 : My students are mostly focusing their study on grades. This seems to have prevented them from participating in authentic learnings. (Code: B-2-b)

It is clear from the statements above that the teachers experienced students' issues. Similar findings were reported by Chen, et al (2021) who showed that the teachers in their study were found to have many passive students. In relation to this, Lam (2019) argued that students' passivity in classroom activities was one of influential factors in the practices of FA.

Regarding assessment skills and knowledge, some participants enjoyed participating in assessment trainings outside of their school to find more information about assessment.

PST1 : Previously, I have participated in relevant trainings. I received a lot of information about assessment in language teaching. (Code: B-3-a)

PST6 : I cannot clearly remember what assessment materials I have studied few years ago. Therefore, I try to talk with my colleagues to help me recalled what I have studied. (Code: B-3-b)

Similar finding was shown in the interview. For example, PST4 said that:

PST4 : I know that FA can benefit student's learning, but honestly, I don't know much techniques in FA. I realize that I need to attend more assessment trainings in the future. (Code: B-3-b)

This finding aligns with what Saoud (2022) has researched. He found that training programs should be continuously provided to help teachers with their assessment literacy development and practices. The teachers in the current study appeared to have been aware of this issue. They communicated with their colleagues and planned to participate in relevant trainings. As mentioned by Al-Bhalani (2019), these strategies were found to have been beneficial for teachers in developing their assessment literacy.

Conclusion

Quantitative data gained from the survey revealed that the pre-service English teachers had a moderate level of literacy in FA. In addition, qualitative data from the second of the survey and from interview sessions, the teachers encountered five different challenges in the practices of FA.

As the findings revealed, pedagogical implications from the current study may include three things. First, the teachers need to participate more in assessment trainings for the purpose of helping develop their literacy in assessment process. Second, institution officials need to be more mindful with teachers teaching workload since it may detrimentally effects on teachers' assessment performances. Third, training programs need to design to help teachers improve their digital literacy

Despite this, several limitations are found in the current study. First, the participants of this study are relatively limited. Future research needs to recruit more participants to generate more representative findings. Second, the current study examined FA from teachers' points of view. Future research needs to explore perceptions of other groups including students, syllabus designers, and school headmaster to obtain more comprehensive findings.

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