

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, the scope of the study, clarification of the main terminologies, and the organization of the thesis.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Assessment has been viewed as an important issue in education. Its fundamental role is acknowledged to be essential to the process of teaching and learning. Assessment is a part of the teaching framework in addition to learning goals and teaching and learning activities (L. D. Fink, 2013). Understanding the basis of theoretical knowledge and practical assessment skills is highly recommended in education (Brown, 2003; Douglas, 2014; Fulcher, 2010; Taylor, 2009; Vogt, Tsagari, & Csépes, 2020). For that reason, a well-designed education program necessitates a high-quality assessment component (Işık, 2021; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014).

It may be suggested that assessment and academic success are intrinsically related. Assessment has been used to determine the effectiveness of educational materials by observing students' learning progression from the beginning to the completion of the program (Bachman, 1990, p. 12). Moreover, assessment is understood as acquiring, analyzing, documenting, and applying information on students' performance to educational assignments (Lambert & Lines, 2001). It is apparent that assessment could be used to examine the learning outcomes.

For many years, there has been a considerable growth of studies focusing on the effectiveness of assessment (Fan & Yan, 2020; Fulcher, 2010; Litman, Strik, & Lim, 2018; Taylor, 2013; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). It was found that assessment becomes more effective when the intended learning goals are specified, the procedures are appropriately selected, and the limitations of assessment are reported (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Miller, Linn, & Gronlund, 2009). Moreover, the impact of assessment on educational programs has risen in popularity recently, and it is widely agreed that assessment directly impacts teaching and learning (Gultom, 2016; Nikolov, 2016; Stiggins, 2002). Further, the importance of assessment in

language education has received much attention (Firoozi, Razavipour, & Ahmadi, 2019; Işık, 2021; Khadijeh & Amir, 2015). Thus, it can be inferred that assessment has become a critical issue for those who work closely in education, for instance, the teachers, the administrators, and the school principals.

Another essential point is assessment also applies to language teaching. Language assessment is an important area for scholars, researchers, and anyone interested in improving the quality of language teaching, especially in the context of English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT). For the students, language assessment can allow them to learn about what they know and do not know as long as the feedback from the assessment is understandable (Bachman, 1990, p. 34). Additionally, students' language competence is diagnosed in a variety of ways. Tests, long project reports, short essays, writing portfolios, and other activities are included (Hyland, 2003). Hence, language assessment should include a variety of tasks for the students so that teachers have sufficient information to analyze the learning progress.

Many studies in the literature have discussed different aspects of language assessment. The most common trends investigated about teachers' language assessment literacy (LAL) (Fulcher, 2012; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Sultana, 2019; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; Yastibas & Takkaç, 2018) and students' assessment literacy (Fan & Yan, 2020; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Hudaya, 2017; Nimehchisalem & Hussin, 2018). Some other studies revolve around the perception of language assessment (Agcam & Babanoglu, 2016; Cheng, Wu, & Liu., 2015; Sharma, 2020). Additionally, the study about assessment and testing has influenced how the assessment should be conducted. Specifically, some studies examined the changes in language testing textbooks (Davies, 2008), the challenges of language assessment research (Mcnamara, 2001), and the lack of understanding of assessment (Ali, 2011; Wijayanti, 2019). It can be seen that much work on the potential of language assessment has been carried out. Yet, scant studies have been done on how language assessment is understood and practiced.

Understanding the concepts and features of language assessment is indispensable in teaching and learning. That aside, concerns have arisen that question teachers' understanding of the concepts of language assessment and how

they are practiced in the classroom. A study by Wijayanti (2019) revealed that most teachers had insufficient knowledge and skills to perform language assessment-related tasks. Similarly, Işık (2021) found that the teacher training program had failed to prepare the teachers with sufficient abilities to conduct language assessments in the classroom. These research findings are contradicted what Stiggins (1991) suggests. He believes that educators must have a solid understanding of language assessment to implement it successfully in language teaching. Moreover, according to Malone (2013), a solid grasp of language assessment implementation leads to valuable information concerning the achievements of students and the attainment of learning goals. Thus, there is a direct correlation between having the foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge of language assessment concepts with the ability to perform language assessment in the classroom.

This study considers ELT graduate students as the main subject. ELT graduate students are expected to use analytical techniques and assessment procedures to solve challenges in English teaching and learning (English Language Education Study Program, 2022). Furthermore, graduate students have been identified as familiar with the assessment concepts among other stakeholder groups (Yan & Fan, 2020). It can be understood that there is an expectation of better knowledge about language assessment by the members in the sample of this present study. In addition, Nimehchisalem and Hussin (2018) reported that a group of postgraduate students understood the assessment purposes but faced different challenges when implementing it. Therefore, graduate students are projected to implement their expertise in language assessment as they continue their professional careers in language teaching.

Three significant prior studies and literature gaps are identified (Miles, 2017). First, there is an apparent theoretical gap in the prior studies concerning the theory of understanding language assessment in the ELT context. Most of the theories on assessment have focused on the conception of assessment (G. Brown & Hirschfeld, 2008; Deneen & Brown, 2016; Lam, 2019; Nimehchisalem & Hussin, 2018), the perception of assessment (Agcam & Babanoglu, 2016; Ocktarani, 2021; Sharma, 2020), and the conception of language assessment literacy (Fulcher, 2012;

Stiggins, 1991; Taylor, 2009). Thus, there is a lack of theories discussing understanding the concepts and features of language assessment within the ELT context. Second, based on the review of the prior studies, there is a gap in sample size. ELT Graduate students have been under-researched. In several studies, only a small number of participants were recruited (Nimehchisalem & Hussin, 2018; Yan & Fan, 2020). That is why this present study aims to address this particularly neglected area. Lastly, the researcher identified an empirical gap in the prior studies. Previous research has focused primarily on undergraduate students, EFL teachers, and language testers (Jin, 2010b; Puspawati, 2019; Sharma, 2020; Yastibas & Takkaç, 2018). Further, previous work has failed to address the issue of insufficient knowledge of understanding language assessment elements and the practice in language teaching and learning. Very little research has been done on how ELT graduate students understand and practice LA to evaluate the language education program problem correctly.

This present study aims to investigate the understanding and practices of language assessment to fill the gaps discussed above. ELT graduate students need to understand the concepts and characteristics of language assessment as it is an essential part of English learning and teaching. Further, this study aims to enrich the discussion on how ELT graduate students in Indonesia practice their knowledge acquired from the English language assessment training. This study is expected to benefit Indonesia's English Language Teaching and teacher education programs from theoretical, practical, and policy perspectives. In the long run, the significance of this study lies in its intention to support English language teachers and Teacher Education programs in Indonesia.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Under the discussion mentioned above, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do ELT graduate students understand about language assessment?
2. How do the students practice their perceived understanding of language assessment in the classroom?

3. To what extent does ELT graduate students' perceived understanding influence their practice in assessing language assessment

### **1.3 Aims of the Study**

This study investigated graduate students' understanding and practices of Language Assessment (LA) in the English Language Education program at a state university in West Java, Indonesia. Another objective of this study was to explore the influence of ELT graduate students' perceived understanding toward the practice of Language Assessment (LA) in the classroom.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study was on Language Assessment (LA) from the understanding of graduate students studying in the English Language Education program. It was limited to a group of students registered as active students in the 2022 academic year at a state university in Bandung. Moreover, the focus was on graduate students who have taken courses related to language and testing during their undergraduate or graduate studies. How ELT graduate students practice language assessment during their pre-service and in-service teaching experiences was also explored.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Research is needed to investigate the significance of language assessment to ELT graduate students. This study can provide valuable information to various stakeholders in developing and planning their language assessment programs. Theoretically, this study offered insights into how ELT graduate students understand the field of language assessment. Students, teachers, language testers, and practitioners were expected to experience the benefits of recognizing and understanding language assessment elements. Besides, it would develop an awareness of the importance of language assessment in English Language Teaching. Socially, this study intended to share insights with higher education institutions leading to the adjustments of the language testing and assessment

courses. Moreover, other stakeholders could use this study to evaluate their current practice and construct a better language assessment practice.

### **1.6 Clarification of the Main Terms**

In the context of this study, several terms are defined as follows:

1. Language assessment intends to explore students' performance during their language learning experience (Khan, 2018). The teacher will subconsciously evaluate the student's performance whenever a student answers a question, comments, writes a formal essay, or tries a new word or structure (Brown, 2003, p. 4). Moreover, the students are being assessed in the areas of receptive skills (reading/listening), productive skills (speaking/ writing), micro-linguistic aspects (grammar/vocabulary), and integrated language skills (Douglas, 2014; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Language assessment in this study refers to all procedures used to gauge students' comprehension and proficiency with English. Thus, the language assessment could take the shape of formal or informal, formative or summative procedures.
2. Understanding refers to the capacity to think and behave flexibly based on what someone learns (Perkins, 1998). Moreover, understanding is seen as consistently transferring knowledge acquired from one place to another (Gardner, 1991). Furthermore, in this study, understanding language assessment entails the ability of ELT graduate students to practice the acquired theoretical knowledge related to the concepts, principles, purposes, and types of language assessment in ELT from the courses they had taken during their undergraduate and graduate study.
3. Practice means to carry out or apply (Practice, n.d.). This study conceptualizes practice as applying or using language assessment concepts, principles, purposes, and types of language assessment in the ELT setting. Specifically, it refers to ELT graduate students' experience in assessing their students' English ability.

## **1.7 Thesis Organization**

Chapter one consists of the introduction of this study. It covers the study's background, aims, research questions, scope, significance, clarification of key terms, and thesis' organization.

Chapter two provides theories and reviews of the relevant literature explaining Language Assessment (LA). It comprises assessment in education, the concept of language assessment, the principles of language assessment, and the types of language assessment. Besides, the practices and challenges of language assessment are also discussed, and several related studies are presented in the literature.

Chapter three unpacks the methodology of this study. It elaborates on research design, sites and participants, data collection techniques and procedures, data analysis, and research plan.

Chapter four discusses data analysis, presenting ELT graduate students' understanding and practice of language assessment. Moreover, the relationship between understanding and practice of language assessment is also presented. This chapter also provides the result of the findings according to the supporting theories.

Chapter five presents the conclusion of the overall study and its implication. It also comprises suggestions, limitations, and recommendations for the study.

## **1.8 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has presented an introductory chapter that covers the background of the study, research questions, the study's purpose, significance, the study scope, clarification of key terms, and the organization of the thesis. The introductory chapter's overall aspects lead to chapter two's literature review.