ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TESTING AND ASSESSMENT AT TAY NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This quantitative study investigates the attitudes of English-majored students (N = 150) at Tay Nguyen University towards testing and assessment. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Key findings reveal that a majority of students (60%) perceive testing as an effective measure of learning. However, significant proportions reported mixed experiences regarding its diagnostic value (63.33% find it sometimes/frequently helpful vs. 24% rarely helpful) and feedback quality (14–20% rarely/never receive clear, actionable feedback). Additionally, while many acknowledge the motivational role of testing (over 60%), a comparable majority (60–62.66%) also reported experiencing it as stressful. The study concludes that while students largely view assessment as a measure of accountability and effectiveness, there is a pressing need to diversify assessment methods, enhance the specificity and equity of feedback, and reduce unnecessary testing pressure to better support student learning and well-being. Implications for improving assessment design and teacher training are discussed.

Keywords: Students' attitudes, testing and assessment, feedback, perceptions, ELT context, EFL students, Vietnamese higher education.

1. Introduction

In recent years, raising educational standards has become a significant national priority in Vietnam. This drive for improvement has spurred a movement to renovate education in general and assessment practices in particular. Testing and assessment play a pivotal role in the teaching and learning process (Brown, 2002). While the quality of education in Vietnam has seen some progress, it still lags behind the actual requirements of national socio-economic development, public expectations, and educational advancements in other countries. Persistent weaknesses in education continue to raise societal concerns. Therefore, thorough investigations into testing and assessment reform are necessary to enhance educational quality in general and to understand the attitudes of English-majored students at Tay Nguyen University specifically.

Understanding students' feelings about testing and assessment is essential for striking a balance between educational rigor and student well-being. Identifying whether students find these assessments beneficial or overly stressful can inform the development of more effective and student-friendly testing practices. This balance is critical to ensure that assessments are not only rigorous and reflective of students' knowledge and skills but also considerate of their mental and emotional health. Such insights are crucial for improving assessment design and implementation. By considering students' perspectives, educators can develop assessment strategies that are not only challenging but also supportive, ultimately fostering a more positive and productive learning environment. This approach enhances student learning outcomes and prepares future teachers to implement best practices in their own teaching careers.

SPECIAL ISSUE

Moreover, the limitations of assessment—such as its use as a primary means to evaluate schools and student achievement—have long been noted, and it is now under greater scrutiny than ever before (Nancy, 2001). Black and Wiliam (1998) provide evidence of an urgent need for assessment reforms. They point out that current assessment practices can be ineffective when teachers' tests encourage rote and superficial learning, are not critically reviewed for what they actually assess, and neglect quality in relation to learning. Furthermore, an overemphasis on grading can foster competition rather than personal development, demotivate students, and promote superficial knowledge.

Understanding students' perspectives on testing and assessment is particularly important in contexts where they face more context-related obstacles to educational quality improvement. This study aims to contribute to the literature by investigating how assessment is conceived by English-majored students at Tay Nguyen University. The results provide significant evidence to inform productive policies for improving assessment effectiveness and educational quality. Specifically, given the importance of assessment in shaping learners' experiences and outcomes, it is essential to examine the attitudes of English-majored pedagogical students at Tay Nguyen University toward testing and assessment.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Method and Instrument

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing a questionnaire to investigate students' attitudes toward testing and assessment. All items in the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with a neutral midpoint. Questionnaires are a cost-effective and straightforward means of gathering data from a large number of respondents simultaneously (Nunan, 1996). The use of a standardized questionnaire allows for the comparison of information across participants (Li & Fai, 2008). The reliability of the questionnaire scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. All constructs demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from .78 to .89, exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Figure 1. Reliability Analysis of Measurement Scales (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Testing and Assessment as Educational Effectiveness	0.81
Testing and Assessment for Diagnosing Weaknesses	0.78
Assessment as a Tool for Feedback and Improvement	0.85
Testing Pressure and Affective Responses	0.76
Overall questionnaire	0.83

2.2. Research Questions

The study aims to provide an understanding of students' beliefs and attitudes with respect to assessment in learning and teaching and to identify the relationship between these conceptions of assessment and how these conceptions influence each other. This study aims to answer the following question:

- *What are the attitudes of English-majored students at Tay Nguyen University towards Testing and Assessment?*

2.3. Participants

The study involved 150 students majoring in English in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Tay Nguyen University. Participants were selected randomly. Before completing the questionnaire, they received detailed explanations about the distinctions between testing and assessment practices.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS software (Version 26). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize participants' responses to each item on the Likert scale. The analysis focused on identifying central tendencies and distributions of attitudes across the four main themes of the study.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Overview of Testing and Assessment

3.1.1. The Definition of Testing and Assessment

There is empirical and theoretical evidence for believing that assessment is a powerful tool available to help assessors ensure that students reach appropriate standards (Biggs, 1998; Brown, 2004; Stiggins, 2008, Vandar, 2010). Conceptually, testing and assessment are central to language education, yet they differ in purpose and scope. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), testing refers to a systematic procedure for measuring learners' performance through controlled tasks, while assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a broader range of evaluative activities. Similarly, Bachman and Palmer (2010) emphasize that language assessment involves multiple techniques used to gather information about learners' abilities in authentic and instructional contexts. In language teaching and learning, assessment plays a crucial role in helping teachers design effective evaluation instruments (Saragih, 2017) and adjust instructional practices accordingly. Within educational settings, the combination of formal testing and informal assessment provides a comprehensive understanding of learners' abilities, enables the monitoring of progress, and informs curriculum development.

Assessment can be divided into two main categories: Assessment for Learning (Formative Assessment) and Assessment of Learning (Summative Assessment) (Black & William, 1998; Stiggins, 2002; Neibling, 2014). While the former occurs during learning process, the latter is at the end of the process. Furthermore, "formative assessment actively engages both teachers and students in learning goal development, progress monitoring, and preparation of future learning steps" (Calveric, 2010, p.23). On the other hand, summative assessment focuses on final products, so feedback does not provide assessors with enough information for learning improvement of students (Brown, Kennedy, Fok, Chen & Yu, 2009).

Researchers emphasize the systematic and objective nature of testing, considering it as a tool for observation, classification, and driven decision-making in learning and teaching. The continuous aspect of testing (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001) allows educators to identify strengths and weaknesses, tailor teaching strategies, and provide targeted support. Pedagogical tests, enhanced by technological tools, remain accessible and reliable means of measuring knowledge and supplying data to improve instructional methods

In brief, testing and assessment is considered as not only as tools for measuring learning results but as mechanisms for feedback, curriculum guidance, fairness, and the overall enhancement of education in general and in EFL contexts in particular.

3.1.2. The Importance of Testing & Assessment in Language Education

The significance of testing and assessment in language education is highlighted by its role in gauging language proficiency and enhancing language instruction. It is a vital aspect of teaching activities, ensuring responsibility and assessing the efficiency of teaching techniques (Mousavi, 2009). It is worth noting thatFulcher, G & Owen, N. (2016) further stresses the importance of assessment literacy among language educators, discussing the significance of standardized testing and assessment for learning.

Furthermore, assessment in EFL contexts also acts as a means to pinpoint students' strengths and weaknesses, steer instructional design, and promote ongoing enhancement in language learning results. By offering feedback to both students and teachers, assessment plays a crucial role in shaping curriculum structure and customizing instruction to cater to the varied needs of language learners. Furthermore, employing diverse assessment approaches like formative assessments, self-assessments, and peer assessments can boost students' involvement, drive, and overall language proficiency growth. As educators delve into innovative assessment methods and technologies, the realm of language education stands to gain from a more thorough and dynamic strategy for evaluating and enriching language learning experiences. In Vietnam, Nguyen and Dao (2020) reported that students appreciate assessments that provide detailed feedback and reflect actual learning needs.

Importantly, in any contexts, in order to transform classroom practices and teaching methodologies, we need to have a broader view of assessment meanings. As a result, students will be able to identify these expectations that they need to fulfil in the minds of teachers (Stiggins,2005). Additionally, from the literature review on assessment purposes, different conceptions on assessment purposes will have different practices, and tensions among these purposes are unavoidable (Brown, 2002).

3.2. Students' Attitudes in Learning Context

To begin with, Thompson (1992) finds the association between beliefs and practices is not a simple cause - effect relationship, but a dialectic one. Students' attitudes play a crucial role in shaping learning behaviors, academic performance, and responses to assessment practices. In language learning contexts, attitudes are closely intertwined with learners' motivation, beliefs about their abilities, and perceptions of instructional and assessment environments. According to Gardner (1985), attitudes toward learning significantly influence learners' willingness to engage with the target language, contributing to both cognitive and affective outcomes. Positive attitudes generally lead to greater effort, persistence, and achievement, whereas negative attitudes may impede learning and increase anxiety. Furthermore, Teachers and students' beliefs and their norms of the environment around them form their behaviour and practices (Azis, 2014). It is a conviction that understanding a conception toward an educational aspect is a powerful way to know how that process is really understood by teachers or students (Brown, 2008).

In the assessment context, students' attitudes are influenced by their understanding of assessment purposes. Research by Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) identifies several student-held conceptions of assessment: assessment as improving learning, assessment as measuring achievement, assessment as accountability, and assessment as irrelevant. Students who view assessment as a tool for improvement tend to engage more positively and use feedback effectively, while those who perceive assessment as a judgmental or punitive mechanism are more likely to experience stress and disengagement.

Overall, students' attitudes within the learning context represent a complex interplay of cognitive beliefs, affective responses, and sociocultural influences. Understanding these attitudes is essential for interpreting learners' reactions to testing and assessment and for designing evaluation practices that support—not hinder—language learning.

3.3. Students' Attitudes Towards Testing and Assessment

3.3.1. Testing and Assessment as Measures of Educational Effectiveness

The first conception of assessment is that assessment is considered as an indicator for necessary changes to improve teaching and students' learning (Brown, 2002; Stiggins, 2008). Data collected from assessing students' knowledge, performances and abilities provide valid, descriptive and reliable evidence for changes in teaching practices or improvement in student learning (Brown, 2002). More clearly, assessment is widely used to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and curricular design. The concept of educational effectiveness has been examined by numerous scholars in various contexts. Susanto (2020) defines testing effectiveness as the practical application of testing methodologies to achieve desired outcomes. Breting-Garcia (2020) adds that it involves the evaluation and review of testing practices to ensure they meet specific standards. Together, these perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of testing effectiveness and its critical role in both learning and assessment.

According to Roediger and Butler (2011), testing is an interactive process that engages students with the material. It's misleading to think of tests only as tools for evaluation. This misconception probably comes from the idea that tests are mainly for measuring performance rather than helping students learn. As a result, the role of testing in education has gained a lot of attention.Nakata (2016) highlights that testing, especially through retrieving information, is crucial for learning. This shows that testing not only helps with memory recall but also enhances understanding and practical application of knowledge, making it a very effective educational strategy.

3.3.2. Using Testing and Assessment to Identify Student Weaknesses

In EFL context, assessment, particularly formative assessment, helps identify individual learners' strengths and weaknesses. Diagnostic assessment is an essential mechanism for identifying learners' strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs. Many researchers have taken a deep insight into how we can acknowledge weaknesses in students' attitudes towards testing and assessment. Alderson (2005) believes that assessment helps diagnose learners' gaps. McNamara (2000) also adds that this process involves systematically evaluating students' responses and attitudes to find areas that need improvement. This method is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of testing and assessment in an educational environment. The success of identifying weaknesses relies on several factors, such as the assessment methods used, the evaluation context, and the characteristics of the students being assessed.

Stiggins (2002) argues that effectively identifying weaknesses allows for personalized feedback and support for students. Testing and assessment process involves systematically evaluating students' responses and attitudes to find areas that need improvement. This method is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of testing and assessment in educational settings. The success of identifying weaknesses relies on several factors, such as the assessment methods used, the evaluation context, and the characteristics of the students being assessed. In addition, this detailed information helps teachers tailor instruction to individual needs. According to Bachman and Palmer (2010), diagnostic feedback encourages students to take greater responsibility for their learning, fostering self-assessment skills and metacognitive awareness. When students recognize their weaknesses, they become more active participants in their learning journey, adjusting study habits, seeking assistance, or engaging with remedial resources.

Moreover, several studies highlight the significance of timely diagnosis. Delayed identification of weaknesses often results in entrenched learning problems that are harder to remediate (Carless, 2015). Early and continuous formative assessment enables teachers to intervene during the learning process, preventing small difficulties from becoming major barriers to achievement.

3.3.3. Assessment as a Tool for Feedback and Improvement

It is believed that feedback is one of the most powerful tools to îmove learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that effective feedback plays a crucial role in the learning process by enabling students to actively engage in self-assessment and reflection. This form of feedback not only helps students to understand their strengths and areas for improvement but also fosters a deeper level of metacognition, allowing them to take ownership of their learning journey**.** Beliefs in improvement purpose of assessment create a fundamental shift from evaluating how high students' grades are to what students have really learnt (Stiggins, 2002).

In addition, Timperley (2007) found that high-quality feedback significantly enhances academic performance by clarifying goals, identifying gaps, and suggesting next steps. He also suggested that Effective feedback can encourage learners to engage in self-correction, improve metalinguistic awareness, and develop long-term writing and speaking skills. Especially, in language teaching and learning feedback derived from assessment guides learners to developing accuracy, fluency, and complexity (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Furthermore, according to Scriven (1991), "improvement assessment or evaluation can be defined as evaluation designed, done, and intended to support the process of improvement, and normally commissioned or done by, and delivered to, someone who can make improvements" (as cited in Brown, 2002, p. 28).

Apparently, while assessment feedback generally contributes to students' academic growth, the inconsistency reported by a considerable subset of respondents highlights the need for more targeted, timely, and equitable feedback practices. Ensuring that all students receive constructive comments may enhance their ability to apply feedback effectively and make meaningful progress.

3.3.4. Testing and Assessment as Tools to Monitor and Understand Testing Pressure

Recent scholarship suggests that assessment itself can be used as a diagnostic tool to measure

testing pressure and identify learners at risk of negative emotional effects. For example, Birenbaum (2007) proposes that students' reactions to tests provide important insights into the quality and fairness of assessment systems. Assessments that include reflective components—such as self-assessment or post-test surveys—can help educators detect levels of anxiety, perceived difficulty, and emotional strain (Yan & Brown, 2017).

Moreover, research by Stobart (2006) highlights that assessment data can reveal patterns of stress across student populations, allowing institutions to evaluate how their testing policies contribute to psychological pressure. In language education, where affective variables strongly influence performance, incorporating affective evaluation into assessment systems is considered essential (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). In addition, Zeidner (1998) argues that testing pressure is shaped by multiple factors, including test format, stakes, scoring transparency, and perceived teacher expectations. For example, high-stakes assessments—such as final exams or proficiency tests—tend to elicit significantly higher anxiety than classroom-based or formative assessments. Therefore, by analyzing patterns in students' assessment responses, educators can determine whether testing environments are inadvertently contributing to elevated anxiety or discouragement.

In conclusion, the use of assessment as a tool for monitoring testing pressure reflects a shift toward more holistic and learner-centered evaluation. By identifying emotional barriers to performance, institutions can develop more equitable assessment policies and provide targeted interventions that support both academic achievement and student well-being.

4. Findings

4.1. Testing and Assessment as Measures of Educational Effectiveness

This section of the questionnaire was constructed using a five-point Likert scale to capture respondents' degrees of agreement with the statement, "Testing is an effective way to measure student learning." The response options ranged from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree, allowing participants to indicate the extent to which they aligned with the statement and providing a nuanced understanding of their perceptions. The findings show that a majority of students (60%) agree or strongly agree that testing is an effective means of measuring learning, indicating generally positive attitudes toward assessment. Nevertheless, a notable minority (15.33%) express disagreement, suggesting that some students do not perceive testing as beneficial. Additionally, the neutral responses from 24.67% of participants reflect a degree of uncertainty or ambivalence, pointing to potential gaps in current test design or implementation. These varied perspectives emphasize the need for improved assessment practices that more effectively address students' diverse learning needs and promote greater fairness and inclusivity.

In brief, while the majority support testing as beneficial for learning and motivation, the presence of neutral and negative responses highlights the need to refine assessment practices to better address students' diverse perceptions and experiences. (see Table 1).

Table 1: Attitudes towards Testing as a Measure of Educational Effectiveness

Response Option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	8	5.33
Disagree	15	10.00
Neutral	37	24.67
Agree	65	43.33
Strongly Agree	25	16.67

### 4.2. Using Testing and Assessment to Diagnose Student Weaknesses

The primary objective of this section is to examine how effectively students perceive testing as a means of identifying their weaknesses in English language skills. By analyzing students' feedback regarding the clarity, usefulness, and frequency of test results, this section aims to determine the

extent to which current assessment practices enable learners to recognize their deficiencies and take appropriate steps toward improvement. Obviously, the analysis of English major students' attitudes toward the use of testing to identify areas for improvement reveals a wide spectrum of perspectives. A clear majority (63.33%) report that testing is sometimes or frequently helpful in pinpointing weaknesses, whereas nearly a quarter (24%) perceive it as rarely beneficial. Additionally, 22.67% express a neutral view, indicating varied experiences with assessment practices. These findings suggest that, although many students acknowledge the value of testing for diagnostic purposes, a substantial proportion do not find it effective. This highlights the need for more flexible and responsive assessment strategies that better accommodate students' diverse learning needs and experiences.

Finally, although the majority recognize testing as beneficial for pinpointing deficiencies, varied responses suggest that current practices do not consistently provide clear or meaningful feedback, highlighting the need for more effective and student-centered assessment methods.

4.3. Assessment as a Tool for Feedback and Improvement

Figure 2: Assessment as a Tool for Feedback and Improvement
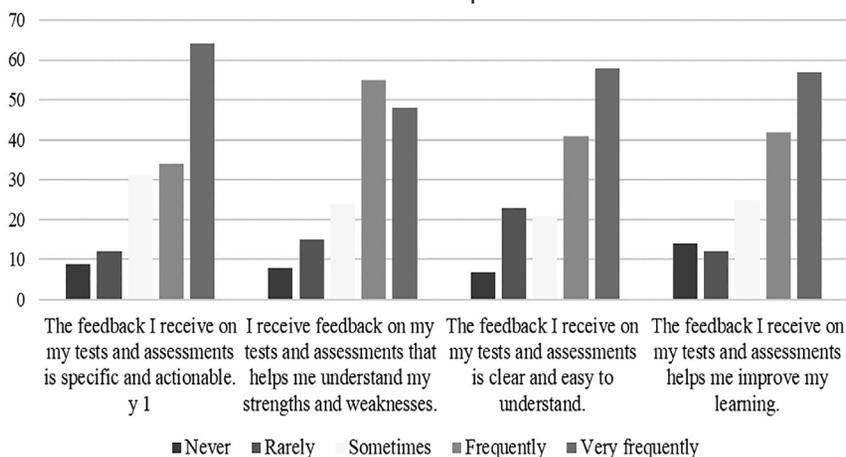
Survey results indicate that most English major students benefit from assessment feedback, though notable gaps remain. A majority reported receiving specific and actionable feedback frequently or very frequently (65.34%), and 68.67% stated that feedback often helps them understand their strengths and weaknesses, which helps them improve for the next examinations or assignment. Similarly, 66% found feedback clear and easy to interpret, and 66% indicated it supports learning improvement. However, across all items, 14–20% of students rarely or never experienced such benefits, while another 14–17% reported only sometimes receiving useful feedback. These findings suggest that, while assessment feedback is generally effective, a significant minority of students do not consistently receive the clarity or specificity needed, highlighting the importance of more targeted and equitable feedback practices.

4.3. Testing and Assessment as Tools to Monitor and Understand Testing Pressure

Many English major students at Faculty of Foreign Languages , Tay Nguyen University participating in the research acknowledged the motivational benefits of testing. The first statement showed that 60.66% of respondents agreed that testing creates a positive learning environment, though 20.67% disagreed and 18.67% remained neutral. Similarly, the second statement showed a slightly higher level of agreement (63.34%), indicating that most students continue to view testing as somewhat motivating, despite 20% expressing disagreement. The third statement reflected a more divided perspective: 56.67% agreed that testing has little impact on the learning environment, while 24.67% disagreed. This suggests that students differ widely in how strongly they feel testing influences their learning.In contrast to the motivational aspects, the fourth and fifth statements revealed pronounced concerns about testing-related stress. For the next statement, 60% agreed that testing creates a stressful or

discouraging environment, while 23.33% disagreed. The final statement reinforced this pattern, with 62.66% agreeing that testing is extremely stressful; however, 22% did not perceive testing as highly stressful.

In short, the analysis provides a multifaceted picture of students' attitudes toward testing pressure. While many students recognize the positive and motivating aspects of testing, a substantial proportion also report experiencing stress and discouragement. These mixed perceptions highlight the need for a more balanced assessment approach—one that maintains the motivational value of testing while reducing unnecessary pressure.

5. Conclusion

In the context of Tay Nguyen University, the high level of agreement suggests that English-majored students trust the existing assessment system and believe that testing practices are generally fair, transparent, and reflective of their academic ability. The results indicate that English majors define assessment as a means of making students accountable for their learning where compulsory examinations are applied at all levels. This reinforces the view of Gibbs and Simpson (2004), who argue that students are more likely to appreciate assessment when it provides clear expectations and consistent criteria. However, it is vital to strike a balance in assessment practices—maintaining the motivational benefits of testing while reducing unnecessary pressure. Developing more supportive testing environments may improve both student well-being and academic performance.

In conclusion, the analysis strongly supports the notion that assessment as a measure of effectiveness dominates student perceptions, with the majority viewing testing as an essential and reliable measure of educational effectiveness. Among English-majored students at Tay Nguyen University, it is believed that testing serves as a reliable tool to evaluate whether learning objectives have been met, particularly in core areas such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The other attitudes, while not insignificant, remain relatively less influential, suggesting that students primarily regard assessments as a means of evaluating their academic performance rather than as tools for learning enhancement, stress evaluation, weakness identification, or feedback.

Recommendations

Several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of assessment methods and feedback practices for English majors at Tay Nguyen University. Firstly, Diversify Assessment Methods: Implement a broader range of assessment formats (e.g., portfolios, projects, peer assessments) to create a more inclusive and comprehensive evaluation framework that caters to diverse learning styles. Secondly, the enhancement of feedback practices is essential for fostering student development. Ensuring feedback must be specific, actionable, timely, and constructive. Training for educators on providing effective feedback is essential to help students identify strengths and areas for improvement clearly. Following that, the promotion of autonomous learning stands as a critical recommendation. Empowering students to take ownership of their educational journeys through the development of self-regulated learning skills is vital. By addressing these areas, Tay Nguyen University can develop assessment practices that are not only rigorous and effective but also supportive, equitable, and conducive to overall student well-being and academic success.

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