

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates on the study's background, aim, research questions, scope, significance, clarification of key terms, and organization.

1.1 Background of Study

Assessing students is an essential component of the learning process. Assessment is the activity of collecting and processing information on learner learning outcomes to determine learning progress; conclude the results of learning achievements that focus on learner knowledge, skills, abilities, or proficiency; and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching in promoting continuous improvement (De Angelis, 2021; Green, 2020; Kavaklı Ulutaş, 2023; Phakiti, 2014; Pasmendik, 2019; Tontus, 2020). In addition, such multi-purpose assessments (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; Djoub, 2017) also provide valuable feedback to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of students and the learning process. This feedback is a foundation for decision-making, enabling teachers to adapt their teaching tactics accordingly (Kirby & Merchant, 2020; Tosuncuoglu, 2018). In order to achieve a more thorough and effective outcome, the process is carried out using various assessment techniques, instruments, and sources with appropriate approaches.

There are three distinct approaches in assessment which cover assessment of learning, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning (Earl, 2003). Among these, assessment of learning—conducted after instruction to assess student achievement—still dominates classroom practices, especially in Indonesian EFL settings (Earl, 2003; Setiawati et al., 2019; Volante, 2010). This heavy focus on summative assessment often overlooks students' learning needs and progress during the process.

The National Examination (UN) once served as a standardized form of summative assessment across Indonesia. Following its abolishment in 2021, Indonesian teachers are now responsible for constructing their own tests (RUU Sisdiknas 89/2022). While this policy gives teachers more autonomy, it also results in inconsistent test quality and a lack

of standardized benchmarks. In EFL classrooms, many teacher-made tests are not aligned with curriculum goals or students' cognitive levels due to limited assessment literacy (Tsagari et al., 2018). As a result, these tests may fail to accurately measure students' English proficiency and learning outcomes.

High-quality assessments make evaluation meaningful, practical, and functional when teachers apply them accurately in the classroom. To achieve this high-quality assessment, teachers must cultivate a combination of knowledge and skills as assessment standards, known as assessment literacy or assessment knowledge (Xu & Brown, 2017). Teachers must not only understand how language tests are created, scored, and interpreted but must also be able to create, score, and interpret assessment results that are useful for themselves (Green, 2020). Consequently, the teachers are required to be assessment literate. However, a large number of studies show that teachers globally possess moderately low levels of assessment literacy that are unsatisfactory to effectively execute their assessment duties (Djoub, 2017; Isnawati, 2023; Luthfiyyah et al., 2020; Pfeiffer-Hoens, 2017; Prizovskaya, 2017; Talib et al., 2014; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). This inadequate assessment literacy was also found among English teachers (Alderson, 2005; Cheng, 2008). Teachers' limited level of assessment literacy is because most of them need to be more confident (Lam, 2019), believing that tests should ideally be standardized by authorized stakeholders and not created by teachers (Berry et al., 2019). In addition, the lack of training in assessment has contributed to teachers' lack of confidence in designing tests (Puspawati, 2022). This is understandable as teacher training programmes in Indonesia generally give limited attention to assessment aspects, while the main focus is more on mastering pedagogy and classroom practices.

In the context of the design of examinations in language learning, language teachers are the backbone of assessment (Kunnan, 2021). Some recent research on language teachers' assessment practices, particularly their ability to construct test questions, has emerged (Sun & Sihes, 2020). Test construction competence among secondary school teachers in China is even declining (Chen, 2015; Wang, 2017). The same results were also found in Nigeria (Hamafyelto et al., 2015), Ghana (Quansah et al., 2019), Ethiopia (Gashaye & Degwale, 2019), and even in Indonesia (Pusat Penilaian Pendidikan, 2012), showing that teachers'

knowledge and ability to construct questions was still low, indicated by incapability of writing good quality tests (Alderson, 2005) in the form of teachers' made tests that did not meet the criteria of a good test and lacked content validity. As a result of studies on the insufficiency of teachers' test construction competence, tests are constructed only based on personal experience, leading to poor knowledge coverage or a lack of alignment with the syllabus. The quality of a test plays a significant role in determining the validity of the evaluation (Sun & Sihes, 2020). Besides, according to the results of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum at the Junior High School level in Indonesia in 2014, about 60% of educator respondents said they had difficulty in formulating indicators, compiling test instrument items, and carrying out attitude assessment using various techniques.

The quality issues in teacher-made tests often stem from teachers' limited knowledge of test construction and the lack of application of assessment principles in practice. Unlike standardized tests which are typically designed by experts, pretested, and refined to ensure high reliability and relevance (Gronlund, 1985), many teacher-constructed tests fall short due to insufficient training and assessment literacy. In addition, lack of time and resources also contribute to the low quality of teacher-made tests (Popham, 1990). Furthermore, teachers' inability to construct quality tests is often due to their lack of understanding of the principles of educational measurement, so they feel that creating good tests is a difficult task (Davidson & Lynch, 2002). Teachers' low assessment literacy in constructing test items has significant implications for the quality of learning and student learning outcomes (Zulaiha & Mulyono, 2020). Incompetent assessment can produce inaccurate information about students' abilities, hinder their learning progress, and even lead to unfair decisions.

Despite the critical role of assessment literacy, existing studies on Indonesian teachers, particularly EFL teachers, have mainly focused on self-reported data through questionnaires (Anam & Putri, 2021; Aria et al., 2021; Isnawati, 2023) or interviews (Fitriyah et al., 2022; Luthfiyyah et al., 2020; Suherman, 2022). However, these approaches do not examine the actual test items teachers produce, leaving a gap in understanding whether their claimed knowledge and practices are reflected in their real assessment products. Therefore, there is

a need for research that analyzes teacher-made tests directly to evaluate the alignment between teachers' assessment literacy and the quality of the tests they construct.

1.2 Research Questions

Two research questions are developed to guide the study based on the study's objectives.

- 1) How is the EFL secondary teachers' assessment literacy as reflected in the way they construct classroom tests?
- 2) To what extent do teacher-made tests reflect their assessment practices, as seen through their alignment with established test construction guidelines?

1.3 Aims of the Study

The study's primary purpose is to examine teachers' assessment literacy and their test construction practices. Specifically, this study aims to:

- 1) Explore the EFL secondary teachers' knowledge and practices related to their assessment literacy as reflected in the way they design classroom tests;
- 2) Examine the design of the teacher-made tests through their alignment with established test construction guidelines, which reflect their assessment practices;

1.4 Scope of Study

The area of assessment literacy is quite broad, as it includes teachers' knowledge, skills, and understanding in designing, implementing, and evaluating assessments effectively. One of the concrete manifestations of assessment literacy is teachers' ability to develop test questions. Therefore, the primary focus of this study is directed at teachers' knowledge and practice in developing summative questions as a reflection of their assessment literacy. Teachers with good assessment literacy will be able to design assessment instruments, including tests, that are aligned with learning objectives, curriculum standards, and the principles of quality assessment. In the context of this study, the assessment instrument in question is limited to the tests of the midterm examination or final term examination.

The research subject was focused on secondary school teachers, involving junior and senior high school teachers, from public and private schools in Central Java and West Java.

1.5 Significances of Study

This research has the potential to benefit various parties in the education system by investigating EFL teachers' assessment literacy in the context of test construction competence.

The study result can help English teachers improve their assessment literacy by constructing practical test items that can accurately assess students' understanding. This can lead to more meaningful and informative assessments that provide a clearer picture of student learning. Besides, by developing stronger assessment skills, they may feel more confident in creating and using assessments to measure student progress and guide instruction. Well-designed assessments based on sound principles can lead to better student learning outcomes. This study can provide teachers with practical strategies for constructing tests that accurately assess students' English language proficiency.

Findings from this study can inform stakeholders (School administrators, policymakers, etc.) about the current state of EFL teachers' assessment literacy in relation to test construction competence. This can guide policy decisions regarding professional development programs and support teachers in producing their tests effectively. In addition, the research can highlight best practices in constructing summative tests for English language learning. This information can be disseminated to other schools and educators, promoting better assessment practices.

Lastly, for future researchers, this study can provide a foundation for further research on EFL teacher assessment literacy. Future studies can examine specific aspects of test construction or explore the effectiveness of different assessment methods.

1.6 Clarification of the Key Terms

- 1) Teachers' assessment literacy refers to the comprehensive understanding and abilities that teachers possess to apply and use various forms of assessment effectively to improve the quality of learning in the classroom. In this study, teachers' assessment

literacy refers to the knowledge of the theories and practical uses of assessment instruments through the construction of English summative tests.

- 2) Language assessment literacy is knowledge, skills and the ability to apply this knowledge and skills to the design, development and evaluation of large-scale standardised language tests and/or classroom-based tests with familiarity with the testing process, and an awareness of the principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice. In this research, language assessment literacy has to do with the knowledge and practice of teachers in designing language classroom-based tests in the form of summative English tests.
- 3) Teacher's knowledge refers to teachers' understanding of education's principles, purposes, and assessment methods. The scope of this knowledge includes familiarity with different types of assessments, principles of test preparation, alignment of assessments with learning objectives and curriculum standards, scoring techniques and interpretation of results, and ethical use of assessment data to support the learning process. In this study, teachers' knowledge of assessment literacy refers explicitly to how teachers claim their understanding of the principles in constructing summative tests.
- 4) Assessment practice is a systematic process that the teachers undertake to evaluate student learning and determine the quality of learning outcomes, including skills assessment. In this study, assessment practices are defined as the actions taken by teachers in designing test items that align with intended learning outcomes, selecting and applying appropriate test formats, ensuring content validity, considering the cognitive levels being assessed, and guaranteeing that the assessment instruments demonstrate reliability, fairness, and practicality. These practices are grounded in a strong understanding and knowledge of the principles, theories, and objectives of appropriate assessment.
- 5) Test construction is a specific aspect of teachers' assessment literacy that focuses on designing and developing tests. This study conceives of the test construction skill as the capacity to create exam questions involving the analysis of each item in the teacher-

made test set, evaluating whether they adhere to the principles of clear, functional, and logical item writing.

1.7 Organization of the Study

Chapter I includes a brief overview of Indonesia's current EFL assessment practices. Chapter II explores specific frameworks or models for teachers' assessment literacy and test construction competence. Chapter III describes the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis techniques. Chapter IV deals with findings and discussions, and Chapter V summarizes the data results through conclusions and recommendations.

1.8 Concluding remark

The background of this study starts from the many data emerging that the teacher assessment literacy of teachers is still unsatisfactory. This is because they do not understand the concepts of assessment which then causes them to think that tests should be made by education policy makers.

In practice, assessment is divided into three based on Earl (2003), with assessment of learning being the most frequently used assessment. In Indonesia, assessment of learning is conducted in the summative assessment of mid-semester, end of semester, and end of year where the tests are made by the teachers themselves. Because it is not standardized and authorized, it is necessary to analyze teacher-made tests that reflect their assessment literacy to explore their knowledge and ability to construct tests as part of assessment literacy.

In the next chapter, expert theories and previous research related to aspects of teacher assessment literacy will be thoroughly explored to serve as a reference for data analysis and findings in this study.