

EFL TEACHERS' FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN NON-ENGLISH MAJOR CLASSROOM

HOẠT ĐỘNG KIỂM TRA ĐÁNH GIÁ THƯỜNG XUYỀN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRONG LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ

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Received: 29/4/2025; Accepted: 9/5/2025; Published: 19/5/2025

Tóm tắt: Trên cơ sở thực hiện mục tiêu của Đề án ngoại ngữ Quốc gia (2008 – 2025), chuẩn đầu ra tiếng Anh bậc 3/6 theo khung năng lực ngoại ngữ 6 bậc dành cho người Việt Nam được đặt ra cho các sinh viên tiếng Anh không chuyên ngữ tại các trường đại học. Nhằm đạt được chuẩn đầu ra đó, cần có sự cải cách đáng kể trong thực hành kiểm tra đánh giá sinh viên trong các lớp học tiếng Anh không chuyên ngữ. Bài báo này trình bày kết quả của một nghiên cứu tìm hiểu thực hành kiểm tra đánh giá sinh viên tiếng Anh không chuyên ngữ của giáo viên tiếng Anh tại một thành phố ở miền Trung Việt Nam. Dữ liệu thu thập được từ phỏng vấn, quan sát và các mẫu kiểm tra đánh giá nêu bật các công cụ kiểm tra đánh giá được giáo viên tiếng Anh thường xuyên sử dụng để kiểm tra đánh giá sinh viên. Đề xuất đưa ra từ kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ góp phần nâng cao chất lượng học tập của sinh viên không chuyên ngữ và hỗ trợ phát triển chuyên môn cho giáo viên tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: Kiểm tra đánh giá thường xuyên, sinh viên tiếng Anh không chuyên ngữ, công cụ kiểm tra đánh giá

Abstract: Level 3/6 of the Vietnam Foreign Language Proficiency Framework (VNFLPF) has been set as the expected English proficiency level for non-English major students in the implementation of the National Foreign Language Project (2008–2025). The launch of this policy has necessitated significant reforms in EFL teachers' assessment practice to align with the required learning outcomes. This paper presents the results of a study examining the assessment practice of EFL teachers working with non-English major students in a city in Central Vietnam. Data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples identifies commonly used tools in formative assessment. Based on the findings, the paper proposes practical recommendations to enhance non-English major students' learning outcomes and support professional development among EFL teachers.

Keywords: Formative assessment, assessment tools, non-English major students

1. Introduction

The implementation of the National Project 2020, (extended to 2025) in Vietnam, has set level 3/6 (VNFLPF) - B1 (CEFR) as the learning outcomes for non-English major students with the hope that most young Vietnamese graduates of professional universities would have a good command of foreign language to serve national industrialization and modernization (MOET, 2008). These objectives have made English language learning at university degree challenging as non-English major graduates are required to achieve Level 3/6 (VNFLPF) - B1 (CEFR) after taking seven required credits relevant to 105 general English instruction hours by teachers to achieve the required standard.

English language testing and assessment is of great concern as effective assessment is believed to provide valuable information to students, educators, parents, and administrators for making the right decisions or setting upcoming goals, maintaining students' interests and improving learning quality. Teachers' practice of assessing students hence plays a significant role in helping students achieve the required learning outcomes.

From the reality of a new teaching and learning context, this study was conducted to explore EFL teachers' assessment tools of non-English major students supporting students meet the required standard outlined by the Ministry of Education and Training in the implementation of the National project 2020.

2. Literature review

2.1. Formative assessment

Formative assessment provides opportunities for teachers to collect information about students' strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs in relation to learning outcomes; enables students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do; helps teachers make judgments of their instructions; improves and motivates students' learning with timely and effective feedback. In other words, formative assessment is an ongoing process that informs teachers about how well students are performing, allowing them to make timely decisions aimed at reducing students' test anxiety and enhancing their comfort and sense of success through effective feedback

2.2. Principles of selecting assessment tools

- Assessment tools should be suitable for both

formal and informal assessment;

- Assessment tools should help collect information of students' ongoing development of English learning and
- Assessment tools in classroom should be multi-dimensional (coming in different forms, lengths, task types).

2.3. Related studies

Studies about teachers' assessment practice have focused mainly on identifying the assessment tools that teachers use in their classroom to assess their language students.

Gullickson's (1985) study of assessment practice indicated that teachers preferred teacher-made assessments and other tools, such as essay tests and paper tests. Sharing the same results, Cizek and Rachor's study (1996) indicated that teachers frequently used quizzes and tests to assess their learners. Apart from using the same assessment tools as the discussed studies, it was suggested that teachers' practice of assessment was influenced by high-stake tests in this context (Kanjee, 2015). In the same context of this study, it was showed that the most popular forms used for assessing learners were tests and tests were summative-oriented.

The development of digital assessment had opened new possibilities on teachers' assessment activities to accommodate a variety of learners. It was indicated that educational learning applications can facilitate ongoing data collection throughout the learning process and help integrate assessment more effectively with instruction as well as reduce time to grade and provide feedback on students' performance (Delgado, Azevedo & Sebastiany, 2020)

The literature review has discussed some background of the study including formative assessment, principles of selecting assessment tools and related studies.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Research participants

The participants of this research are 6 lecturers working at a university in Central Vietnam. These teachers have from 5 to 20 years of experience in teaching English to non-English major students. These EFL teachers graduated from university with a M.A or Ph.D. degree of English language teaching.

3.2. Research questions

The paper aims to answer the following research question: What are common assessment tools used by EFL teachers to assess non-English major students?

3.3. Research instruments

This study employed the following instruments to collect data relevant to the research questions: in-depth interview, classroom observation and assessment samples.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 teachers. Average length of interview duration was about 20 minutes.

Structured classroom observation in this study was undertaken to discover what assessment practice EFL teacher used, how they assessed their students, and how they gave feedback to their students.

A corpus of formative assessment samples in various formats and of different lengths were accumulated from teacher participants to provide more insight into teachers' assessment practice.

4. Results and discussion

The findings from the in-depth interview, classroom observation, and a collection of assessment samples showed that EFL teachers used various assessment tools, including tests, quizzes, portfolios, observation, and peer/self-assessment for formative assessment in the classroom.

This study shared the same findings as some findings in the previous studies (Gullickson, 1985; Yildirim, 2004) in the fact that tests were the most common tools used in EFL teachers' formative assessment practice of non-English major students. Tests were compiled from available learning resources for the Elementary and Pre-Intermediate Life textbook by Cengage Learning, practice tests from Key English Tests (KET) or Preliminary English Tests (PET) by Cambridge University Press, and other available online resources that were relevant to the learning themes being instructed in non-English major classrooms and the test format being used in informal and formal assessments. Teachers also adapted these tests from textbook learning resources. Teacher participants shared that: "I often adapt some reading texts with WH-questions from the textbook for cloze tests with three or four alternatives so that my students can apply what they have learnt into practice." (T1) or "Some reading texts can be transformed into listening sections and vice versa" (T6).

The study shared the same findings as in many other related studies in the reliance on the tasks and exercises in the textbooks (Gullickson, 1985). Tests were often written with multiple-choice and short answer questions, which were frequently used and reused in high-stake tests. It was suggested that teachers' practice of assessment was influenced by high-stake tests in this context (Kanjee, 2015; Yildirim, 2004).

The second common assessment tools used by teachers for formative assessment in the classroom were quizzes. Quizzes were often used to assess students' lower-order thinking skills for assessing vocabulary and grammar as two teacher participants shared "*Short quizzes are easy to use either at the beginning or at the end of each unit lesson*". (T5) and

"Short quizzes help motivate students a lot. Students are excited whenever I let them play quizzes." (T4). These quizzes could be played in teams or individually. Actually, the findings from classroom observation showed that most students were really interested in playing games/ quizzes and were motivated in their learning.

Observation, the third common assessment tool, was often used to collect information about students' progress in their learning process. Teachers could observe students' reaction, application of learning in familiar or unfamiliar contexts and their level of understanding directly. As a results, teachers identified where student learning is going, provide feedback to help students know where they are to make progress in their learning; teachers could also make some changes in their instruction.

Learning portfolios were taken from available learning resources for Elementary and Pre-Intermediate Life textbook by Cengage Learning and practice tests from Key English Tests (KET) or Preliminary English Tests (PET) by Cambridge University Press and assigned for students to work individually as a collection for review and further practice. Four of six teachers shared that these learning portfolios were sent to students in Zalo group or delivered in hard copies at the beginning of the course, asked to finish unit by unit and checked or marked selectively.

Peer and self - assessment were practiced by three out of six of EFL teachers as it was believed that incidental observation during class activities like oral interaction, drafting process in writing or reading providing valuable information about what students were thinking, feeling and guiding them for making teaching decisions. Teacher participant 1 shared *"I think self - assessment makes students more active and responsible for their process of learning. Before any new lessons, my students are asked to start with Things I have learnt are...or I would like to learn more about"* From these activities, teachers could learn where the students are, what they have learnt and what should be done for both teaching and learning improvement.

To sum up, some common assessment tools used by EFL teachers had always been used as ever in formative assessment of non-English major students; thanks to emergence of educational learning applications, they were being used more and more effectively and students made progress in their learning gradually.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings provided insights into EFL teachers' practice of assessing non-English major students in the current teaching context.

The data collected from interviews, classroom

observation, and assessment samples showed some common assessment tools teachers used in the practice of assessing non-English major students, including tests with multiple-choice and short-answer questions, quizzes, observation, portfolios, peer assessments, and self-assessments. Tests and quizzes were the most common tools, and most items were from textbooks and learning resources. The findings stated teachers' reliance on tasks and exercises from textbooks. The findings also showed that the conducting of these assessment tools in assessing students was becoming more and more effective thanks to available educational learning applications; therefore, students were more motivated and engaged in their learning process.

Some implications would be suggested for improving both teaching and learning quality.

- In the implementation of formative assessment, alternative assessment tools—peer assessment, self-assessment, and portfolios—should be combined with other favorite tools, including tests, quizzes, etc to collect more information about students' learning so as to provide them with timely and effective feedback;

- EFL teachers should take advantage of educational learning apps to reduce time in assigning assessment activities, providing timely feedback and grading;

This study only focused on EFL teachers' tools of assessing non-English major students in one university in Central Vietnam, so the findings could not be generalized to all universities around Vietnam to show the reality of language assessment to the policy-makers; further research can be done on the national scale with the participation of EFL teachers from other universities from other regions all over Vietnam.

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