



FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: In the implementation of the National Foreign Language Project for the period 2008 – 2020, now extended to 2025 in Vietnam, level 3/6 - VNFLPF (B1- CEFR) has been set as the learning outcomes for non-English major students. The implementation of this policy has brought about reforms in the general English curriculum, teaching materials, and assessment practices, which aimed at achieving the required learning outcomes. This paper reports the findings from an investigation into EFL teachers' formative assessment practices of assessing non-English major students in a city in Central Vietnam using interviews, classroom observations and assessment samples. The study reveals some formative assessment tools commonly used by EFL teachers and factors affecting EFL teachers' formative assessment practice. From the findings, practical suggestions on formative assessment practices are made with the hope of providing a valuable basis for both teaching and learning improvement.

Keywords. formative assessment, assessment tools, influential factors, non-English major students

1. Introduction

In the implementation of the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (extended to 2025) in Vietnam, level 3/6 (Foreign Language Proficiency Framework in Vietnam - VNFLPF) - B1 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - CEFR) has been set 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. The project aims to ensure that the majority of Vietnamese university graduates achieve a level of foreign language which enables them to independently and confidently communicate, study and work in a multilingual and multicultural

environment of integration; to turn foreign languages into a strength of Vietnamese to serve national industrialization and modernization [26]. 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 (2-2-3 credits in semester 1, 2 and 3, respectively) relevant to 105 general English instruction hours by teachers to achieve the required standard. In order to meet the mandated learning outcomes, necessary adjustments have been made in three key areas: firstly, the general English curriculum has been revised to align with students' skills and competencies expected; secondly, textbooks and other learning resources have been updated to better support students in improving the vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing skills needed to reach the required level; and finally, more formative assessment practices with effective feedback has been adopted to support students' learning. Among these significant areas to help students achieve the required learning outcomes, teachers' assessment practices are 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 [1], [33].

From the reality of a new teaching and learning context, this study was conducted to explore EFL teachers' assessment practices of non-English major students supporting them to meet the required standard outlined by the Ministry of Education and Training in the implementation of the National Project 2020. The study also examined the factors influencing EFL teachers' assessment practices with the aim of providing valuable insights to inform improvements in both teaching and learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Formative assessment

Language assessment is defined as a set of conscious and systematic activities that teachers use to gather information, analyze and interpret it, draw inferences, make wise decisions, and take appropriate actions to improve teaching and learning [1]. Language assessment may occur mainly inside and outside the language learning environment, depending on its specific purposes. It might be an assessment of learner language proficiency that focuses on assessing basic language skills, aiming at checking students' proficiency for selection or placement purposes. Language assessment might also be applied to language students taking a fixed curriculum at a specific educational level, aiming to gather information about students' progress and monitor and improve teaching and learning quality. The latter refers to formative assessment, which will be the focus of this study.

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; and 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 aiming at reducing students' test anxiety and enhancing their comfort and sense of success through effective feedback [3], [33].

2.2. Principles of assessing EFL students

Choice of formative assessment tools and tasks

Formative assessment is believed to play an essential role in the process of learning and maintaining learners' motivation. Thus, whether to be designed or adapted, formative assessment tools and tasks should meet the following criteria. Firstly, formative assessment tools should be adaptable to both formal and informal learning contexts, as their flexibility allows teachers to collect detailed and ongoing information about students' progress and development; for example, in formal settings like quizzes or tests, teachers can evaluate students' competence of specific content, while in informal contexts such as class discussions or groupwork they can gain insights into students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This understanding enables teachers to adjust instruction, provide timely feedback, and support diverse learning needs more effectively. Secondly, formative assessment tools should vary in forms, length, and task types to address diverse learning needs and learning styles as a variety of language assessment tools allow teachers to understand learners from different perspectives and to keep learners interested in their learning. They should promote the integrated use of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, while also promote critical thinking and practical language use. Thirdly, assessment content of tasks should be oriented towards the age-related interests and associated with those in the curriculum to makes students feel psychologically safe and comfortable in their performance as when language assessment tasks are thoughtfully designed and implemented in a psychologically safe environment, they can encourage students to take risks and put in greater effort. Fourthly, formative assessment tasks should be susceptible or well-instructed to help students understand what they are expected to be assessed and provide learners more opportunities to demonstrate what they know, and what they can do. Finally, formative assessment tasks should be engaging and motivating, supported by timely and effective feedback to monitor students' learning process and make progress [1], [4], [31].

Feedback of formative assessment results to EFL students

Feedback is more than just information. It is information generated within a particular system, for a particular purpose environment [4], [31]. Three common types of feedback used for classroom assessment include motivational, evaluative, and learning feedback. Motivational feedback including good grades or marks, positive comments, and rewards helps maintain learners' motivation in the learning process; evaluative feedback is used to make judgments

about pupils' performance, typically by assigning a grade or mark that indicates the quality of their work and helps them understand where they stand in relation to other learners. [1], [3], [4]; Meanwhile, learning feedback helps learners improve language accuracy by not only identifying errors but also explaining why they are incorrect and offering guidance on how to improve performance. It is suggested that all types of mentioned feedback can be integrated, depending on the form of classroom assessment being used.

Feedback given either in oral or written form can be a powerful tool in enhancing student learning when delivered effectively. To maximize its impact, certain principles of effective feedback should be taken into careful consideration. Firstly, feedback should be timely so that students can connect it directly to their performance. It should also be accessible with adequate details to ensure clarity and usefulness. Effective feedback emphasizes students' strengths by highlighting what they can do, while also informing them of areas that need improvement. Moreover, it should offer specific suggestions on how to enhance their performance, maintaining a tone that is both encouraging and constructive. Feedback must also be aligned with the assessment objectives and criteria to ensure consistency and fairness. Importantly, students should be expected to act on the feedback provided, engaging with it as a valuable part of their learning process. More importantly, feedback needs to be sufficient with adequate and specific details, and it is more useful if it gives learners directions on how they can improve their work, and it acknowledges learners' achievements [1], [4].

2.3. Related studies in EFL contexts

Studies about teachers' assessment practice has focused mainly on identifying the assessment tools that teachers use in their classroom to assess their language students [4], [8], [16], [35]. A few studies have investigated more specific areas of assessment such as what EFL teachers assessed students' foreign language performance, when to assess and how to feedback in the practice of assessing their students [13], [18], [21], [24], [25], [31].

Gullickson's (1985) study on assessment practices indicated that teachers preferred using teacher-made assessments and other traditional tools, such as essay and paper tests. Sharing the same results, Cross and Weber (1993) and Marso and Pigge (1993) found that teachers relied primarily on self-constructed assessments. Additionally, Cizek and Rachor (1996) shared that teachers frequently used quizzes and tests to assess their learners. Apart from using the same assessment tools as in the above mentioned studies, Brookhart (2011) concluded that teachers not only used paper-and-pencil tests but also other written evidence for grades together with other achievement-related factors such as attendance, participation, demonstration of effort. Teachers in Yildirim' study (2004) mainly used short-answer tests although it was suggested by their administrators that the students needed to be familiar with multiple choice tests for the national university entrance examination.

From the limitations of studies reviewed on teachers' assessment practice and grading, McMillian (2011) conducted a study to explore EFL teachers' assessment practice and grading, major types of assessment and cognitive level in assessments. The findings showed that teachers tended to emphasize higher-order thinking than recall knowledge. One limitation of this study was that the findings were based on teachers' self-reported practices rather than their actual classroom practices, making it difficult to verify the consistency or accuracy of the data. On the contrary to McMillian's findings in his study (2011), Kahn's study (2010) showed that memory and recall were the main focus in the assessment materials prioritising multiple-choice tests, which were frequently used in high-stake tests. Consequently, it was suggested that teachers' practice of assessment was influenced by high-stake tests in this context [22].

The role of feedback in everyday classroom practice not only made teachers and students both responsible for teaching and learning in higher education, but also enhance the student's learning experience and outcomes [18], [24]. Rahman (2011) explored the nature of English classroom assessment and feedback practice in schools. The data collected by classroom observation checklists and teachers' interviews showed that assessment and feedback were inseparable part of classroom practice. Teachers only provided verbal feedback and gave feedback on a few occasions though they knew that assessment and feedback were the inseparable parts of classroom practice.

In the same context of this study, the findings in Pham and Nguyen' (2014) study investigating EFL teachers' practices of assessment showed that the most popular forms used for assessing learners were summative-oriented tests. These findings were supported by those in Pham, Nguyen and Nguyen (2019) and Kanjee (2015). However, there were still several factors interfering with changing the assessment practice. Nguyen's (2014) study on teachers' beliefs of the alternative assessment indicated that teachers not only appreciated the values of alternative assessments in the classroom but also agreed with the impact of learners' ability, teachers' assessment expertise, and contextual factors on teachers' instructional practices; overcrowded classroom and insufficient instructional time hindered teachers' assessment practice [11], [12], [14], [27]. The reviews of the related studies on teachers' assessment practices revealed a consistent reliance on summative assessment tools, despite policy efforts to promote formative assessment. However, many findings were based on self-reported data, which raised concerns about validity. Furthermore, while several studies acknowledged the benefits of alternative assessment and feedback, practical implementation appeared limited by contextual challenges such as large class sizes and exam-oriented curricula.

The development of digital assessment had opened new possibilities for teachers' assessment to accommodate a variety of learners. The findings in DiCerbo's (2021) and Ummah and Bisriyah's study (2022) indicated that learning applications could facilitate ongoing data collection throughout the students' learning process and helped integrate assessment more

effectively with instruction as well as reduced time to grade and provide feedback on students' performance [9].

The literature review has discussed some background of the study including language assessment, major principles of assessing learners and related studies on assessment practices in EFL contexts. The review of related studies reveal the need to investigate EFL teachers' formative assessment practices using a combination of interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples to triangulate the collected data to explore the common assessment tools used by teachers in non-English major classroom, feedback provided to students by EFL teachers and factors affecting their classroom assessment practices.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Research participants

This research involves six lecturers working at a university in Central Vietnam. Every two teachers are responsible for English A1, A2 and B1 during the research time. These teachers have from 5 to 20 years of experience in teaching English to non-English major students. These EFL teachers had an MA or Ph.D. degree of English language teaching.

3.2. Research questions

The current paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' practices of formative assessment in non-English major classroom?
2. What factors influence EFL teachers' formative assessment practice of non-English major students?

3.3. Research instruments and data analysis

This research employed three instruments to collect data relevant to the research questions: in-depth interview, classroom observation and assessment samples. Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted with 6 teachers to collect data on (1) teachers' practices of formative assessment and (2) factors affecting their assessment practices. The average length of interview duration was about 20 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and resent to the interviewees for checking. This stage allowed the interviewees to review the data in order to confirm the accuracy of researcher's interpretation of their data [7], [19]. Secondly, structured classroom observation was undertaken to discover what assessment tools EFL teachers used, how they assessed their students, and how they gave feedback to their students. Structured observation was chosen as researchers have pre-specified behaviours or practice that they want to know about [23]. Finally, a corpus of formative assessment samples in various formats and of different

lengths were accumulated from teacher participants to provide more insights into teachers' assessment practices.

The data collected from interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and samples) was conducted to ensure consistency and reliability of the findings. First, the interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify patterns related to teachers' formative assessment practices and influencing factors. Second, observation notes were analyzed using a structured observation framework aligned with predefined indicators, such as assessment tools used, feedback strategies, and teacher-student interactions during assessment activities. Finally, the assessment samples were examined to identify the types, formats, and content of classroom assessment.

4. Findings and discussion

This section would discuss the findings to answer the two research questions of teachers' practices of assessing non-English major students and factors affecting their formative assessment practices.

4.1. EFL teachers' formative assessment practices of non-English major students

The data collected from three research instruments including in-depth interview, classroom observation, and a collection of assessment samples provided an insight into common assessment tools teachers used to assess non-English major students in their formative assessment and various ways they used to provide feedback to their students.

Common assessment tools in formative assessment

Various assessment tools, including tests, quizzes, portfolios, observation, and peer/self-assessment for formative assessment in the classroom were commonly used by EFL teachers in non-English major classrooms.

Firstly, this study shared the same findings as some key findings in the previous studies [4], [8], [16], [36] in the fact that tests were the most common tools used in EFL teachers' formative assessment practice of non-English major students. In this context, tests were compiled from available learning resources for 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. These tests were compiled based on the learning themes outlined in the formal curriculum for non-English major students. The test format was developed with reference to official documents issued by Hue University of Foreign Languages and International Studies (HUFLIS), which provide guidelines for designing end-of-level tests (English A1, A2, and B1) for teaching English to non-major students at Hue University.

The study's findings were also in line with those in many other related studies about teachers' reliance on the available learning resources and tasks in the textbooks [6], [8], [16], [23], [25] when the findings showed that teachers mainly adapted these tests from the learning resources of the chosen textbooks. The teacher participants shared,

"I often adapt some reading texts with WH-questions from the textbook for cloze tests with three or four alternatives or True/False so that my students can apply what they have learnt into practice." (T1)
or

"Some reading texts with available audios can be transformed into listening sections and vice versa" (T6)

Assessment samples provided by the above teachers as follows:

One of the adapted reading texts from Life Elementary - Unit 6C – Life jogging (T1)	
Read the article again and answer the questions. 1 When did Samuel Pepys write his diary? 2 What did he write about? 3 What percentage of people write a diary nowadays? 4 Who writes a diary more – men or women? 5 How often did his camera take a photograph?	Read the article and decide whether these sentences are True or False. 1. In a survey, 23% of people said they wrote in their diary regularly. 2. Most people aged between 35 and 64 write a diary regularly. 3. Gordon Bell wore a camera that took a photo every 30 seconds. 4. Lifelogging started in the 1990s. 5. Today, people often share their lives through photos, videos, and social media.
One of the adapted listening texts Life Elementary – Unit 2A – Grammar (T6)	
Look at the grammar box. Then choose the correct prepositions to complete the description of apartment 4. Listen and check. There are two pictures 1 <i>in / on</i> the wall and the sofa is 2 <i>under / next to</i> them. There's a TV 3 <i>opposite / between</i> the sofa and there's a plant 4 <i>opposite / next to</i> the TV. There's a large rug 5 <i>on the right / on the left</i>. The family is 6 <i>in front of / behind</i> the window. The parents are 7 <i>in front of / behind</i> the children.	Which room do they live in? 
One of the adapted speaking tests from Life Elementary - Unit 9B (T6)	
Work in groups and answer the questions. 1 Which TV programmes from Exercise 1 do you often watch? 2 Why do you watch them? (e.g. are they funny? interesting?) 3 What are you going to watch tonight when you get home? 4 Do you normally watch programmes on TV or do you watch online videos (e.g. on YouTube)? Give reasons for your answer.	Talk about one of your favourite TV programmes. You should say: - What it is; - What it is about; - Why you like it.

Tests came in different forms, length and task types. They could include all of three language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing) and language knowledge (Grammar and Vocabulary) or either

of these. These could be used as midterm tests or practice tests assessed, marked and used as students' formative assessment results prerequisite for the final test of each level – English A1, A2 and B1. Paper tests can include only one of the three language skills or knowledge. They are well-instructed, engaging and motivating [1], [3]. Tests were often written with multiple-choice and short answer questions, which were frequently used in high-stake tests thanks to their flexibility and reusability.

The findings of the study about tests as the most common type of tests were in line with those in the studies by Kahn (2000), Kanjee (2015), Le (2015) and Ylidirim (2016) in the fact that teachers' practice of assessment was influenced by high-stake tests [21], [22], [23], [37]. The test items were adjusted to ensure consistency with the summative test format and better prepare students for final evaluation. Each question type was explicitly aligned with the learning objectives, accompanied by clear instructions so students knew what was expected. A consistent marking scheme—especially for the subjective items—was also established to ensure fairness and reliability.

The second common assessment tools used by teachers for formative assessment in the classroom were quizzes. Quizzes were often used to assess students' knowledge of 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. I often use quizzes to check if my students can recall their learnt vocabulary”. (T3)

“I often use short quizzes to recall my students' knowledge. I use short quizzes to motivate my students at the beginning of my lesson.” (T2)

“Students are excited whenever I let them play quizzes because these activities help motivate students, build the friendship with the classmates, who are from different universities” (T4).

These quizzes could be conducted either in teams or individually, depending on the class size. Findings from classroom observations—whether at the beginning or end of each lesson, and across A1, A2, or B1 classes—indicated that most students were genuinely interested in participating in games and quizzes. These activities increased student motivation and helped them understand their current level and what they needed to achieve.

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 result, teachers identified where student learning was going, provided feedback to help students know where they were to make progress in their learning; teachers could also make some changes in their instruction as two teachers shared,

“I first ask my students to complete the vocabulary exercises in the textbook. Then, I have them create complete sentences using the given vocabulary, followed by a speaking activity related to the topic. Through

each step, I can observe their reluctance or eagerness, which helps me understand their engagement in the learning process and adjust my instructions if necessary, give appropriate feedback to support my students." (T6)

"To warm up my students at the beginning of the lesson, I often ask them questions related to previously learned material. This allows me to observe their responses, assess their understanding of past lessons, and determine if they are ready to move on to new content." (T5)

It was clear from the data collected from classroom observation that EFL teachers were aware of the significance of formative assessment in supporting students to complete the end-of level tests effectively and meet the course objectives. In the classroom, formative assessment was conducted at various points throughout the lesson—at the beginning, during, or at the end of each section—to help teachers gather information about student learning and make appropriate instructional adjustments. From these activities, teachers could learn where the students were, what they had learnt and what should be done for both teaching and learning improvement. 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 [29].

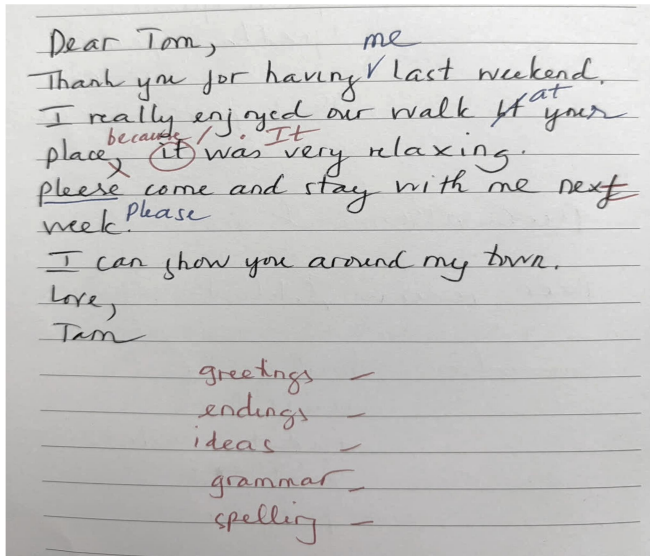
Fourthly, learning portfolios were taken from available learning resources for Elementary and Pre-Intermediate Life textbook by Cengage Learning and practice tests from Key English Tests (KET) or Preliminary English Tests (PET) by Cambridge University Press and assigned for students to work individually as a collection for review and further practice. Four out of six teachers reported that these learning portfolios were either sent to students via the Zalo group or distributed as hard copies at the beginning of the course. Students were asked to complete them unit by unit, and the portfolios were checked or marked selectively. In cases where there was insufficient time for direct feedback, answers were provided to students for self-study.

Finally, peer and self - assessment were practiced by most EFL teachers as they shared,

*"Self - assessment makes students more active and responsible for their process of learning. Before any new lessons, my students are asked to share about **Things I have learnt are...or I would like to learn more about**"* (T1)

"Students can self-assess and revise their writing or speaking products at first, then they can peer-assess by using given assessment criteria" (T3)

Here was an example of combining self-assessment with peer-assessment in writing by T3:



Note:

- blue pen for self-assessment
- red pen for peer-assessment

Peer assessment and self-assessment were considered effective strategies in formative assessment, as they promoted active learning, encourage reflection, and enhance student engagement. Through evaluating their own and others' work, students learnt to take responsibility for both their own learning and that of their peers. These assessment types fostered self-awareness, help learners recognize their strengths and areas for improvement, and increase their involvement in the learning process as claimed in Wisniewski, Zierer and Hattie (2020). However, in practice, peer and self-assessment were only occasionally implemented in non-English major classrooms, primarily due to time constraints.

In addition to classroom observation and peer/self-assessment, which were typically conducted directly during lessons, tests and quizzes were administered either in hard copy format, as was commonly practiced in the past, or through learning applications, which were recognized for their potentials to enhance student engagement and motivation. Findings from in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples revealed that EFL teachers in non-English major classrooms increasingly adopted such applications for formative assessment purposes. The use of these tools was reported to offer several benefits, including increased student engagement and motivation, improved teacher-student communication and collaboration, personalized learning experiences, timely feedback, and overall enhancement of student performance as findings of the studies by Delgado, Sebastiany and Silva (2020), DiCerbo (2021) and Ummah and Bisriyah (2022) [9], [10], [35].

Some of the most commonly used apps included Quizzes, Quizlet, Formaloo, Learning apps, Kahoot, Mentimeter, Padlet, Flipgrid, Grammarly, QuillBot, etc. Specifically, Quizzes, Quizlet, and Kahoot could be used to assess vocabulary and grammar effectively; Learning apps was for reading activities; Mentimeter was for Listening; Flip was Speaking; Padlet, Grammarly and Quillbot were

for writing; especially, Grammarly and Quilbot are for checking grammar, vocabulary and plagiarism. These two apps could be used for peer and self- assessment. Two teacher participants were so excited to share about their use of Grammarly in teaching writing and self-assessment.

“My students are asked to submit their first writings and the versions revised by Grammarly. Then they work individually or with their partners and compare the two versions in terms of grammatical, spelling and punctuation, which are known as the most common errors for non-English major students. Then they will share the most common errors they’ve made to the whole class.” (T6)

“ I do the same things with my students and at first they are so surprised to learn about the apps, then feel confused when they realize that there are so many errors in their writing, but later they feel motivated to see how progress they’ve made from the first to the second or the third revised versions.” (T3)

To sum up, some common assessment tools have long been utilized by EFL teachers in the formative assessment of non-English major students. With the integration of learning applications, these tools are now being used more effectively by providing immediate feedback, saving time, and increasing student motivation. This enables teachers to enhance their formative assessment practices and better support students in making steady progress in their learning.

Feedback giving to non-English major students in formative assessment

The findings showed that EFL teachers integrated three common ways of giving feedback including evaluative, motivational and learning in their practice of formative assessment of non-English major students in the classroom. Usually, evaluative feedback with correct or incorrect answers in assessment tasks of either Reading, Listening, Grammar or Vocabulary. Teachers’ evaluative feedback was delivered directly to whole class focusing on students’ common areas of errors; then motivational feedback with good grades or marks, positive comments, and rewards helped maintain students’ motivation in the learning process was delivered to either to the whole group or individually as two teacher participants shared

“Evaluative feedback with correct or incorrect answers to my students is my favourite way in assessing students’ vocabulary as it saves time and helps me know if my students can recall the learnt lessons.” (T2)

“Correct and incorrect answers are available in the quizzes in learning apps like Quizlet or Google Form or Kahoot, so it saves time and is friendly-user.” (T4)

Though learning feedback was considered as the most effective way in not only pointing out errors but also showing why it was incorrect and gave advice on what to do next to improve the performance [18], [24, [31], it was not frequently delivered to non-English majors by most teachers as it took time and learning feedback was only given to students in assessing their writing and speaking products. All teacher participants shared that official marking scheme for writing and speaking, one of the documents issued by HUFLIS in the teaching of English for non-major students

of Hue University, was used as formal criteria to assess students' performance and deliver feedback for their learning improvement.

Oral feedback was the most frequently used in formative assessment conducted by EFL teachers in this study. Oral feedback was given to the whole group or the whole class as teachers did not have enough time. Some teachers stated that they sometimes gave feedback directly to each individual student, especially when they really had difficulties in learning English and needed timely support from teachers. Contradictory to the reality of having little time for giving feedback, which was mentioned by most teachers in the study and in other studies [11], [12], [27], most teachers still managed to take little time to give learning feedback after certain assessing tasks rather than wait until the end of term or school year because they believed that their feedback during the process of learning and in a timely manner could help their students learn effectively, support teachers' instructional decision-making and students' pedagogical benefits.

4.2. Influential factors in EFL teachers' formative assessment practice

The findings from in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples showed that teachers' assessment practices was influenced by language curriculum, assessment resources, class size, and teaching workload. All teacher participants believed that language curriculum was the most influential factor to their implementation of formative assessment. The curriculum with its overall objectives, content, assessment requirements, and students' expected learning outcomes were reported to play a significant role in implementing the teaching and learning process effectively. The teacher participants stated that it was essential to understand that students are required to achieve the overall objectives as levels 1/6, 2/6 and 3/6 (VNFPLF) or A1, A2 and B1 (CEFR) with detailed performance objectives for each level. Some teachers asserted,

"Students' required performance objectives for each level were used as the main guidelines for my teaching and assessment" (T1)

"The format or content of classroom assessment activities... conducted to assess my students are based on their end-of-level tests, their course objectives" (T6)

The findings gathered from interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples revealed that teachers' formative assessment practices were implemented based on official documents, such as the language curriculum and test format guidelines, in the context of teaching English to non-English major students at Hue University. These findings were in line with those in one of the related studies by Yildrgrim (2004).

The second influential factor affecting all teachers in the practice of assessing non-English major students was assessment resources relevant to the test format and themes for English A1, A2 and B1.

As shared by two teacher participants,

Especially for formative assessment, I find it challenging as I have to investigate, construct, and modify assessment tools and activities from few learning resources. (T5)

And

“Actually, it should be great if we can use available midterm tests designed for English A1, A2 and B1. Or we can work in groups to write some common tests used by the whole department as the midterm tests. The tests like these will be equivalent to each other in format and content”. (T2)

The findings from the common assessment tools used by teachers showed that the teachers relied on the tasks and exercises in the textbooks to assess their students due to insufficient assessment resources. In addition to the assessment resources provided in the Life textbook series, the most relevant materials for assessing non-English major students were compiled from supplementary learning resources designed to accompany the Life series, as well as from collections of practice tests such as the Cambridge KET and PET. These resources were selected based on their alignment with the course themes, test item formats, and learning objectives.

Thirdly, class size and workload were two other factors to consider by teachers in implementing any assessment activities as the findings from the studies by Enu (2021), Eshun and Bordoh (2024), Hargreaves (1992) and Ochur et al. (2022) revealed [11], [12], [17], [27].

Two participants shared,

“Since it takes time to offer marks and constructive criticism, teaching English in many large classes with over 40 students hinders us from performing any assessment activities and providing feedback efficiently”. (T4)

“I rarely let my students present their speaking topics individually as it is time-consuming.”

Workload also hindered the teachers from conducting any assessment activities effectively as it was not easy to practice within a limited time as one teacher shared,

“Though I am aware of the need for changes to help my students improve learning, I sometimes fail to make relevant adjustments in my instructions because of heavy working hours”. (T2)

“I know that I should spend more time on formative assessment to improve my students’ learning, but there is a lot of lesson content for each unit or section... I don’t have time. (T5) or I understand that giving my pupils timely comments will help them improve their education; nevertheless, I do not have much time for this”. (T4)

In short, the findings clearly indicated that EFL teachers tended to rely on their preferred assessment tools, which they found most familiar, practical, or effective when assessing non-English major students. Their formative assessment practices have gradually improved thanks to the advent of learning applications, which have provided more efficient ways to design tasks, collect responses, and deliver feedback. Among the three commonly used feedback including evaluative, motivational

and learning feedback, learning feedback was acknowledged by teachers as the most effective in supporting student learning. However, it was not the most frequently used in practice. Teachers reported that large class sizes and heavy workloads made it difficult to provide timely and individualized feedback on a regular basis. These two factors were consistently mentioned as major constraints affecting the quality and frequency of formative assessment; as a result, although the potential of learning feedback was appreciated, practical limitations often prevent it from being used to its fullest extent.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings provided insights into EFL teachers' practices of assessing non-English major students in the current teaching context. The data collected from interviews, classroom observations, and assessment samples showed some common assessment tools teachers used in the practices of assessing non-English major students, including tests with multiple-choice and short-answer questions, quizzes, observations, 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 revealed 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 learning applications; therefore, students were more motivated and engaged in their learning process. Additionally, EFL teachers' formative assessment practices were also affected by some influential factors, including language curriculum, assessment resources, class size, and teaching workload.

To enhance the quality of both teaching and learning, several implications for the implementation of formative assessment should be considered. Firstly, EFL teachers' formative assessment practices should combine alternative tools such as peer assessment, self-assessment, and portfolios with traditional methods like tests and quizzes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning. This integration not only allows teachers to gather diverse evidence of student progress but also actively engages learners in their own development. Prioritizing timely and learning feedback is essential, as it supports students in identifying their strengths or weaknesses and providing guidelines for improvement. Moreover, EFL teachers should be provided with assessment resources aligned with the language curriculum to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of their assessment practices. Regular participation in professional development activities, including forums and training workshops, is crucial for equipping teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in language assessment. In addition, learning applications should be utilized in assigning assessment tasks, delivering feedback, and grading, thereby saving time and increasing efficiency. Finally, to support the effective

implementation of formative assessment, class sizes should be reduced to around 30 students.

This study only focused on EFL teachers' practices of assessing 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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