

Factors Influencing Assessment Decision-Making of Pre-Service EFL Teachers: Insights From the Teaching Practicum Experience

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Abstract—Effective classroom assessment is essential for quality teaching, yet pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers often face challenges in assessment decision-making during their practicum. This study explores factors influencing the assessment practices of 42 pre-service EFL teachers in senior high schools in Semarang, Indonesia. Using a qualitative research design and semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis revealed four key findings. First, pre-service teachers' knowledge of assessment principles, such as validity, reliability, and formative strategies, supported effective design but was limited by gaps in practical application. Second, their conceptions of assessment, shaped by prior experiences and institutional norms, influenced their preferences for formative versus summative approaches, with positive beliefs fostering innovation and traditional views constraining flexibility. Third, mentor teachers played a pivotal role, with supportive guidance enhancing autonomy and confidence, while rigid oversight often perpetuated outdated practices. Finally, classroom realities, including resource constraints, class size, and time limitations, posed significant challenges to implementing ideal assessments. These findings highlight the interplay of knowledge, beliefs, mentorship, and contextual factors in shaping pre-service teachers' assessment decision-making. The study underscores the need for teacher education programs to integrate practical training with theoretical instruction, fostering adaptability and confidence in diverse teaching contexts. Further research should examine the long-term impact of teacher training and the mentorship dynamic on enhancing assessment literacy and decision-making.

Index Terms—assessment practices, assessment decision-making, teaching practicum, pre-service EFL teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher decision-making is a critical component of effective learning and teaching, as it directly influences the quality of instruction and the outcomes of student learning. Research has consistently emphasized the significant role of teacher decision-making in shaping classroom practices, promoting student engagement, and fostering academic achievement (Van Orman et al., 2024; Atai-Tabar et al., 2024). Among the many aspects of teacher responsibilities, assessment-related decisions are particularly crucial, as they serve to gauge student progress and guide instructional strategies. According to Nkhata et al. (2023), effective decision-making in assessment requires teachers to balance multiple factors, including curriculum goals, student abilities, kind contextual constraints, while ensuring that their judgments are fair, accurate, and conducive to learning. This underscores the necessity for teachers to develop evidence-informed decision-making skills that are rooted in both theoretical understanding and practical experience.

Despite the centrality of assessment in education, research has shown that teachers often face challenges in justifying their choice of assessment approaches. Many teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the multifaceted nature of data analysis and the subsequent decision-making processes required to address student needs (Oo & Alonzo, 2023). The complexity of these tasks is compounded by the need to balance theoretical knowledge, practical application, and the diverse demands of their teaching contexts. For pre-service teachers, particularly those in English as a Foreign

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Language (EFL) context, this challenge may be even more pronounced as they navigate their developing professional identities while attempting to implement effective assessment practices (Orongan et al., 2024). These difficulties highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the factors that shape teachers' decision-making processes, particularly within the realm of assessment.

Teacher decision-making is not merely a technical process but is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts (Köksal, 2019). As such, it can be understood through the concept of teacher agency, which examines how teachers respond to the dynamic and emergent situations within their professional environments (Priestley et al., 2013, 2015). Teacher agency is influenced by a combination of factors, including the broader context of education policy, the specific conditions within schools, and individual teachers' beliefs, values, and experiences. For pre-service EFL teachers, this interplay of factors becomes especially significant during their teaching practicum, where they must reconcile their personal pedagogical beliefs with the realities of their classrooms (Munasih et al., 2024; Widiastuti, 2021). Understanding how teacher agency shapes assessment decision-making in these contexts provides valuable insights into how pre-service teachers can be better supported in developing the skills and confidence needed for effective, context-sensitive assessment practices.

Teacher agency plays a pivotal role in shaping how teachers navigate emerging challenges within their professional environments, particularly in the context of assessment decision-making. It is best understood as the dynamic interaction between individual efforts, available resources, and contextual or structural factors, which together create unique situations requiring thoughtful responses. Priestley et al. (2013) and Moran (2015) conceptualize teacher agency as the outcome of three interconnected dimensions: the *iterational*, which reflects teachers' past personal and professional experiences; the *projective*, which emphasizes their aspirations and orientation toward the future; and the *practical-evaluative*, which involves their ability to critically engage with cultural, structural, and material contexts. For pre-service EFL teachers, these dimensions manifest in distinct ways during their teaching practicum. Their past experiences as learners and novice practitioners (*iterational*) influence their approaches to assessment, while their vision for their future teaching practice (*projective*) drives their willingness to experiment with new strategies. Simultaneously, their ability to adapt to the immediate demands of the practicum environment (*practical-evaluative*) determines how successfully they can implement effective, context-sensitive assessment approaches.

However, research indicates that pre-service teachers are often inadequately prepared by teacher education programs to effectively utilize appropriate assessment strategies that support student learning (Piro et al., 2014; Phang et al., 2020; Prastikawati et al., 2024). A solely theoretical introduction to fundamental assessment concepts within coursework is insufficient to develop comprehensive assessment literacy. Consequently, it is essential for pre-service teachers to be provided with opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical classroom settings. Such experiences are critical for fostering the development of effective assessment practices and equipping future teachers with the skills necessary to enhance student learning outcomes. In other words, instead of merely instructing pre-service teachers on the techniques for collecting assessment data, it is crucial to provide them with opportunities to engage directly with real students in authentic classroom settings (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Mudra, 2018).

Specific to EFL context in Indonesia, teacher education programs afford pre-service teachers to engage in a teaching practicum program for at least a six-to-twelve-week teaching practicum. The integration of a teaching practicum into the curriculum offers pre-service English teachers' valuable opportunities to enhance their teaching skills and develop their proficiency in assessing student learning. Through the practicum, pre-service EFL teachers are immersed in authentic classroom environments, enabling them to improve their assessment literacy. They gain hands-on experience in designing, administering, analysing, and evaluating assessments, which helps them build a deeper understanding of assessment practices. Qiu et al. (2021) emphasize that practicum experiences positively influence pre-service EFL teachers' practices and play a crucial role in identifying their professional development needs. However, limited research has focused specifically on the assessment practices of pre-service teachers during their practicum. As noted by Trent (2013), pre-service teachers who participate in teaching practicums and gain hands-on experience conducting assessments in real educational environments perform better than those without such experience. The teaching practicum plays a crucial role in the professional growth of pre-service teachers, acting as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and its practical implementation on assessment decision-making (Köksal, 2019; Jusoh, 2013).

Research on pre-service EFL teachers' assessment decision-making during their practicum is urgently needed today, as this critical area remains largely unexplored despite its importance for teacher preparation and student learning outcomes. While existing literature underscores the difficulties pre-service teachers encounter in building assessment literacy (Kippers et al., 2018; Palmer et al., 2005; Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018), little is known about how they make assessment decisions in real classroom settings or the factors influencing these choices. This line of inquiry is particularly innovative, shifting attention from theoretical assessment knowledge to the practical processes of decision-making in authentic contexts. By exploring how these factors interact to shape these decisions, such research could offer valuable insights into how teacher education programs can more effectively foster context-sensitive and impactful assessment practices. Moreover, delving into the intricacies of pre-service teachers' decision-making during practicum is essential for addressing deficiencies in current teacher education curricula and equipping future teachers to make informed, evidence-based assessment decisions that drive student success.

Given the limited research on pre-service EFL teachers' assessment decision-making practices during their teaching practicum, this study explores how these teachers navigated classroom assessment decisions while working with real students in authentic classroom settings during their final practicum. For reaching that goal, this present study was led by the following research question:

1. What are the various factors influencing pre-service EFL teachers' in making assessment decision?
2. Do those various factors promote or limit pre-service EFL teachers' assessment-decision making?

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the factors influencing the assessment decision-making processes of pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practicum. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the participants' experiences (Fossey et al., 2002), perspectives, and the contextual factors shaping their assessment practices. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' views while maintaining a focus on the research objectives.

B. Participants of the Study

The study included 42 pre-service EFL teachers from Universitas PGRI Semarang, Indonesia. These participants were in their sixth semester and completing a teaching practicum at various senior high schools in the region. The selection process ensured that all participants had practical experience conducting classroom assessments during their practicum, providing valuable data for examining their decision-making processes. Table 1 presents details about the participants, including gender and the type of school where the teaching practicum took place. According to the table, female participants (26) outnumbered male participants (16). Additionally, the majority of participants were placed in public senior high schools rather than private ones, likely due to the higher number of public senior high schools available in the region.

TABLE 1
INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

Items	N	Percentage
Genders		
Male	16	38.09
Female	26	61.90
School setting		
Private senior high school	13	30.95
Public senior high school	29	69.04

C. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in a group interview. This group interview section was based on the similar school setting in which the pre-service EFL teachers conducted their teaching practicum. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences with assessment decision-making, the challenges they faced, and the factors that influenced their decisions. The open-ended questions were based on three main topics inspired from Oo et al. (2021). These topics comprise assessment decision-making experiences, challenges in assessment decision-making, and factors influencing assessment decisions. Table 2 summaries the three main themes in open-ended questions

TABLE 2
TOPICS IN OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Topics	Objectives	Examples of questions
Assessment decision-making experiences	This theme explores how pre-service EFL teachers approach the process of making assessment decisions. It includes their strategies, considerations, and rationale for selecting specific assessment methods and tools. The focus is on understanding their thought processes and how they aligned assessments with lesson objectives and student needs	Can you describe how you made decisions about assessing your students during the teaching practicum? Can you share an example of a specific assessment you conducted and explain why you chose that approach?
Challenges in Assessment Decision-Making	This theme addresses the obstacles and difficulties participants faced while making assessment decisions. It encompasses issues such as student engagement, balancing institutional requirements with personal judgment, and managing uncertainties or lack of confidence in their assessment practices.	What challenges did you face when deciding on the type of assessments to use in your classroom? Can you describe a situation where you felt uncertain or lacked confidence in your assessment decisions? How did you address it?
Factors Influencing Assessment Decisions	This theme examines the various internal and external influences on participants' assessment practices. Key factors include theoretical knowledge from university coursework, guidance from mentors and supervisors, classroom dynamics, school policies, and curriculum requirements. It highlights the interplay of personal, contextual, and structural elements shaping their decision-making.	What factors influenced the way you designed and implemented assessments during your practicum?

Each interview, lasting around 30–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure precise transcription and analysis.

D. Data Analysis

The data were examined using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The analysis began with an in-depth review of the interview transcripts through repeated readings to become familiar with the data. Key features of the data were then captured through the development of initial codes, which were subsequently grouped into potential themes. These themes were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data and aligned with the study's objectives. Ultimately, the themes were defined and labeled to create a cohesive narrative that highlighted the factors influencing pre-service EFL teachers' decision-making processes regarding assessment. This structured approach provided a detailed understanding of the complexities involved in assessment practices during the teaching practicum in real classroom contexts.

III. FINDINGS

This study presents the result of qualitative analysis using thematic analysis on the semi-structured interviews carried out to pre-service EFL teachers before and after teaching practicum. Based on the result of thematic analysis, there are four main themes of factors influencing pre-service EFL teachers in making assessment decision during their assessment practices in the teaching practicum. Those factors are pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge of assessment, conceptions of assessment, mentor teachers, and classroom realities

A. Previous Knowledge of Assessment

The findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge of assessment significantly influences their decision-making during teaching practicum. This influence is evident in both supportive and constraining ways, as their theoretical understanding and practical application of assessment knowledge interact with real classroom demands.

Pre-service EFL teachers who possess a solid understanding of assessment principles demonstrate a stronger ability to make informed decisions. For instance, Pre-service EFL Teacher 3 implemented her assessment knowledge on building the validity and reliability for a test in her assessment decision-making during her teaching practicum. She explained how her knowledge of validity and reliability helped her design a speaking test that was aligned with the learning objectives. This demonstrates how a foundational understanding of core assessment principles allows pre-service teachers to create assessments that are both relevant and purposeful.

During my practicum, I remembered what I learned about validity and reliability. For example, I ensured my speaking test matched the learning objectives and was fair to all students. This knowledge guided me to focus on designing tasks that really reflected what students had learned. (PET-3, semi-structured interview)

Additionally, pre-service EFL teachers who are familiar with the distinctions between formative and summative assessments exhibit more structured assessment practices. One of pre-service EFL teachers (Pre-service EFL Teacher 1) shared how he used formative quizzes after each lesson to monitor students' progress and summative tests to evaluate overall learning outcomes. She used her previous knowledge of assessment to better implement formative assessment regularly. She clearly understood the functions of formative assessment to check her students' learning progress in English learning as well as to compose an evaluative test.

From my assessment course, I knew the difference between formative and summative assessments. I decided to use quick quizzes as formative assessments after each lesson to monitor students' progress, and then I designed a unit test to evaluate their overall understanding. This approach felt structured and effective. (PET 1, semi-structured interview)

This structured approach reflects how knowledge of different assessment types enables pre-service teachers to address both immediate and long-term instructional goals effectively. Moreover, exposure to alternative assessments further broadens their decision-making capabilities. For example, Pre-service EFL Teacher (PET) 11 highlighted how his training in performance-based assessments enabled him to implement role-plays for speaking tasks, supported by rubrics to ensure fair and consistent evaluation. This illustrates how theoretical knowledge, when combined with practical tools, empowers pre-service EFL teachers to adopt diverse and innovative assessment methods (Postareff et al., 2012).

I learned about performance-based assessments during training, so I asked students to do role-plays for their speaking test. My knowledge of how to create rubrics and assess their performances helped me manage this task confidently. (PET 1, semi-structured interview)

However, the findings also highlight several constraints that stem from gaps in pre-service teachers' knowledge of assessment. One recurring issue is the difficulty in applying theoretical knowledge to real classroom contexts. For example, Pre-service EFL Teacher 5 expressed his uncertainty about implementing self-assessment techniques, despite understanding their theoretical importance. In this case, he was struggle to translate the theory into practice. This suggests that while pre-service teachers may grasp the concepts in principle, they often lack the practical experience needed to apply them effectively.

Even though I learned about assessment methods, I struggled to apply them in class. For example, I wanted to use a self-assessment technique, but I wasn't sure how to teach students to evaluate themselves properly, so I avoided it altogether. (PET 5, semi-structured interview)

Furthermore, an overemphasis on traditional testing methods in their coursework limits their ability to assess language skills holistically. Pre-service EFL Teacher 20 admitted finding it difficult to evaluate speaking and listening skills due to the predominant focus on written exams during their training. This narrow focus restricts their ability to design assessments that address all aspects of language competence, particularly productive skills.

In my language assessment course, it focused heavily on written exams and multiple-choice tests. So, during my practicum, I found it difficult to design assessments for skills like speaking and listening because I didn't know how to evaluate them effectively. (PET 20, semi-structured interview)

This section has presented how pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge of assessment plays the crucial role in their decision-making during teaching practicum. While a strong theoretical foundation enables them to design valid, structured, and innovative assessments, limitations in practical application and a reliance on traditional testing methods constrain their ability to fully implement diverse assessment strategies. These findings emphasize the importance of teacher education programs balancing theory with hands-on experiences (Yüce, 2015; Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018), equipping pre-service teachers with both the knowledge and the skills needed to navigate real-world classroom challenges effectively (Oo & Alonzo, 2023).

B. Conceptions of Assessment

The conceptions of assessment that pre-service EFL teachers hold about assessment play a crucial role in shaping their decisions regarding classroom assessment. When they have a strong conviction about the importance of assessment for enhancing student learning, it reflects positively in their practical application of effective assessment strategies during their practicums. Conversely, when they lack faith in the advantages of using assessment methods to foster learning, their commitment to implementing these practices tends to diminish (Prastikawati et al., 2024). For example, Pre-service EFL Teacher 11 highlighted the benefits of employing assessment strategies. She tailored her feedback during her practicum to address the specific needs of her students. Ultimately, she felt content with her application of assessment and the choices she made.

One of the highlights for me is that when I provide feedback, I know how to make it engaging, even when using colorful pens. While many students typically dislike red, I incorporate it in a stylish way that they actually enjoy. Despite seeing red comments on their papers, they read them with interest. It brings me great satisfaction to observe that they no longer repeat those mistakes and really put in the effort to improve. (PET 11, semi-structured interview)

On the other hand, some pre-service EFL teachers encountered unfavorable reactions from their students, who failed to recognize the positive impact of their assessments. These teachers did not incorporate adaptable teaching methods, foster a trusting environment, or cultivate students' interest in learning. For instance, Pre-service EFL Teacher 25 did not apply any assessment for learning strategies, as he lacked enthusiasm for his teaching practice.

Since it was just a practicum, I didn't feel like I had a lot of responsibility. The students weren't very compliant, so I chose not to confront them directly. With only three weeks to teach, I didn't want to be overly strict or reprimand them too often. I aimed to maintain a more relaxed approach during this short period. (PET 25, semi-structured interview).

Similar to Pre-service EFL Teacher 25, Pre-service EFL Teacher 19 also struggled to effectively apply even one assessment for learning strategy, despite her efforts. As a result, she chose to abandon these assessment methods. She failed to create a trusting environment, did not consider her students' backgrounds in her assessments, and did not address or clarify their misconceptions.

I encouraged my students to seek assistance from their classmates if they didn't understand something. If that didn't work, they could always come to me for help. Indeed, some students approached me with their questions.

In those cases, I often directed them to another student who had the answer, as I wasn't able to provide a detailed explanation myself. (PET 19, semi-structured interview)

This indicates that having positive beliefs and values regarding the use of assessment typically resulted in effective assessment practices during the practicum, while negative attitudes tended to lead to a reluctance to employ assessment for learning strategies. This finding aligns with the work of Izci and Caliskan (2017), who argued that successful assessment experiences, driven by the positive efforts of pre-service teachers, enhance their conceptions of assessment.

C. The Influence of Mentor Teachers

With the guidance of supportive mentor teachers, two key behaviors emerged: the granting of more autonomy, allowing pre-service EFL teachers (PET) the freedom to refine their teaching and assessment methods, and the provision of academic and professional support through sharing lesson plans, offering constructive feedback, and engaging in discussions about their teaching. Notably, pre-service EFL teachers who experienced increased autonomy during their practicum developed a better understanding of assessment strategies and consistently used the outcomes of their assessments to improve both their teaching practices and student learning. When pre-service EFL teachers had mentor teachers who encouraged autonomy, they were more capable of making informed decisions regarding

assessment to enhance student learning. For instance, pre-service EFL teachers 22 noted that his mentor teacher did not impose strict controls on his teaching, which allowed him the flexibility to select assessment strategies that were appropriate for his students' needs.

My supervising teacher allowed me significant freedom in choosing my instructional strategies and determining the lessons I needed to cover. At the start of my practicum, she laid out the lessons I was expected to complete over the three weeks but gave me the autonomy to approach them as I saw fit. She only came to observe my teaching twice for assessment purposes. (PET 22, semi-structured interview)

When it comes to academic support from supervising teachers, only a few pre-service EFL teachers received assistance like shared lesson plans and constructive feedback on their teaching methods. Pre-service EFL Teacher 2 and Pre-service EFL Teacher 33 stood out as exceptions, benefiting from this type of support.

My mentor teacher was very kind. She gave me a lot of example materials that she collected during her teaching period. She even showed me which one is interesting for students' English learning. (PET 2, semi-structured interview)

Mr. Harun was helpful and friendly. He guided me a lot on how to apply some teaching methods and what assessment tasks are match with the students' needs. He also advised me on how to be a good English teacher. (PET 33, semi-structured interview)

Based on this study, mentor teachers have played a pivotal role in shaping pre-service EFL teachers' decision-making regarding assessments. Their guidance and support can either empower or hinder pre-service EFL teachers' confidence in utilizing various assessment strategies. When supervising teachers provide constructive feedback, share effective assessment practices, and encourage autonomy, they foster a positive learning environment that enhances pre-service EFL teachers' understanding of assessment's role in improving student learning (Prastikawati et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). Conversely, a lack of support or overly restrictive supervision can lead to uncertainty and hesitation in implementing assessment methods. Therefore, the relationship between supervising teachers and pre-service EFL teachers significantly impacts the effectiveness of assessment practices in the classroom.

In contrast, the majority of pre-service EFL teachers did not receive any professional guidance from their supervising teachers, such as discussions about their teaching practices, despite expressing a desire for such support during their practicum

D. Classroom Realities

During the assessment practices at school, the realities of the classroom environment emerged as a significant factor affecting their decision-making. Various aspects of the classroom context, such as the physical layout of the school, the number of teaching periods available, and the timing of specific lessons, all played a role in shaping how pre-service EFL teachers approached assessments during their practicum experiences. The interplay between these elements often dictated the effectiveness of the assessment strategies they chose to implement.

One of the most influential factors affecting pre-service EFL teachers' assessment practices was the classroom setting itself. Adequate space is essential for effectively conducting assessment-based activities; however, many pre-service teachers found themselves in cramped or lecture-oriented classrooms that limited their ability to engage students fully (Mudra, 2018). In situations where there was insufficient room to arrange students into groups or facilitate collaborative learning, pre-service teachers struggled to implement their intended assessment activities. As a result, the physical constraints of the classroom environment posed significant challenges to their assessment practices.

Consequently, some pre-service EFL teachers reported feeling negatively impacted by their classroom settings, which led them to abandon certain assessment methods altogether. Specifically, the lack of space hindered their ability to conduct self- and peer-assessments, which are often vital for promoting student engagement and reflection. This limitation prompted these teachers to reconsider their assessment strategies, ultimately leading to a more cautious approach in their evaluation methods due to the restrictive nature of their classroom environments. This fact was shown by some excerpts from PET 26 and PET 30 during semi-interview sections:

The class is small for me making some activities with the students. We are difficult in arranging the desks for setting the peer assessment. It takes much time of learning. (PET 26, semi-structured interview).

The space in the classroom was limited. I even can't walk through when checking the students. (PET 30, semi-structured interview)

Meanwhile, not all pre-service EFL teachers had small and limited space in the class. Some of them reported that they can conduct activities-based assessments easily due to the large classroom. For instance, Pre-service EFL Teacher 16 felt satisfied with the activities-based assessment even the students made a lot of noisy.

The class is wide enough for my 32 students. I can put them in such activities-based assessments such as peer-assessment well. Even the classroom was so crowded, but we're happy to do that. They even asked more to do! (PET 16, semi-structured interview)

Except of classroom space, another classroom reality that pre-service EFL teachers had was the available period of teaching. Each pre-service EFL teachers had different teaching period depending on the schedule of mentor teacher in the school. Some of pre-service EFL teachers reported that they had two to three English classes in a day. Meanwhile, some of them mentioned that they had fewer teaching period in a day. This difference creates different chance for pre-service EFL teachers to conduct assessment practices. The more pre-service EFL teachers implemented assessment

practices, the better pre-service EFL teachers linked the assessment theory and practices (Qazi et al., 2012). This fact was once revealed in the interview:

My mentor teachers gave me a lot of chance to teach English in a week. It's really busy and hectic for me, but off course I got a lot of experience in implementing my assessment strategies. I even tried some of technology-based assessments that I learned in my assessment course in college. (PET 37, semi-structured interview)

I only taught for twice in a week. My mentor teacher was pregnant so she only had few English classes. I did not have may experience in implementing assessment tasks as my friends did. (PET 41, semi-structured interview)

As pre-service EFL teacher 37 mentioned, he had practiced a lot on the variety of assessment strategies during his teaching practicum. This was due to his lucky chance to have a lot of teaching period during his teaching practicum. He agreed that the more teaching period he had, the better he implemented various assessment tasks. Meanwhile, pre-service EFL teacher 41 did not have the similar chance as pre-service EFL teacher 37 had. She had only two teaching periods in a week. This limited chance could not help her to implement various assessment tasks during her teaching practicum.

IV. DISCUSSION

Assessment decision-making is a complex process influenced by various interrelated factors that shape pre-service EFL teachers' practices during their teaching practicum. As novice educators, pre-service EFL teachers navigate the interchange between their theoretical knowledge, personal beliefs, guidance from mentor teachers, and the practical realities of the classroom. Understanding these factors is essential for identifying the strengths and challenges they encounter in designing and implementing assessments. This section delves into four key themes—knowledge of assessment, conceptions of assessment, mentor teachers, and classroom realities—and explores how these factors influence pre-service teachers' decision-making during their practicum experience. These findings are aligned with some previous studies (Allen & Wright, 2014; Qazi et al., 2012) that highlighted some external factors such as school policy and parents. On the other hand, this study does not include those factors for the short period of teaching practicum in which pre-service EFL teachers have.

Pre-service EFL teachers' knowledge of assessment serves as a foundational factor that significantly influences their decision-making during teaching practicum. This knowledge includes understanding assessment principles such as validity, reliability, and practicality, as well as familiarity with diverse assessment types like formative, summative, and alternative assessments. Teachers with a robust theoretical background are better equipped to design assessments that align with instructional objectives and adequately measure student performance. For instance, pre-service EFL teachers who understand the concept of validity often strive to create tasks that directly reflect the skills or knowledge taught, ensuring the assessment is meaningful and relevant. However, gaps in practical application often hinder the ability to implement this knowledge effectively. Despite understanding self-assessment and diagnostic assessments in theory, many pre-service teachers struggle with their execution in real classrooms due to limited exposure to concrete examples or hands-on experiences during their training (Prastikawati et al., 2024). This disconnect underscores the need for teacher education programs to emphasize practice-oriented learning, ensuring pre-service teachers can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation (Van Orman et al., 2024; Widiastuti et al., 2023).

Another critical factor is pre-service EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment, which shape their beliefs and attitudes about its role in teaching and learning. Pre-service EFL teachers who view assessment as a tool for fostering learning are more likely to adopt formative approaches that provide continuous feedback and promote student growth (Xu & He, 2019). Conversely, those who perceive assessment primarily as a means of ranking or grading students tend to prioritize summative assessments, often relying on traditional tests. These conceptions are often influenced by their own experiences as students and the dominant assessment culture in their training institutions (Nkhata et al., 2023). For example, pre-service teachers trained in environments emphasizing high-stakes testing may default to using standardized test formats, even when alternative assessments may be more appropriate for language skill development. Changing these entrenched beliefs requires exposing pre-service teachers to diverse assessment practices and encouraging reflective discussions on the purposes and impacts of assessment (Izci & Caliskan, 2017). By reshaping their conceptions, teacher education programs can empower future educators to view assessment as an integral component of teaching that supports both instruction and learning.

The influence of mentor teachers is another significant factor in pre-service EFL teachers' assessment decision-making. During teaching practicums, mentor teachers often act as role models, shaping the assessment practices of pre-service teachers through direct guidance and observed behaviors. Positive mentorship can inspire confidence and creativity, as mentor teachers introduce pre-service teachers to varied assessment strategies, including alternative and performance-based assessments (Prastikawati et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). However, mentor teachers can also perpetuate conservative or outdated assessment practices, particularly in schools with rigid policies or limited resources. This study findings are aligned with a study from Kalsoom et al. (2019) mentioning that pre-service teachers placed with mentors who rely heavily on traditional tests may feel constrained to replicate these practices, even if they understand the value of more innovative approaches. The mentorship dynamic thus plays a dual role: it can either enhance or limit pre-service teachers' ability to apply their theoretical knowledge and experiment with diverse

assessment method (Phang et al., 2020). Collaborative dialogues between mentors and pre-service teachers, supported by shared reflection on assessment practices, are crucial to fostering a constructive and enriching mentorship experience.

Finally, classroom realities significantly shape pre-service EFL teachers' assessment practices, often mediating the extent to which theoretical knowledge and personal conceptions can be applied. This finding supports the previous study conducted by Liu (2016) investigating factors such as class size, time constraints, curriculum demands, and resource availability frequently challenge pre-service teachers' ability to implement their preferred assessment methods. For example, a pre-service teacher might wish to use portfolio assessments to evaluate student progress but feel overwhelmed by the logistical challenges of managing portfolios for a large class. Similarly, rigid school policies and an emphasis on preparing students for standardized tests often limit the flexibility and creativity of pre-service teachers in designing assessments (Akcan & Tatar, 2010). These realities highlight the gap between the idealized scenarios presented during teacher training and the complexities of real-world teaching. Addressing these challenges requires teacher education programs to prepare pre-service teachers to navigate such constraints pragmatically. Equipping them with adaptable strategies, such as simplifying rubrics or integrating formative assessment into daily activities, can empower pre-service teachers to balance theoretical ideals with practical demands effectively.

In sum, the factors influencing pre-service EFL teachers' assessment decision-making—knowledge of assessment, conceptions of assessment, mentor teachers, and classroom realities—interact dynamically during teaching practicum. Strengthening teacher education programs to address these factors comprehensively can better prepare pre-service teachers to make informed, reflective, and adaptable assessment decisions in diverse teaching contexts.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study investigated the factors influencing pre-service EFL teachers' assessment decision-making during their teaching practicum in senior high schools in Semarang, Indonesia. The findings highlight four main factors: pre-service teachers' knowledge of assessment, their conceptions of assessment, the influence of mentor teachers, and classroom realities. Knowledge of assessment emerged as a crucial foundation for effective decision-making, enabling pre-service teachers to design assessments that align with learning objectives and measure language competencies appropriately. However, gaps in practical application often constrained their ability to implement theoretical knowledge effectively. Conceptions of assessment, shaped by prior experiences and institutional norms, influenced the types of assessments pre-service teachers prioritized, with some gravitating toward traditional methods due to entrenched beliefs (Köksal, 2019). Meanwhile, mentor teachers played a dual role, providing guidance and introducing innovative practices, but also sometimes perpetuating outdated approaches. Lastly, the complexities of classroom realities, including large class sizes, time constraints, and resource limitations, posed significant challenges to implementing ideal assessment practices. These factors underscore the multifaceted nature of assessment decision-making and the need for teacher education programs to provide both theoretical and practical support.

In addition, the findings have several implications for teacher education programs and policy-makers. First, teacher education programs should strengthen the practical components of their assessment training, ensuring pre-service teachers gain hands-on experience with designing, implementing, and evaluating a variety of assessment types. This can be achieved through workshops, simulations, and real-life case studies that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Second, reflective practices should be embedded in training programs to help pre-service teachers critically examine their conceptions of assessment and align them with contemporary, student-centered approaches. Third, collaboration between universities and schools should be enhanced to ensure that mentor teachers are equipped with up-to-date knowledge of assessment practices and are prepared to provide constructive guidance (Moran, 2015). Finally, addressing classroom realities requires equipping pre-service teachers with adaptable strategies for managing assessment challenges in diverse and resource-constrained environments.

Finally, this present study opens several avenues for further research. Future studies could explore the long-term impact of teacher education programs on the assessment literacy of pre-service teachers, tracking their progress into in-service teaching roles. Comparative studies across different educational contexts, such as junior high schools or vocational schools, could provide deeper insights into how contextual factors influence assessment decision-making. Additionally, investigating the perspectives of mentor teachers and school administrators could reveal complementary insights into how school cultures and policies affect pre-service teachers' assessment practices. Lastly, experimental studies that introduce targeted interventions, such as intensive assessment workshops or collaborative mentoring models, could evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing pre-service teachers' assessment competencies. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to the development of more comprehensive and effective approaches to preparing pre-service EFL teachers for the multifaceted challenges of language assessment in diverse classroom contexts.

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