



How Pre-Service English Teachers Understand and Enact Assessment in Teaching Practicum: Narratives from Within

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Introduction

Assessing students' performance in learning is necessary and a crucial task that teachers should enact (Brooks et al., 2020; Cho et al., 2020). Assessment is needed to help the teachers and students identify learning gaps and goals to facilitate targeted instruction (Deluca & Hughes, 2014; Mok, 2010). However, the first and foremost issue to date is that assessment is believed to be challenging as it includes knowledge and how to practice it in classes. Several studies have attempted to investigate assessment effectiveness in the classroom and teachers' grading decisions (see Dhillon & Kaur, 2020; Mantzicopoulos et al., 2018; Pratolo & Purwanti, 2020). Those studies documented various assessment practices enacted by teachers and concluded that assessment is critical in classroom learning. Other studies have also looked into the interlink between teacher knowledge and practice of assessment in language classrooms worldwide (see, for example, Leung, 2013; Yin, 2010).

The primary goal of assessment in the classroom is to enable students to develop their autonomous learning. This paradigm considers students as agents of assessment, rather than looking at them as the passive recipients of classroom assessment (Rasyidah et al., 2020). Classroom assessment serves as the social construction of student understanding and teacher teaching performance outlook. However, in this case, teachers are asked to provide active learning through assessment for students which enables them to sustain their competencies. In obtaining a well-practiced classroom assessment, teacher knowledge is of paramount importance (Wolff et al., 2020).

In the context of pre-service teacher education programs, although some attempts have been made to address assessment knowledge and practice, very little attention has been geared toward exploring Indonesian pre-service English teachers' knowledge and practice of assessment. Research in this area has been exclusively done toward in-service and university teachers (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018; Tavassoli & Farhady, 2018; Xu & Liu, 2009; Zulaiha et al., 2020). In fact, assessment literacy and its practice enacted



by pre-service teachers have become an important topic in EFL research. Meanwhile, pre-service teacher education serves as the initial preparation of teacher candidates for assessment literacy (Xu & He, 2019).

Previous studies have reported that pre-service teachers are the key components of initial teacher preparation programs (Bannister-Tyrrell et al., 2018; Kuswandono, 2017; Ubaidillah et al., 2020). Those studies inform that the values, emotions, beliefs, knowledge, and aspirations of pre-service teachers are essential in reframing the higher education curricula. Despite this, studies that specifically investigate assessment knowledge and practices among pre-service English teachers seem sparse, particularly in the Indonesian context. To the best of our understanding, previous research has primarily focused on teaching practices (Mudra, 2018; Tan et al., 2019; Tutyandari, 2022), identity construction (Nue & Manara, 2022; Ubaidillah et al., 2020), and belief systems (Kuswandono, 2017; Tustiawati, 2017; Ubaidillah, 2018). The literature signals that further studies on assessment knowledge and practice among pre-service English teachers are worth doing. Understanding pre-service English teachers’ knowledge of assessment and their practices may provide feedback for re-designing curricula in teacher education programs and experiences for future English teachers to prepare their professional expertise.

In order to delve into the problem, two research questions are addressed in this study:

1. How do pre-service English teachers understand assessment in teaching practicum?
2. In what ways do they enact assessment in teaching practicum?

Methodology

Design

This study employed a narrative inquiry to explore pre-service English teachers’ knowledge and practice of assessment in teaching practicum. Our reasons for using such a design are threefold. First, narrative research exploring classroom assessment practices enacted by pre-service English teachers seems sparse in the Indonesian context. Second, the emergence of narrative inquiry into EFL research is lacking in general (see Ubaidillah et al., 2023). Third, listening to personal stories leads to self-understanding that echoes emotions, lived experiences, and personal voices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participants

At the outset, we initially recruited five pre-service English teachers from a private university in East Java Province, Indonesia, through a snowballing technique. However, due to personal reasons, two of them withdrew from our study. As a result, we collected the data from three participants: Ani, Anton, and Rika (see Table 1 for participants’ detailed profiles).

TABLE 1
Participants’ Profiles

No	Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Year of Study
1	Ani	Female	21 years old	Third year
2	Anton	Male	20 years old	Third year
3	Rika	Female	21 years old	Third year

For ethical considerations, pseudonyms were used. Three of the participants were studying at an initial teacher preparation program in a private university in East Java and had taken a course on language assessment. Prior to the commencement of this research, they had undertaken a teaching practicum in public secondary schools in Malang. A consent form was sent to the participants. Initially, the form explained the

aims, benefits, and outcomes of the study. The participants were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, they signed the form to participate voluntarily in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data in this study were gathered through in-depth interviews over a period of two months (from May 2020 to June 2020). Although we used some guiding questions in the interview sessions, the participants were not limited to telling their personal stories on assessment knowledge and practice. This was done to generate the participants' wholeness of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interview was done multiple times through Zoom with around 30 to 45 minutes for each session. The discussion was enacted using *Bahasa Indonesia* and English interchangeably.

In the analysis stage, we first transcribed the interview and read it multiple times to achieve a global understanding of the participants' shared voices. Next, we identified and grouped similar excerpts into a three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry: looking backward, looking inward/outward, and looking forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We also developed themes that answer the research questions addressed in this study. This categorical content analysis enabled us to present three themes as the findings: 1) the contribution of prior learning, 2) enacting assessment in teaching practicum, and 3) envisioning assessment practice.

Findings

Findings from this study are detailed using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry: looking backward, looking inward/outward, and looking forward.

Looking Backward: The Contribution of Prior Learning

Our initial inquiry into the participants' lived experiences was about their personal reasons for choosing an English language teaching program and continued with past English language learning achievement and classroom learning on language assessment in their study programs. It is intriguing to see how the three participants shared their intrinsic motivation in opting for an English language teaching program. It is depicted in the interviews with Ani and Anton:

Excerpt 1:

The first reason is that I like English and since I was a kid my parents support me to be a teacher. Actually, I wanted to be a doctor or others. My parents always said that I had to be a teacher because my uncle and my aunt became teachers. Since I was in kindergarten to junior high school, I studied English course, even though I was still poor in speaking skills I liked writing so much (Interview, Ani, 14 May 2020).

Excerpt 2:

I had dreamed of being an English teacher since I was in vocational high school because I have loved to be a teacher since I was in vocational high school. So that's why, I choose the English education department (Interview, Anton, 13 May 2020).

When asked about their past experiences of achieving a teacher's score for their English competence during the class, one of the participants, Ani, shared that she seldom attended the English class due to boredom and playing around with friends, instead of learning.

Excerpt 3:

I got a bad score when I was in junior high school. I got a score of 4 if I am not mistaken. It was because I felt that I was still in elementary school so I liked playing around with my friends. I seldom studied. I was not serious about studying but my parents still supported me to study in the course. My parent always said, "you have to do this and don't do this". I felt tired because my parents wanted me to study hard (Interview, Ani, 14 May 2020).

The first author of this study continued asking Ani whether her low score was caused by her passive learning performance. In the interview, Ani contended that:

Excerpt 4:

I saw the teacher was so boring. I saw that the teacher didn't have good methods of teaching. He always used the same method like explaining and doing exercises. He was so monotone. There was no game or speaking practice with our friends. That made me bored so that's why I got a bad score (Interview, Ani, 14 May 2020).

Interestingly, Anton had a little different experience in achieving a teacher's score for his English competence. Despite his very confident feeling about a good score, the teacher gave a low score on him. It is depicted in the interview:

Excerpt 5:

I felt sad because I was really confident in English. I was shocked when I saw the result of my examination (Interview, Anton, 13 May 2020).

In the context of attending a course on language assessment, Ani contended that giving assessment done by teachers is not an easy task. She commented on the difficulty teachers have to go within giving assessments to students. She shared in the interview:

Excerpt 6:

I know how to be a good teacher and how to give a good assessment. From the assessment course, I know that there were many approaches on how to give a good assessment. And now I know that the way teachers give assessments is so complicated and it is not easy for the administration. How lucky I am! When I was in college, I got a lecturer who was capable of explaining assessments so I could understand the lesson (Interview, Ani, 14 May 2020).

On the other hand, Rika shared that giving an assessment, as she understood from the course, is quite difficult. She expressively signaled its complexity under the remark, "For smart students, how to assess? Do we need to give the standard score?" Both Ani's and Rika's comments on assessment practice indicate that giving assessments to students is not easy. Students' real competence and the administrators' needs should be considered.

Looking Inward and Outward: Enacting Assessment in Teaching Practicum

The study also inquired about participants' lived experiences of enacting assessment during the teaching practicum. In the interview, Rika stressed that her understanding of assessment does not suffice for the practice in the class during teaching practicum. She admitted that her previous assessment course at the ELT program only theoretically quipped her and her friends with assessment understanding, but excluded practical steps to enacting it in the class. Rika shared that:

Excerpt 7:

It was still complicated and difficult because I didn't get a complete lesson from my lecture. It was not optimal. I only got the theory. We never practice in the class but I have to practice it directly in my teaching practicum (Interview, Rika, 17 May 2020).

Similar experiences were also encountered by Ani. In the interview, she contended that the lecturer never assigned students to practice the assessment, making her confused when conducting assessments during the teaching practicum. In the interview, Ani shared that:

Excerpt 8:

Little bit different, because at that time, I only listened to the explanation of lessons from my lecture then he gave the assignment, and we never practiced. As a matter of fact, when I was in the teaching practicum, I was directly practicing to give assessments to the students. So, I saw a lesson plan from my senior to learn from there. But actually, what I got from the lecture is good, the most difficult thing is in practice (Interview, Ani, 11 June 2020).

Ani added an explanation in the interview:

Excerpt 9:

The condition in the class influences the students. For example, if the students are not in a good mood to learn or the students don't have the spirit to learn. So, I felt confused to give a score. Sometimes they thought that I was only a practicum teacher so they didn't care about me. They underestimate teaching practicum teachers (Interview, Ani, 12 June 2020).

Anton, however, experienced no complexities in enacting classroom assessments, particularly for reading classes. He seemed to use contextual aspects of assessing students' performance in the class, such as looking at the standard competency (KD) that every teacher has in his or her lesson plan. Anton shared that:

Excerpt 10:

I got to experience becoming a teacher in Islamic Junior High School. I only got a chance to give an assessment in reading. I didn't get a chance to give an assessment on speaking and listening because at that time there was no basic competence in speaking and listening. So, I can't give the student assessment on it. The assessment is complicated because today it must be assessed with critical thinking (Interview, Anton, 12 June 2020).

Looking Forward: Envisioning Assessment Practice

At the end of the data collection, we asked about participants' future aspirations on assessment knowledge and practice for their future careers. This was done in order to construe the participants' reflections after exploring their past and present lived experiences. The three participants agreed that becoming a professional English teacher who can assess students' performance in the classroom is vital. They contended that assessment in the class should be able to measure what students understand from the lessons. Anton, for instance, in the interview shared that:

Excerpt 11:

The important thing when we become a teacher is that we have the motivation to do the assessment. So, it doesn't mean that administration is not important but the administration can help us make good assessments. Administration helps the teacher do good assessments. So, I do agree that the teacher

will be doing administration before doing an assessment. Because I knew some teachers didn't do good administration because it is complicated (Interview, Anton, 13 June 2020).

Upon becoming an English teacher, Rika envisions a moral responsibility to ask students who obtained low scores in the class. It was shared by her in the interview:

Excerpt 12:

I want to be honest to give a score. So, if there are students who got scores under standard competence, I will give training again. I ask them closely in the teaching practicum room then I give them many questions like "what is the difficult thing for you to study English? Why you don't have the spirit to study? etc". So, because of that, their English is better than before (Interview, Rika, 13 June 2020).

Lastly, Ani contended that when becoming an English teacher, she would be creative and innovative in assessing students' English competence based on how well the students understand the lesson. It is depicted in the interview with her:

Excerpt 13:

If I become an English teacher, I want to be a creative and innovative teacher. For example, I use good methods in teaching (Interview, Ani, 13 June 2020).

The study's findings documented three dimensions of stories from participants' experiences, such as looking backward at their prior learning, looking inward/outward at their present assessment practice, and looking forward at their career envision. The study then revealed that past, present, and future narratives of the participants co-construct positioning in terms of how they understand assessment and enact it in professional careers.

Discussion

The participants' lived experiences were first seen from their motivational background in enrolling in the English language teaching program at the university as well as their prior learning in the language assessment course. In the interview, all participants signaled personal and intrinsic motivation to study in the ELT program (Bergmark et al., 2018; Inman & Marlow, 2004). Teacher as a profession is seen as a moral-led continuum wherein student teachers aspire (Campbell, 2008). Interestingly, the participants also shared that they encountered unenjoyable learning experiences related to the teacher scoring system in the previous schools. Two of the participants achieved low scores despite their confidence in better scores. This mismatch leads to dissatisfaction and boredom among students in the classroom (Hill et al., 2012).

When asked about their prior learning experiences in the assessment course, the participants encountered multifaceted experiences of studying the course in the classroom. The classroom teaching was much geared toward theoretical explanation rather than practical teaching by the teachers. Many scholars have regarded that assessment is not an easy domain in the teaching and learning process (see, Sluijsmans & Prins, 2006; Stacey et al., 2020; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). This evidence signals that university teachers may encounter difficulties in teaching assessment courses.

The participants' past experiences contributed to their present knowledge and practice of assessment during the teaching practicum (Rasyidah et al., 2020). The findings captured that the participants' knowledge of assessment is premature, influenced by their minimal understanding of the assessment course in the previous semesters. In practice, the participants referred much to their lesson plan during the teaching practicum which seems to be contextually based on students' competence and classroom conditions. Our findings, in this case, inform that assessment can be contextually enacted based on students' performance and classroom conditions.

Furthermore, all participants in the present study confirmed that assessments enacted by teachers are not easy and dynamic, and should be related to the teacher's lesson planning. Previous studies have revealed teachers' multiple approaches to assessment in the class such as formative assessment (Earle, 2020), technology-based assessment (Danniels et al., 2020), and authentic assessment (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). The findings of the present study differ from those of previous studies in terms of contextual classroom conditions and student performance as the assessment consideration in the class done by pre-service English teachers. Thus, the findings contribute to the contextualization of the assessment curriculum in pre-service teacher education programs.

Conclusion

The present study revealed pre-service English teachers' knowledge and practice of assessment using a narrative inquiry as the methodology. The results documented multifaceted and complex understanding as well as incongruences of prior learning with the present practice of assessment among the participants. Informed by these findings, pre-service education programs should re-design their curriculum for assessment literacy and practice in order to equip pre-service teachers with a comprehensive understanding of assessment and the practice of it in the classroom. Our study is open to limitations in terms of generalizability as it is qualitative research in nature. The current study recruited three pre-service teachers who have done their teaching practicum at schools. A study with a larger number of participants and different research methods might result in different outcomes. Lastly, this study provides new insights for teacher education programs and university teachers to enact assessments embodied with pre-service teachers' personal experiences in teaching practicum.

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