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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6604-9187>**TESL Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom-Based Assessment in
Primary ESL Classroom: A Quantitative Study****Ahmad Muaz Mohd Fadzli**
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Institute of Teacher Education Tun Hussein Onn Campus
Johor, Malaysia**ABSTRACT**

Classroom-based assessment (CBA) is an integral component of teaching in Malaysian schools, particularly in primary ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom. However, TESL pre-service teachers often face significant challenges in implementing CBA effectively during practicum phase. Underpinning by the synergy of Constructivist Learning Theory, Socio-Cultural Theory and Assessment for Learning Framework (AfL), this study investigates these challenges and determines potential solutions, employing a quantitative research design with a survey conducted among 64 TESL pre-service teachers from the Bachelor of Teaching in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or *Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan* (PISMP) programme at southern region campuses of the Institutes of Teacher Education (ITEs). Data were collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) via SPSS version 27. Respondents perceived a high level of challenges in implementing CBA to enhance pupils' English language proficiency ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.62$), followed by the identification of potential solutions perceived to alleviate challenges in CBA implementation ($M=4.56$, $SD=0.53$). These results suggest that while pre-service teachers understand the theoretical value of CBA, a gap exists in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) regarding the practical application. To bridge this gap, targeted CBA workshops and enhanced resource accessibility are recommended. Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach or a mixed-methods design to capture the evolving competency of these pre-service teachers once they enter the permanent workforce.

KEYWORDS: Classroom-based assessment (CBA), perceptions, primary ESL classroom, TESL pre-service teachers

INTRODUCTION

In 21st-century language education, assessment plays a pivotal role in informing both teaching and learning processes. Classroom-based assessment (CBA) is significant in language education as it enables teachers to collect and utilise data regarding pupils' English language proficiency to enhance their instructional methods (Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021). Scholars have had long conversations about the best ways to teach English language to pupils, with a focus on how important it is to test the pupils' knowledge (Khalip & Kee, 2023). Farrell and Jacobs (2020) mentioned how crucial it is for language teachers to combine their knowledge of how to teach and how to test pupils to meet current educational goals. In this way of thinking, testing is not just a way to check how well pupils are doing, it is also an important part of the learning process, which lets teachers check how well pupils understand and can use what they have learnt in real life situations (Wong et al., 2022). Chappuis et al. (2020) advocated that good grading methods can quickly let pupils know what they are doing well and what they need to work on in their language skills. Using the right assessment methods, teachers can create valuable learning experiences that help pupils improve their English language skills, reducing the gap between what they can do now and what is expected of them in the future.

Since its start in 2016, CBA has been used at schools in Malaysia. Lewkowicz and Leung (2021) mentioned that CBA includes testing pupils through planned tasks based on how well they do. This way of assessing lets teachers meet the specific needs of each pupil by collecting and analysing data in a planned way. The implementation of CBA enhances English language teaching and learning, resulting in changes in teachers' attitudes, knowledge acquisition and skills in pupil assessment (Kaur & Saad, 2024). There are two main parts of CBA namely summative and formative assessments. There are summative tests in Malaysian schools, like the National End of Academic Session Examination or *Ujian Akhir Sesi Akademik* (UASA), which checks how well pupils understand subjects, including English language. Classroom-based assessment (CBA) aims to improve the way teachers teach and encourage pupils to keep thinking about their work and getting better at it (Rosli et al., 2022). As one part of the CBA framework, formative assessments could include quizzes, peer evaluations and self-evaluations, which are administered at regular intervals and actively involve pupils in the learning of English language. This is supported by the continuous feedback from teachers and peers, which is essential for pupils to acquire English language.

Despite this, implementing CBA has been hard, and there is proof that it has not achieved its goals (Isa et al., 2020). Previous research has proven that effective assessment procedures in English language teaching greatly improve pupils' learning outcomes and language competency (Almeida et al., 2021). However, many pre-service teachers in Malaysia experience many problems in implementing CBA effectively inside their primary ESL classrooms during their practicum phases. This difficulty is due to a lack of awareness of CBA concepts and inadequate training throughout their teacher preparation programmes (Marzaini et al., 2023). The lack of trust among pre-service and in-service teachers in their ability to do CBA tasks and the short time they have to give these tests are factors that contribute to the problem mentioned (Rosli et al., 2021). The complexities of CBA result in the need for them to modify their evaluation methodologies from time to time to reflect their pupils' continual growth and performance in a more dynamic manner.

However, many pre-service teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge, which can lead to a mismatch between assessment procedures and pupil learning objectives (Syamdianita & Cahyono, 2023). For

instance, without a thorough understanding of CBA, pre-service teachers may overlook the need of delivering timely feedback and modifying their instructional methods based on pupil performance. This dilemma is heightened by time constraints and a lack of resources which further hinder their capacity to integrate CBA into their instructional methods. Meylani (2024) emphasised that conventional evaluation approaches result in limited opportunities for CBA, which is vital for encouraging meaningful learning and pupil involvement in the classroom. Overall, these challenges highlight the urgent need for enhanced CBA training, support and resources to enable pre-service teachers to implement CBA effectively in primary ESL classroom.

Due to numerous challenges faced, pre-service teachers typically turn to traditional assessment methods, such as standardised examinations and summative evaluations which do not correspond with 21st-century educational practices and fail to accommodate the different learning requirements of their pupils (Voinea & Turculet, 2023). Moreover, the lack of pre-service teachers' awareness of appropriate evaluation methodologies adds to a cycle of underperformance among pupils in English language learning. These traditional methods are not only less successful in monitoring pupil progress but also contribute to a disengaged classroom environment where pupils feel limited in their capacity to convey their mastery of English language. If pre-service teachers have a strong understanding of how to assess pupil learning effectively during their practicum phases, they can provide instructions that truly address pupils' individual strengths and areas for growth, helping each pupil to reach their full potential (Gallavan, 2019). The need for a more comprehensive evaluation of pre-service teachers' challenges in adopting CBA is crucial to establishing effective training programmes that will ultimately improve pupil learning results in primary ESL classroom. By addressing these challenges, pre-service teachers can work towards building an inclusive learning environment where all pupils can improve their English language learning.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to measure the level of challenges faced by TESL pre-service teachers during CBA implementation and to determine the potential solutions perceived by them to alleviate challenges in CBA implementation during their practicum phase.

Research Objectives

Based on the identified gaps in CBA implementation, the research objectives of this study are:

1. to determine the level of challenges faced by TESL pre-service teachers in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom.
2. to identify the potential solutions perceived by TESL pre-service teachers to alleviate challenges in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom.

Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives above, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the perceived level of challenges faced by TESL pre-service teachers in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom?
2. What are the potential solutions perceived by TESL pre-service teachers to alleviate challenges in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study was constructed upon three theories namely Constructivist Learning Theory, Socio-Cultural Theory and the Assessment for Learning (AfL) framework. The synergy of these theories provided insights into the challenges faced and possible solutions perceived by TESL pre-service teachers in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom.

Constructivist Learning Theory

The Constructivist Learning Theory asserts that learners actively create their own understanding and knowledge via experiences and reflection. Piaget (1973) posited that learning is a dynamic process that transpires when humans interact with their environment. They assimilate new knowledge and integrate it into their pre-existing cognitive frameworks. This study emphasises the importance of Constructivist Learning Theory in comprehending how TESL pre-service teachers can enhance pupil engagement and foster deeper English language learning through CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom. In this study, this theory acts as a lens to identify the pedagogical challenge of shifting from traditional teacher-centred methods to pupil-centred assessment. Studies demonstrate that pre-service teachers who embrace constructivist concepts foster learning environments that promote critical thinking and collaboration (Zeng et al., 2023). Implementing CBA in primary ESL classroom enables pupils to link theoretical concepts to real-world situations, cultivating a sense of ownership in their learning. This method not only boosts the pupils' motivation but also facilitates the acquisition of important skills for lifelong learning. However, a primary challenge for pre-service teachers is the difficulty in utilising instructional methods that effectively integrate CBA within these constructivist frameworks. By comprehending the ideas of constructivism, pre-service teachers may implement CBA that promotes active engagement, cater to multiple learning modalities and address the differing requirements of their pupils. In this study, the theory portrays how TESL pre-service teachers' knowledge and attitudes affect their capacity to implement CBA, hence fostering meaningful learning experiences for their pupils.

Socio-Cultural Theory

Socio-Cultural Theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), highlights the significance of social interactions and cultural environments in the language learning process. This idea asserts that cognitive growth is predominantly shaped by the social environment, in which language learning transpires through collaborative discussion and collective experiences. In this study, the theory provides a framework to understand resource and environmental challenges as challenges to social mediation. Chung and Fisher (2022) explained the impact of socio-cultural factors on teachers' beliefs and practices. In the educational setting of Malaysia, which is marked by significant cultural diversity, it is crucial to examine how these socio-cultural elements influence TESL pre-service teachers' perceptions and instructional methods regarding CBA implementation.

In a multicultural primary ESL classroom during their practicum phase, TESL pre-service teachers may face difficulties in properly implementing CBA due to varying cultural norms and communication styles. Diverse pupils may interpret assessment criteria differently, resulting in confusion and a disconnect between teachers' goals and pupils' comprehension. This theory helps to analyse the specific challenges faced, including the adaptation of assessments for diverse pupils and the management of limited resources. Socio-Cultural Theory suggests that learning and development are shaped by interactions with peers and mentors as More Knowledgeable Others

(MKOs) and the wider cultural context. Consequently, the theory also points towards potential solutions based on collaborative practices and culturally responsive teaching strategies, emphasising how pre-service teachers utilise their sociocultural environment to effectively overcome these challenges. This study highlights the necessity of preparing TESL pre-service teachers to effectively manage the cultural dynamics present in primary ESL classroom through the connection of these variables to Socio-Cultural Theory.

Assessment for Learning Framework

The Assessment for Learning (AfL) framework promotes formative assessments to improve pupils' learning and guide instructional methods. Wiliam et al. (2024) asserted that assessment must be an essential component of the learning process, allowing teachers to collect data on pupils' progress and modify their instructional methods accordingly. The Assessment for Learning (AfL) emphasises that assessment transcends basic grading, serving as a potent mechanism to enhance pupils' involvement and elevate English language proficiency. In the context of this study, the AfL framework is used to identify the practical implementation gap between ideal assessment and actual classroom challenges in primary ESL classroom. The application of AfL practices in CBA enables teachers to perceive assessment as an on-going feedback system that facilitates pupils' development. Assessment for Learning (AfL) through CBA such as formative assessments, which include quizzes and peer reviews, yield significant insights into pupils' comprehension and areas requiring enhancement, enabling teachers to modify their instructional methods to address pupils' needs. This study specifically sought to identify challenges that TESL pre-service teachers faced from effectively implementing these AfL practices in CBA. Comprehending these challenges would aid in the formulation of specific interventions and tools that assist TESL pre-service teachers in using AfL practices in CBA effectively, hence enhancing English language proficiency for their pupils.

Findings of Past Studies

Previous studies have demonstrated that CBA enhances English language proficiency in primary ESL classroom, though TESL pre-service teachers encounter numerous challenges in its implementation. Classroom-based assessment (CBA) uses curriculum-aligned assessments to evaluate pupils' knowledge and competencies. Effective implementation of CBA enhances the engagement and English language proficiency in primary ESL classroom (Isa et al., 2020; Zaki et al., 2022). Modern educational systems prioritise CBA such as formative assessment and continuous feedback in teaching. Despite its advantages, many TESL pre-service teachers encounter difficulties in implementing CBA in primary ESL classroom owing to their insufficient comprehension and preparation. This prompts enquiries on teacher training programmes and the support for TESL pre-service teachers, which impacts the learning experiences in primary ESL classroom.

Many TESL pre-service teachers lack confidence in executing CBA and have anxiety regarding the integration of this assessment into their instructional methods (Rosli et al., 2021). In the absence of confidence, they may depend on conventional assessment techniques that prioritise rote memorisation rather than critical thinking and language application. Classroom-based assessment (CBA) may appear to be a burden for teachers rather than a mechanism for enhancing pupils' learning. The complexity of CBA, necessitating a profound comprehension of the material and assessment procedures, may deter TESL pre-service teachers from engaging in planning and executing English lessons. Teachers must combine instructional competence with assessment methods to address pupils' diverse needs (Fathoni & Sutimin, 2024). More often than not, TESL pre-service teachers lack foundational knowledge due to inadequacies in their teacher education

programmes (Robertson et al., 2020). This can lead to inconsistent implementation of CBA in the primary ESL classroom and reducing its intended impact on pupils' outcomes.

The lack of educational resources and support makes it difficult to implement the CBA. In actuality, TESL pre-service teachers frequently lack training materials and instruments that comply with CBA standards (Bradley et al., 2020). This limits their ability to offer significant assessment activities for pupils with varying levels of competence. The deficiency of educational resources impacts the quality of assessments, the motivation of in-service and pre-service teachers and the creativity in developing engaging learning experiences. When TESL pre-service teachers lack institutional support, their confidence in CBA diminishes, resulting in disengagement and ineffective instructions. The TESL pre-service teachers experience feelings of inadequacy due to their difficulty in creating engaging assessments, which accommodate diverse learning styles, compounded by restricted resources. These circumstances raise significant questions regarding how Institutes of Teacher Education (ITEs) better prepare TESL pre-service teachers with the necessary skills and support to be applied for the CBA implementation.

This study highlights the necessity of organised training programmes and adequate resources in ITEs to enhance TESL pre-service teachers' knowledge of CBA. Du Plessis (2023) advocated specialised training to enhance teachers' confidence in their assessment practices, which has been shown to elevate pupils' engagement and learning outcomes. Nonetheless, there is limited understanding on the adaptation of training programmes to meet the demands of Malaysian TESL pre-service teachers. There are limited frameworks for integrating CBA into teacher education, which could connect theory and practice. Peer feedback and collaborative lesson planning have demonstrated enhancements in assessment methods (Boardman & Maynard, 2023), although their impact on CBA implementation among TESL pre-service teachers remains mostly unexplored. Enhancing teaching methods requires understanding how collaboration can improve TESL pre-service teachers' CBA literacy.

There is limited data on the efficacy of mentorship programmes in assisting TESL pre-service teachers with CBA. Research suggests that mentorship can offer substantial insights and guidance; nonetheless, the outcomes and best practices of mentorship in CBA implementation remain largely unexamined (Alegado & Soe, 2021). This literature gap could enhance both theory and practice. Mentorship can assist pre-service teachers in reflecting on their instructional methods and acquiring CBA through practicum phase. Nevertheless, teacher education programmes are deficient in formal mentorship initiatives, resulting in numerous TESL pre-service teachers potentially forgoing this essential support. Effective mentorship models and their influence on CBA implementation may enhance TESL pre-service teachers' classroom readiness and pupils' learning outcomes.

In summary, CBA has been widely acknowledged for its potential to improve English language proficiency in primary ESL classroom, but its effective implementation remains a challenge for TESL pre-service teachers during practicum phase. The literature highlights that despite the educational value of CBA, many TESL pre-service teachers struggle due to limited assessment literacy, lack of confidence, insufficient training and a scarcity of resources. These challenges are compounded by inadequate support systems within teacher education programmes, leading to inconsistent and often ineffective CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom.

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the research methodology, encompassing the chosen research method. Aspects such as design of the study, sampling, instrumentation, pilot study, data collection and data analysis procedures are explained.

Design of the Study

Creswell (2009) noted that survey designs constitute methodologies within quantitative research whereby researchers employ surveys to a subset of respondents with the objective of identifying patterns in attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics prevalent within a larger population. The researchers used a quantitative research method for this study. The study adopted a methodological framework centred on descriptive statistics, employing a questionnaire format as its data collection instrument. Quantitative study can objectively measure and assess the challenges and potential solutions perceived by TESL pre-service teachers in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom. A quantitative method facilitates systematic data collection, ensuring consistency and comparability over a broader sample, essential for generalising TESL pre-service teachers' perceptions. The objective characterisation of patterns by quantitative methods aids in recognising challenges and assessing potential solutions. This approach produces data-driven insights that can guide the CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom.

Sampling

The research was conducted among a population in three Institutes of Teacher Education (ITEs) that offer a TESL teaching programme in the southern region of Malaysia (in the states of Negeri Sembilan and Johor). The total population of the Bachelor of Teaching Degree Programme or *Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan* (PISMP) across these campuses was 71 pre-service teachers ($N=71$), distributed as follows: Temenggong Ibrahim Campus ($n=15$), Teknik Campus ($n=19$), and Raja Melewar Campus ($n=37$). A sample of 64 TESL pre-service teachers from June 2021 - July 2025 intake was selected using non-probability purposive sampling. The researchers ensured that only those who had completed their practicum phase were included in the study, in which the respondents had direct, hands-on experience with the CBA implementation. They were also exposed to the implementation of CBA in the primary ESL classroom, as it was one of the mandatory contents that they learnt throughout academic lectures in their respective ITEs. The determination of the sample size followed the guidelines outlined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which suggest that for a small, finite population between 70 to 75, a sample size of between 59 to 63 is required to maintain a 95% confidence level.

Instrumentation

Trigueros et al. (2017) explained that an instrument is a tool to collect data for quantitative data in general. The instrument that was used for this research was a survey questionnaire. This was because it allowed for the gathering of quantitative data in a standardised manner as well as ensuring that the collected data maintain internal consistency and coherence for analysis (Roopa & Rani, 2012). The survey questionnaire designed for this study was divided into three sections, namely Sections A, B and C. Section A comprised general background information of the respondents. The instrument was adapted from Omar's (2019) research entitled "Knowledge, Skills, Attitude and Problem of Teacher's in Implementing Classroom Assessment Malay Language in Primary Schools". Section B and C each consisted of 7 items related to the two variables. In this survey questionnaire, the researchers utilised a 5-point Likert scale for measurement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to

“Strongly Agree” (5).

Validity

Validity is a crucial element in the process of constructing research instruments, assessing the extent to which a measurement tool accurately captures the data it is intended to measure (Heale & Twycross, 2015). To ensure the rigor of the instrument used in this study, several layers of validity were addressed in this study. The researchers conducted meetings and a formal review process with an expert lecturer from an Institute of Teacher Education (ITE). This expert assessed the items for their relevance to the Malaysian primary ESL curriculum and their alignment with the CBA framework to address face and content validity. To address language and construct validity, items deemed inappropriate or containing confusing language and terms were modified or eliminated based on respondent suitability.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of a study to obtain consistent values when repeated at another time (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). To ensure the internal consistency of the survey questionnaire, the researchers conducted a pilot study among TESL pre-service teachers at two other ITEs. This initial inquiry enabled the researchers to meticulously scrutinise the questionnaire for any potential inaccuracies or deficiencies, facilitating subsequent enhancements aimed at increasing the reliability of the study. The data obtained from the pilot study were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The researchers applied Cronbach's Alpha analysis to determine the coefficient values for all items in the questionnaire. A Cronbach's Alpha value of at least 0.60 indicates an acceptable level of reliability for an exploratory study, while values exceeding 0.70 are preferred for established quantitative measures (Bond & Fox, 2013). Opting for a sample size of 30 pre-service teachers specialising in the field of TESL at two other ITEs was deemed both practical and conducive for the pilot study. This methodology adheres to the recommendation posited by Isaac and Michael (1995), suggesting that pilot studies typically encompass sample sizes ranging from 10 to 30 respondents. It recorded the value of 0.828 for Cronbach's alpha, which suggested that the researchers could proceed with the data collection for the required sample size.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

It is crucial to manage how researchers collect the data so as to ease the analysis procedures (De Leeuw, 2012). Firstly, the researchers obtained approval from the Institute of Teacher Education Tun Hussein Onn Campus authorities to conduct the study. Upon receiving approval, the researchers conducted a pilot study to identify strengths and weaknesses and revise the survey questionnaire to improve the reliability of the study. Subsequently, the researchers distributed the questionnaire and administered it to respondents via Google Forms. Instructions on how to respond to the questionnaire were provided on the platform. For this study, the researchers provided the instrument to the identified respondents. A total of 64 respondents answered the survey questionnaire that was conducted through Google Forms. Subsequently, the researchers collected and examined the data using Google Spreadsheets.

In this study, a quantitative methodology was employed to examine both the sample size and the distribution of data derived from the instrument. Following data compilation, analysis was conducted utilising SPSS version 27 to derive conclusive insights. These insights were presented in tabular format, reflecting the findings obtained from the survey questionnaire. Quantitative results were transformed into measures of means and standard deviations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study. It summarises the respondents' profiles, their perceived challenges and potential solutions. Each finding is interpreted and linked to relevant literature and past studies to provide a clear understanding of TESL pre-service teachers' perceptions pertaining to CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom.

Respondents' Profile

A total of 64 TESL pre-service teachers of June 2021 - July 2025 intake from three ITEs participated in this study. Table 1 displays the number of respondents by gender.

Table 1

Number of Respondents

Gender	n	Percentage
Female	51	79.7%
Male	13	20.3%

Main Findings and Discussion

Table 2 and Table 3 provide details of the means and standard deviations for the 14 items representing the two variables of TESL pre-service teachers' perceptions of the CBA implementation in the primary ESL classroom, namely challenges faced and potential solutions. As mentioned earlier, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" for "Strongly Disagree" to "5" for "Strongly Agree", mean 0-1.00 means "Strongly Disagree", mean 1.01-2.00 means "Disagree", mean 2.01-3.00 means "Neutral", mean 3.01-4.00 means "Agree" and mean above 4.01 means "Strongly Agree". Based on the overall results of the survey, respondents perceived high level of challenges in implementing CBA to enhance pupils' English language proficiency ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.62$), followed by the identification of potential solutions perceived by TESL pre-service teachers to alleviate challenges in CBA implementation ($M=4.56$, $SD=0.53$). Below are further explanations of the individual results.

Table 2

TESL Pre-Service Teachers' Perceived Challenges, Means and Standard Deviations

Item Code	Item	M	SD
	TESL Pre-Service Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Implementing CBA (Overall)	4.23	0.62
C1	I am still unclear about the detailed process of CBA implementation in the primary ESL classroom.	3.86	0.66
C2	I find it challenging to conduct CBA because of the extensive number of assessment criteria within each proficiency level.	4.31	0.59
C3	I face difficulties as my lack of commitment to assessments affects the entire CBA system.	4.03	0.71
C4	I believe that my English proficiency level can affect my ability to effectively implement CBA.	4.47	0.59
C5	Students' low level of English proficiency affects their understanding of the CBA tasks.	4.48	0.53

C6	Designing CBA activities is time-consuming.	4.30	0.55
C7	Executing CBA activities is time-consuming, especially for large classes.	4.20	0.69

In relation to the first variable on TESL pre-service teachers' perceptions, the findings revealed that the respondents encountered significant challenges in implementing CBA in the primary ESL classroom. The quantitative data showed high mean values across related items, all exceeding 4.01 including Item C2 ($M=4.31$, $SD=0.59$), Item C3 ($M=4.03$, $SD=0.71$), Item C4 ($M=4.47$, $SD=0.59$), Item C5 ($M=4.48$, $SD=0.53$), Item C6 ($M=4.30$, $SD=0.55$) and Item C7 ($M=4.20$, $SD=0.69$), except for Item C1 ($M=3.86$, $SD=0.66$). This indicates strong agreement with the statements pertaining to challenges faced. These results suggest that the majority of TESL pre-service teachers perceived CBA as a complex and demanding evaluation process due to the presence of numerous challenges.

The findings of this study provide a critical look into the reality of CBA implementation among TESL pre-service teachers during practicum phase. The high mean scores recorded for challenges suggest that the transition from a standardised testing culture to a formative assessment framework is not merely a procedural change, but a significant pedagogical challenge for TESL pre-service teachers.

The respondents highlighted the extensive number of assessment criteria within each proficiency level as overwhelming. This complexity suggests a breakdown in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for the pre-service teachers as they are asked to perform tasks that exceed their current level of assessment literacy without sufficient scaffolding from their training programmes. This is further heightened by the respondents' admission that limitations in their own English proficiency affected their confidence. Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory notes that a teacher must act as the MKO in the teaching and learning process. However, in this study, if the TESL pre-service teacher's own linguistic competence is inadequate, their ability to mediate the learning process through CBA is fundamentally compromised.

The findings also revealed that pupils' low English proficiency and large class sizes act as significant environmental challenges. Time constraints were reported as a major concern, particularly in the context of designing and executing tasks for large classes. This aligns with the AfL framework, which requires timely and personalised feedback to be effective (William et al., 2024). In the absence of manageable class sizes and adequate time, CBA ceases to be a formative tool and instead becomes a difficult administrative task.

These results are consistent with previous research by Isa et al. (2020) and Popham (2017), which identified similar challenges among in-service teachers. However, this study extends those findings by showing that even the pre-service teachers who are trained at ITEs do face the same systemic challenges as their senior counterparts. This suggests that the issue is not merely a lack of experience, but a systemic gap in how CBA is conceptualised versus how it is practised in the primary ESL classroom. Without targeted training that addresses linguistic confidence and time management during the pre-service tenure, the successful nationwide implementation of CBA will remain elusive.

Table 3
TESL Pre-Service Teachers' Potential Solutions, Means and Standard Deviations

Item Code	Item	M	SD
	TESL Pre-Service Teachers' Potential Solutions to Overcome Challenges Faced in Implementing CBA (Overall)	4.56	0.53
S1	Select trainers who are experts in CBA to deliver effective training sessions for pre-service teachers.	4.58	0.50
S2	Ensure that the extended training module covers essential CBA strategies specific to ESL contexts.	4.40	0.49
S3	Create a mentor-mentee system that pairs pre-service teachers with experienced mentors to guide on CBA.	4.50	0.59
S4	Encourage English language teachers to conduct peer observations among pre-service teachers during CBA activities.	4.40	0.63
S5	Provide primary pupils with exposure to CBA practices.	4.68	0.51
S6	Re-evaluate the grouping of pupils based on their English proficiency levels for CBA practices.	4.67	0.51
S7	Consider pupils' diverse learning styles by incorporating differentiation techniques in CBA.	4.67	0.51

The findings above indicated strong agreement on a variety of potential solutions to improve the implementation of CBA in primary ESL classroom. This is supported by consistently high mean values across all items, each exceeding 4.01, including Item S1 ($M=4.58$, $SD=0.50$), Item S2 ($M=4.40$, $SD=0.49$), item S3 ($M=4.50$, $SD=0.59$), item S4 ($M=4.40$, $SD=0.63$), item S5 ($M=4.68$, $SD=0.51$), item S6 ($M=4.67$, $SD=0.51$) and item S7 ($M=4.67$, $SD=0.51$). This indicates the respondents' strong agreement of the potential solutions across all items in the questionnaire.

The findings regarding potential solutions indicate that TESL pre-service teachers possess an understanding of the scaffolding required to bridge the gap between their current abilities and effective CBA practice. The respondents emphasised the importance of selecting expert trainers and establishing a mentor-mentee support system. From the perspective of Socio-Cultural Theory, these solutions represent the necessity of an MKO to facilitate professional growth. Peer observation and mentorship serve as social mediation tools that help pre-service teachers move through their ZPD. As noted by Davison and Leung (2009), assessment literacy is not merely an individual skill but a socially situated practice. By advocating for collaborative environments, pre-service teachers are seeking the social support necessary to apply theoretical assessment knowledge into classroom practice.

The solution to regroup pupils based on proficiency and incorporate differentiated instruction aligns with Constructivist Learning Theory, which posits that assessment should be tailored to the pupils' existing cognitive framework. The pre-service teachers' call for these potential solutions suggests they recognise that a one-size-fits-all assessment model is incompatible with the diverse linguistic realities in primary ESL classroom. By aligning assessment tasks with learner abilities, teachers can foster a sense of ownership in the learning process, a core tenet of constructivism (Zeng et al., 2023). This proactive stance suggests that pre-service teachers are ready to move away from traditional standardised models if provided with the structural flexibility to do so.

The potential solution to expose primary pupils to CBA practices early on highlights a desire to normalise the AfL framework in primary ESL classroom. Early exposure reduces pupil resistance and builds a feedback-oriented classroom climate, which Brookhart (2011) identified as essential for high-quality formative assessment. These findings suggest that the potential solutions are not merely about fixing the teachers' skills, but about a holistic restructuring of the classroom environment, including pupil readiness and structural support to make CBA a sustainable component of English language instruction in primary ESL classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated TESL pre-service teachers' perceptions of the challenges and potential solutions in CBA implementation in primary ESL classroom. The TESL pre-service teachers faced prevalent challenges, including the complexity of assessment criteria, severe time constraints, a lack of personal commitment and the linguistic limitations of both the pre-service teachers and their pupils. These challenges have significant implications for the CBA implementation in supporting pupils' English language proficiency, as they often force pre-service teachers to revert to traditional, less effective assessment methods. However, despite these challenges, the pre-service teachers demonstrated a strong awareness of potential solutions grounded in Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. They emphasised the necessity of social mediation through expert trainers, mentor-mentee support systems and peer observations to bridge the gap in their ZPD. Furthermore, classroom-level strategies such as differentiated instruction and regrouping pupils based on proficiency were identified as essential tools to align CBA with pupils' actual abilities.

The implications of these findings suggest a critical need for curriculum developers and ITEs to move beyond theoretical instruction. Professional development must be contextualised and ongoing, ensuring pre-service teachers having the necessary scaffolding to manage diverse classroom dynamics. Streamlining assessment criteria and providing CEFR-aligned resources could reduce the perceived challenges of CBA. Despite these insights, this study is limited by its small sample size of 64 respondents from the southern region, which may affect the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, as a quantitative study based on self-reported data, the findings may not capture the nuances of actual classroom performance. Therefore, future research could employ a longitudinal, mixed-methods approach to track the development of these pre-service teachers during their early years of service. Incorporating classroom observations and expanding the study to include a nationwide sample would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the success of CBA implementation in Malaysian primary ESL classroom.

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