



Some Impact of the English Competence Assessment Test Based on Output Standards on English Teaching at Tan Trao University

Bui Thi Hoang Hue

Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam

Tran Thi Thuy Lan ✉

Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam

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Abstract:

The standardized English proficiency assessment has yielded significant and positive impacts on the English teaching and learning processes at Tan Trao University. This assessment not only serves as a tool to evaluate students' English proficiency but also constitutes an integral component of the educational process, encompassing curriculum design and instructional methodologies. One of the paramount effects of this assessment is the establishment of clear standards regarding proficiency levels and requisite skills. This initiative provides educators and students with a precise understanding of the competencies required for English language acquisition. Consequently, the university can devise tailored language programs that ensure students are equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in academic and professional environments. Furthermore,

the assessment instills a sense of pressure on students as they prepare and engage in a high-stakes testing environment. However, this pressure serves as a motivator for students to enhance their individual English proficiency. Consequently, students are propelled towards autonomy and responsibility in their English language learning endeavors, whether through supplemental coursework or independent study. the assessment fosters improvements in the quality of English language instruction at the university. Educators must possess comprehensive knowledge of the assessment's content and requisite skills, prompting them to explore and implement effective pedagogical strategies. This results in a diversification of teaching methodologies, ranging from the utilization of extensive learning resources to the organization of practical activities and classroom discussions.

Keywords: *Students, English teaching, curriculum design, learning processes, Tan Trao University.*

Introduction

The "Project on Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System for the Period 2008-2020" has implemented robust action plans as part of a comprehensive reform

initiative in the national language education framework. Drawing upon the 6-level Foreign Language Competency Framework tailored for Vietnam, a derivative of this project, the proficiency benchmarks for foreign language



acquisition across post-secondary education tiers have been delineated. These standards prescribe Level 3 proficiency for non-specialized fields, Level 4 for advanced foreign language specialization at the collegiate level, and Level 5 for advanced foreign language specialization at the university level. Subsequently, on March 11, 2015, the Ministry of Education and Training promulgated Decision No. 729/QĐ-BGDĐT, formally acknowledging the English proficiency assessment examination spanning Levels 3 to 5 per the Foreign Language Competency Framework. This assessment serves as an evaluative instrument for English language competence across Levels 3 to 5 within the post-secondary education domain, universally deployed throughout the national educational apparatus, with an eye toward international accreditation.

Following its ratification, the designated language proficiency assessment exam transitioned into an English proficiency evaluation endeavor aimed at establishing the linguistic competency standards for all students within the Tan Trao University consortium, located in Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam. Attainment of Level 3 out of 6 on this proficiency scale is requisite for graduation eligibility, thereby imparting a significant burden upon learners, educators, and administrative stakeholders alike.

Within the framework of this discourse, our objective is to preliminarily discern and scrutinize the ramifications of this examination on the pedagogical delivery and educational management of practical language modules within the academic curriculum of Tan Trao University, situated in Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam.

The Impact of Assessment on Foreign Language Teaching Activities

History of Research on the Washback Effects of Assessment and Evaluation on Foreign Language Teaching Activities

The history of research on the rebound effects of tests on teaching and learning activities began

in the 1950s and 1960s. Studies indicate that assessments significantly impact educators' selection of resources and planning of instructional strategies. According to Vernon (1956), teachers often neglect knowledge that is not directly related to test items, thus the objectives of the curriculum are often not fully addressed.

In another study, Davies (1968) also pointed out that teachers often use tests and review materials for exams as teaching materials. This selection of materials narrows the learner's educational experiences. Popham (1983) was the first to introduce the concept of measurement-driven instruction. This concept emphasizes the unity between the format and content of the test with the structure and content of the curriculum. This notion highlights the relationship between the format and substance of the test and the organization and content of the curriculum. Hughes (1989) was at the forefront of researching the washback effects of the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam in 1989. His research findings highlighted the significant impact of IELTS exam formats on the teaching methods employed by instructors and the learning strategies adopted by students. In 1993, Alderson and Wall embarked on a study investigating the repercussions of English language exams. Their findings underscored the multifaceted effects that administering English exams can have on both educators and learners, influencing instructional practices and academic pursuits. Watanabe(2004) delved into the reverse washback effects of English exams in 2004. The outcomes of this study shed light on the potential positive impact of English exams on language acquisition, yet also highlighted the potential for heightened pressure and anxiety among students. More recent study has shown that integrating a new exam into a specific educational context can improve teaching and learning outcomes. These include principles like systematic validity, consequential validity, and test impact.

Definition of Washback Effects in Assessment Testing

Research in the field of assessment and testing confirms that tests, especially highstakes tests, have a great impact on teaching and learning activities. These are commonly referred to as "washback effects". This idea has been defined in a variety of ways over the course of research on the subject.

"Washback effects, or simply washback, represent a pivotal concept within the realm of language assessment and education. As articulated by Hughes (1989), washback effects are delineated as the influence exerted by assessments on the teaching and learning processes. Echoing this sentiment, Alderson and Wall (1993) have analyzed washback effects not only as outcomes of assessments impacting both teachers and students but also as influences extending to the entire teaching and learning dynamic. Watanabe's (2004) study further elaborates, suggesting that washback effects not only affect students' language acquisition approaches but also their perceptions of success in learning endeavors. Delving deeper, Bachman and Palmer (1996) expound upon the impact of washback effects on both educators and learners, catalyzing shifts in teaching practices and learning strategies. And, McNamara's (1996) focus on outcomes underscores washback effects as resultant effects of assessments on the behaviors and achievements of students, educators, and educational systems collectively.

Alderson & Wall (1993) and Biggs (1995, 1996) define "washback effects" as the influence of a test reverberating back into the teaching and learning process. This concept originates from the perspective that assessment can and should guide the teaching and learning process. According to Alderson & Wall (1993), washback effects specifically refer to the behaviors of learners and teachers within the classroom framework when influenced by a particular test.

To elucidate the extent and scope of the test's impact, many authors have made a clear distinction between washback effects and the impact of the test. Wall (1997) points out that the "impact of the test" refers to "... any

influence of the test on individuals, classroom policies, schools, the education system, or society as a whole," whereas the washback effects of the test specifically pertain to "the effects of the test on teaching and learning" (p. 291). Similarly, Shohamy (2001) posits that washback effects are a component of the test impact. The test impact occurs on a societal or educational institution level, while the washback effects occur on an individual level, affecting both learners and teachers.

Collectively, these definitions offer a comprehensive understanding of washback effects, emphasizing their significance in assessment and the enhancement of language teaching and learning processes."

Currently, the washback effect is considered as an aspect of the value of a test, and is referred to by a relatively new term called "consequential validity," emphasizing the "consequences" of testing and assessment on prior teaching and learning.

Classification of Washback Effects

The washback effects of language proficiency assessments can be classified into various types based on their scope and impact. A common classification is based on the scope of the effects, including individual washback and societal washback. Individual washback focuses on the impacts of the test on students and teachers within a specific classroom, including instructional guidance and learning perceptions. On the other hand, societal washback concentrates on the effects of the test on educational policies, training procedures, and even society, such as a nation's confidence level in using a foreign language. The different types of washback effects provide a multidimensional perspective on how language proficiency assessments can influence both the learning environment and the larger society.

Firstly, according to Bailey (1996, 1999), the anticipated impact of the test includes both positive and negative effects, as well as unforeseen unintended effects. Meanwhile, Hughes (1989) emphasizes input and output effects, as well as the distinction between the

direct and indirect impact of the test. Alderson & Wall (1993) classify the effects into specific and overall impacts, and the effects on teachers and students.

In Vietnam, research by Nguyen Thi My Ha (2009) focuses on the impact on curriculum and teaching methods, as well as the impact on students' learning opportunities and expectations. Meanwhile, Tran Thi Le Huong (2016) categorizes the impacts into positive and negative, and also highlights the impact on students' learning opportunities and confidence.

However, the most common classification still relies on the quality of test design. Hwang (2003) argues: "If the test is of good quality, it will have a supportive effect on learning, but if the test is of poor quality, it will have a negative effect on learning" (p. 16). Experts in the field of assessment consider washback effects to be either positive, negative, or neutral, resulting in outcomes that may or may not be predictable. Some experts even view a test and its washback effects as a potential tool for educational reform.

Negative Washback Effects

There are quite a few studies affirming the negative washback effects of standardized testing. Alderson & Wall (1993) define negative washback as the unintended consequences of a test on teaching and learning. According to Shohamy (2001), the washback effect of a test is negative if "test preparation curricula reduce teaching time, narrow curricula and teaching methods, may diminish teachers' ability to teach content and use appropriate methods and materials, test formats that meet teachers' standards" (p. 18). Tsagari (2011) found that the test would have a negative impact on teaching and learning if it made teachers and learners focus too much on the content and skills being tested while neglecting the knowledge and skills not assessed. In this case, the test has distorted the curriculum. Damankesh & Babaii (2015) argue that in preparing for the exam, learners reviewed past exams, consulted materials related to the exam. For this reason, the curriculum is narrowed down, learning activities are limited, and the focus is shifted from developing language communication skills to memorizing

vocabulary and grammar. Regarding psychological effects, Tsagari (2011) suggests that the test has a very negative impact on learners' attitudes towards language learning as test preparation makes them overly stressed, leading to frustration and lack of interest in learning.

These classifications provide multidimensional and comprehensive insights into the washback effects of language proficiency assessment tests, thereby enhancing understanding of how they influence the teaching and learning process at universities.

Positive Washback Effects

Positive washback effects refer to the beneficial consequences of a test on teaching and learning processes. They are observed when the test motivates learners to engage more actively in language learning activities, encourages teachers to adopt more effective teaching strategies, and enhances the overall quality of language instruction. Positive washback can also lead to curriculum enrichment, as teachers may incorporate new materials and teaching methods to better align with the test requirements. Additionally, positive washback effects can contribute to learners' confidence and sense of achievement, fostering a more conducive learning environment.

Alderson & Wall (1993) define positive washback effects as beneficial influences on teaching and learning activities. According to Davies (1985), the washback effect of a test will be positive if it promotes teaching and learning. Messick (1996) argues that "to achieve maximum effectiveness, there should be no distinction between language learning activities and test preparation activities" (p. 241-242).

Models of Washback Effects

Several theoretical models of washback effects have been proposed, among which the two fundamental and widely studied models are those of Hughes (1993) and Bailey (1996). Each model approaches the issue differently, but they all address three main components: participants, processes, and products.

Building upon Hughes's theoretical framework (1993), Bailey (1996) further developed and proposed a theoretical model of washback effects consisting of three main components: participants, processes, and outcomes (see Figure 1). The relationship among these components is similar to that in Hughes's model: the test directly impacts the participants (learners, teachers, test writers, curriculum designers, and researchers), and the participants engage in processes (teaching and learning) to achieve outcomes (the knowledge and skills acquired by learners). The difference in Bailey's model is that researchers are considered a factor among the participants. In terms of the scope of impact, the test not only affects teaching and learning activities but also influences other aspects such as curriculum development. The relationships among the components are dialectical rather than linear. For example, the test not only influences learning outcomes through participants and learning processes, but the participants and their involvement also provide feedback and influence the test in return. According to Wall (1997), a weakness of Bailey's model is its lack of clarification regarding intermediate processes. In other words, the model demonstrates that the test directly impacts participants without considering the role of attitudes and pre-existing beliefs of the participants.

Some Relevant Studies on the Washback Effects of Tests on the Process of Teaching Foreign Languages

A test can impact various aspects of the teaching and learning process. According to Cheng, Watanabe, and Curtis (2004), factors contributing to this impact include: test-related factors (test format, test content, test skills, test purposes, decisions based on test results, etc.), reputation factors (the test's position in the national educational system, benefits the test offers to test-takers, etc.), personal factors (e.g., teachers' educational background, teachers' beliefs about the best teaching and learning methods, etc.), micro-contextual factors (e.g., the school context where the test is applied), and macro-contextual factors (the societal system where the test is applied).

Shohamy (1992) conducted a study on the impact of Arabic (second language) and English (foreign language) exams on teaching practices in Israel. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. Shohamy and colleagues found that with the introduction of the Arabic exam, teachers ceased using new teaching materials and reverted to reviewing old content. Textbooks were replaced by exam-like worksheets from previous years, classroom activities became exam-oriented, and the classroom atmosphere grew tense. Both students and teachers tended to focus on mastering exam-like exercises. The study also revealed that after the exam period, test-preparation activities ceased. Through interviews, researchers observed that "when teachers realize that students' test results do not have any direct personal impact on them, teachers become more relaxed and less fearful, reducing the impact of the exam" (p. 314).

Hwang (2003) investigated the influence of the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) on English teaching and learning at secondary schools in South Korea. Surveys and interviews were used to collect data from teachers and students. To examine the relationship between the CSAT, curriculum, and teaching materials, data were analyzed based on Cunningsworth's (1995) curriculum evaluation criteria and Bachman and Palmer's (1996) framework. The results showed that while the curriculum aligned with teaching materials, the CSAT did not assess all the skills covered in the curriculum. Therefore, the CSAT had a negative impact on English teaching and learning at this educational level in South Korea. Participants also held negative attitudes toward the exam.

Stecher, Chun, and Barron (2004) examined the effects of changes in writing assessment on teaching writing skills in Washington State, USA. Data were collected through surveys of principals and teachers in Washington. One of the main purposes of the study was to explore the impact of educational innovations on teaching and learning activities. The study found that teaching writing skills were greatly influenced by the exam and new assessment policies. Teachers reported altering lesson

content to reflect the exam accurately. Teaching methods also changed, with teachers frequently assigning multiple exercises to prepare for the test. According to interviewed teachers, replacing multiple-choice tests with competency-based assessments significantly increased student writing output at school. However, content and skills not assessed were not addressed in teaching and learning.

Manjarres (2005) investigated the impact of English exams on English teaching in the Colombian education system. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and English class tests. The results showed that exams generally had a positive effect on English teaching and learning in Colombia. The researcher also emphasized the complex nature of the backwash effect and suggested using qualitative research methods to understand this phenomenon better.

In the context of education in Spain, Pizarro (2010) studied the influence of a high-stakes English test on English teaching at high schools. One of the study's objectives was to understand the test's impact on curriculum, materials, methods, teacher emotions, and attitudes. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire. The study found that the test affected many aspects of the curriculum, particularly teaching materials and methods, which became focused on preparing students for the exam. Teachers spent most of their class time practicing skills tested in the exam and neglected skills and knowledge not assessed. Consequently, the test reduced students' communicative abilities significantly as it did not include listening and speaking sections.

Wang's (2010) study was conducted in China to evaluate the impact of the College English Test (CET) on teacher beliefs and practices. The study also examined complex factors related to methods, social, and personal influences on teachers. The results showed that the CET, combined with factors related to teachers, created strong backwash effects of the exam. Wang pointed out that due to the complex nature of the backwash effect, changes in educational policies and assessment alone were

insufficient to change teachers' behaviors and methods. According to Wang, one subjective factor and four objective factors influenced teachers' professional activities: support, teaching methods, teaching experience, language proficiency, and professional development needs.

These studies shed light on the backwash effects of English exams on teaching activities across various educational settings worldwide. They demonstrate that an exam's introduction can significantly impact teaching practices. In the context of Vietnam in general and Tan Trao University in particular, the initial assessment of the impacts of English language proficiency assessment exams as a measure of language outcomes for students is crucial and holds significant importance in ensuring the quality of educational activities.

Several Positive Impacts of English Language Proficiency Assessment Exams Aligned with Learning Outcomes Standards on English Language Teaching at Tan Trao University

"The English proficiency assessment exam according to the standard outcomes not only serves as a crucial component of the learning process at Tan Trao University but also significantly impacts the quality of English language teaching and learning. Its positive effects resonate deeply within both lecturers and students.

For lecturers, this assessment exam provides a specific guideline framework, facilitating the construction of appropriate teaching content and the design of reasonable learning plans. This fosters in-depth research and teaching excellence, thereby enhancing the overall teaching quality.

However, the positive impact of the exam extends beyond providing guidelines for lecturers. It also encourages students' autonomy and effort. Aware of the impending exam, students become more self-directed in managing

their studies and honing their skills independently. This not only promotes comprehensive development but also serves as a strong motivational factor for progress and success in learning.

In conclusion, the English proficiency assessment exam is not just a significant part of the learning process at Tan Trao University; it is also an essential tool for improving the quality of English language teaching and learning, fostering student autonomy and effort, and contributing to the success of the educational system."

According to Bailey's model (1996), interview questions focus on exploring information related to: (i) Curriculum development and material design process, (ii) Teaching activities and assessment, (iii) Research activities serving teaching, (iv) Teachers' opinions on training management activities. The interview questions are conducted in a semi-structured manner to allow researchers to flexibly ask additional probing questions based on the information provided by participants.

Based on the assessment of all 10 interviewed teachers, the exam has generally brought about very positive changes to the participants in the teaching process and educational organization, including curriculum designers and material writers, teachers, researchers (according to Bailey's model (1996)), and even training managers. These results align with the findings of Manjarres (2005).

The Construction of Curriculum and Material Design

According to the interviewees, previously, the development of practical language curriculum often had a subjective nature. There was a lack of clear differentiation in competency to be developed between semesters. Curriculum design primarily relied on a few foreign textbooks with rudimentary level descriptions such as Pre-intermediate, Intermediate, and Advanced. Curriculum developers and instructors themselves did not fully understand the distinctions between these proficiency levels, relying only on personal experience for

differentiation. It was not uncommon for minor skills taught in one semester to be repeated in the following semester, or for the material in subsequent semesters to be easier, despite the theoretical progression of student proficiency levels.

The emergence and significance of foreign language proficiency assessment exams for university students are pivotal in the contemporary higher education landscape. Regarded as an indispensable tool for evaluating and measuring students' language proficiency, these exams serve to ascertain their language abilities and ensure they meet the requirements of an increasingly globalized job market. Such proficiency assessments not only gauge students' language skills but also establish a common standard for the language proficiency necessary across various academic disciplines and professional fields. This helps students gain a clearer understanding of the labor market demands and motivates them to enhance their language proficiency. Additionally, these exams drive universities to develop high-quality foreign language programs and provide suitable teaching resources. Consequently, foreign language proficiency assessment exams play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of language education for university students and preparing them to become competent professionals in an ever-globalizing world. For example, The Department of Foreign Languages at Tan Trao University has proposed a competency development framework for non-major students as follows:

The survey of incoming students aims to identify those who achieve the A2 proficiency level. If students do not meet this requirement, they will be required to study and retake the assessment until they reach the A2 level, at which point they will be eligible to enroll in the university's training program. Throughout each semester, there will be comprehensive examinations covering all four language skills. Failure to meet proficiency in any skill area will necessitate further review and examination until proficiency is achieved, enabling progression to the next English language module. Upon graduation, students must attain a minimum B1 level on the

language proficiency examination to qualify for graduation.

Thus, each semester has specific, clearly defined goals that are widely communicated to both students and instructors to work towards. Additionally, specific descriptions are provided for each proficiency level to avoid the repetition of skills developed in previous semesters or the use of easier materials compared to previous semesters. For example:

The ability to use the language at the A2 level typically involves being able to understand and use simple everyday expressions and basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type, as well as interacting in a simple way and initiating a direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. This may include asking and answering simple questions about personal details, daily routines, immediate needs, and simple topics related to work, school, or leisure activities. At the A2 level, individuals can also handle very short social exchanges, although communication may be limited and comprehension may require repetition or rephrasing.

The ability that students achieve at the B1 level in a foreign language is characterized by a higher level of confidence in language interaction. At this level, students are capable of understanding and utilizing common language expressions as well as some more complex language expressions. They can articulate personal opinions, viewpoints, and ideas clearly and in detail. Students at the B1 level can engage in conversations, discussions, and communication in everyday situations and work-related contexts within their familiar fields. They also have the ability to read and comprehend simple to moderately complex texts such as emails, news articles, personal letters, and to write short and clear texts on familiar topics. In summary, at the B1 level, students can use language more confidently in various communication situations and have a better understanding of more complex issues.

The faculty members of the English department further elaborated that the curriculum has been meticulously delineated into specific

competencies and sub-skills required for advancement in each academic term. Additionally, corresponding to each proficiency level, there exists a compilation detailing grammar phenomena, thematic content, vocabulary, language functions to be mastered, and prevalent errors or misconceptions observed at various levels. The documentation system is equally precise, quantifying the knowledge and skills requisite for students to attain in each semester. Consequently, students formulate a tailored progression aligned with their aptitudes towards achieving a level 3 proficiency or B1. The developers of supplementary materials also possess a solid grounding in grammar and vocabulary to craft materials that cater to the linguistic proficiency of students at each stage of their academic journey.

The positive assertions made by the English department faculty seem to contradict the findings of Shohamy (1992), Hwang (2003), and Pizzaro (2010). These studies suggest that the implementation of standardized testing has exerted significant pressure on teachers, leading them to refrain from using new teaching materials and resorting to revisiting old materials. The curriculum has been supplanted by test-like exercises reminiscent of those used in previous years. This inadvertent deviation distorts the objectives and training programs, transforming language proficiency classes into test preparation classes. However, the administration of language proficiency assessments for students has engendered a counterintuitive effect by promoting the standardization of curricula and teaching materials in a scientifically grounded manner tailored to each proficiency level.

Previous research has also highlighted one of the factors ensuring the positive nature of the test is to ensure typicality in terms of content and skills being assessed. Test-takers need to learn the knowledge and skills that appear in the test. Conversely, if teachers only focus on teaching knowledge and skills for the test, learners' educational experiences will be limited, leading to a pragmatic learning approach - highly dangerous for practical subjects like language.

Hwang's (2003) study showed that the CSAT had a negative impact on teaching and learning English in Korea because the test did not cover all the skills mentioned in the curriculum. Learners often overlook skills included in the curriculum but not in the test.

Conversely, the group of English department lecturers interviewed indicated that the test fairly reflects the curriculum, and the curriculum is also adjusted to balance both language proficiency development and the supplementation of standardized test-taking techniques: the English department's language practice curriculum is divided into three branches: Branch A - social language development (language used in everyday contexts), Branch B - academic language development (language used in academic contexts to serve learning and research activities), and Branch C - test-taking skill development. In particular, Branch C is not only test preparation for proficiency assessments but also focuses on comprehensive development of general test-taking skills. For example: main idea listening skills, detailed information listening skills, etc. With the skills provided in Branch C, students can participate in any exam.

Teaching Methods and Assessment Practices

8 out of 10 interviewed instructors reported that teaching methods are evolving towards more positive approaches such as group work, integrated teaching, and project-based learning. However, 2 instructors added that as the exam approaches, these active teaching methods are often abandoned, with teachers devoting more time to practicing and grading sample exams. Interestingly, there was a relatively intriguing finding that "it is the students themselves who request that instructors reduce communication tasks to focus on practicing and doing exams."

Regarding assessment, all interviewed instructors noted significant changes. They explained that due to the program setting specific standards for each semester, assessment has also changed to focus on developing the described competencies for each level in a more detailed manner than before. Continuous

assessment forms are used more frequently, with a variety of assessment tools combining competency-based, outcome-based, and personalized assessment. Each semester, students must complete individual and group tasks/projects, designed to assess specific competencies aligned with the language proficiency level required for that semester's objectives.

For midterm and final exams, instead of compiling from various sources with similar difficulty levels to teaching materials, there is now a detailed technical description and matrix design for each exam based on the competency descriptions for each semester. The technical description includes: A brief description of the exam, Detailed description of input materials, Detailed description of question requirements. This description serves as a requirement framework to ensure consistency in exam design over the years, with different individuals agreeing on content, format, and difficulty level. The description is tailored to the objectives and content of the course outline, ensuring both students and teachers focus on the core of the course, facilitating teaching and learning towards expected knowledge and skills.

Research

The research on foreign language proficiency assessment at Tan Trao University marks a significant milestone in the field of education. The overall assessment from the majority of interviewees indicates that the use of English proficiency assessment tests has brought about positive changes in the teaching and learning process at the university. The assessment tests have opened up a new avenue for research in the field of assessment, particularly in the context of foreign language education in Vietnam. This reflects Tan Trao University's progress in creating a conducive research environment and contributing to the development of this field locally. However, the interview group also noted some challenges, particularly regarding the research capacity of the faculty, which needs to be enhanced to promote research activities in foreign language proficiency assessment at Tan Trao University.

Training Management

Some interview questions posed to the faculty focused on their opinions regarding the training management activities of the university when using foreign language proficiency assessment as a measure of language competence standards. Most interviewees were not familiar with this information, with only two faculty members in managerial positions having some knowledge.

In reality, amidst an increasingly competitive job market where many language graduates struggle to find employment, the foreign language proficiency assessment test serves as a commitment to the quality of education provided by Tan Trao University to society. Achieving Level 3 out of 6 (Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework) or B1 (Common European Framework) poses a significant challenge for any student. However, by setting this benchmark for themselves to surpass, Tan Trao University implicitly asserts that its educational products undoubtedly meet the stringent requirements of any employer.

The annual review of the pass rate through the proficiency assessment test before each graduation period also enables the university to implement timely training support measures for students and adjust programs accordingly to continually enhance its educational curriculum.

Some Adverse Effects and Proposals

During the implementation of the foreign language proficiency assessment at Tan Trao University, both positive and negative aspects have been clearly reflected. While setting assessment standards such as the B1 or level 3/6 CEFR can help ensure the quality of education, it also presents significant challenges.

Some teachers have noted that the pressure to meet these assessment standards can create a stressful learning environment. They feel constrained in delivering the curriculum as they must allocate considerable time to test preparation. Consequently, this diminishes the educational experience for students, as they may lose interest and motivation in learning.

It is important to recognize that an excessive focus on achieving high scores in tests can stifle freedom and creativity in the learning process. Instead of fostering holistic student development, this approach may foster an unhealthy competitive environment, diminishing cooperation and interaction among students.

Therefore, careful consideration between setting assessment standards and creating a positive and encouraging learning environment is essential. This ensures that students' efforts are fairly evaluated while providing the most conducive conditions for their comprehensive development.

In the face of these challenges, striking a balance between setting assessment standards and ensuring a healthy learning environment is imperative. There needs to be flexibility in assessment and testing approaches, alongside consideration for support measures and creating conditions for holistic student development, not only in terms of knowledge but also in practical skills and personal growth.

Global studies have proposed numerous solutions to transform negative impacts into positive outcomes. Hughes (1989) suggested: (1) Widely introducing the test format to learners and instructors; (2) Providing support to teachers when necessary. Hence, in the context of Tan Trao University, support for instructors could involve helping them understand the format of the language proficiency assessment - a relatively new test. The university should conduct training sessions to familiarize instructors with the test format and teaching methods aimed at achieving the B1 proficiency level. Subject departments themselves need to identify the challenges and difficulties encountered in teaching language practical components, and then organize professional exchanges and make policy recommendations to the university accordingly.

Bachman & Palmer (1996) proposed that the test impact be positive by "providing opportunities for learners to participate in test design and development, as well as collecting information about their perceptions of the test and its

components." Therefore, after each language proficiency assessment, researchers at Tan Trao University can conduct small surveys to gather feedback from test takers to assess whether the test accurately reflects their proficiency and aligns with the curriculum they have studied. Additionally, the authors also suggest providing detailed score reports and ensuring that the results are reliable and fair to test takers and users. At Tan Trao University, the Foreign Language Informatics Center is conducting validation research on the results of each language proficiency assessment. However, the figures and analysis need to be widely disseminated to all faculty members, thereby providing recommendations for adjusting their teaching materials and methods.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of language proficiency assessment at Tan Trao University serves as a critical juncture in the ongoing evolution of educational practices. Through meticulous research and analysis, we have unveiled a multifaceted landscape of both positive and negative impacts associated with this assessment approach. While the implementation of standardized proficiency tests has undoubtedly enhanced the rigor and credibility of the educational process, it has also posed significant challenges to both students and educators.

Nevertheless, amidst these challenges lie opportunities for growth and improvement. By recognizing the nuanced complexities surrounding language proficiency assessment, we can adopt a more holistic approach to education that fosters not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking, creativity, and personal development. The insights gained from this research underscore the importance of striking a delicate balance between setting assessment standards and nurturing a supportive learning environment.

Furthermore, the curriculum has been specified to each competency and sub-skills needed for each semester. The development of

supplementary materials has provided clear criteria regarding language features for each competency level. In terms of teaching methods, teachers are increasingly shifting away from traditional methods towards more active and modern approaches. The assessment has been standardized and systematized with detailed technical descriptions for regular exams and competency descriptions for major assignments. The exam has also opened up a new research direction in assessment - a relatively new area in Vietnam. In terms of training management, the exam is a commitment to the quality of education provided by the institution to society; it also serves as a tool for the institution to regularly review the quality of education and make appropriate changes.

According to initial surveys, there were some unexpected impacts. Some teachers did not adhere to the teaching schedule and spent more time on exam preparation, thus reducing the students' learning experience and distorting the training objectives. Some teachers also expressed concerns about the limited time for language practice sessions, which was insufficient for implementing various learning activities. The proposed solution is to widely introduce the exam format and support teachers in teaching methods to both develop learners' language skills and prepare them well for the language proficiency assessment. Exam designers need to consider the feedback from participants regarding the exam. The exam results and analyses should also be widely disseminated to teachers and stakeholders for appropriate content and teaching method adjustments.

Due to the limited number of interviewees, these observations only provide a preliminary insight into the impact of the language proficiency assessment on English teaching activities at Tan Trao University. In the future, the authors will conduct further research with a larger and more diverse sample to explore the broader impacts of the exam on students' learning activities.

It is imperative for Tan Trao University to continue its commitment to research-driven educational practices. By embracing flexibility, innovation, and collaboration, the university can

refine its assessment strategies to better meet the diverse needs of its students while upholding the highest standards of academic excellence. Through ongoing dialogue, reflection, and adaptation, we can ensure that language proficiency assessment remains a dynamic tool for promoting learning, growth, and success in the ever-changing landscape of higher education.

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