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# **Students' Perspectives on Assessment and Evaluation in ESL Classrooms**

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දෙවන භාෂාවක් ලෙස ඉංගුීසි විෂය ඉගැන්වීමේ පාඨමාලා සඳහා විෂය නිර්දේශ සැකසීමෙදී ඇගැයිම් සහ තක්සේරු කිරිම (Assessment and Evaluation) සඳහා ලබාදෙන අවධානය ඉතා පහල මට්ටමක පවතී. මෙම පර්යේෂණ පතිකාව මගින් ඉංගීසි භාෂාව ඉගැන්වීම සඳහා ශිෂා හිතකාමී (learner - centred) විෂය නිර්දේශයන් සැකසීමේ දී වැදගත්වන ශිෂා ඉගෙනුම් ඉදිරිදර්ශනයන් (Learner Perspectives) වල වැදගත්කම විමර්ෂණය කරයි. මෙම පර්යේෂණය නාගරික විශ්වවිදාහල පාදක කරගෙන සිදු කරන ලද අතර ඒ සඳහා සමීක්ෂණ කිුයාවලිය යොදා ගන්නා ලදී. මෙහි දී පුශ්ණාවලියක් මගින් සිසුන් ගේ තොරතුරු ලබා ගන්නා ලද අතර එය Google Form භාවිතයෙන් මාර්ගගත කුමයට සිදු කරන ලදී. දත්ත විශ්ලේෂණය පුමාණාත්මක (Quantitative) නියමය පරිදි සිදුකරන ලද අතර ඒ සඳහා SPSS IBM 21 මෘදුකාංගය භාවිතා කරන ලදී. මෙම පර්යේෂණය විදාහා විෂය ආශිත පීඨ සහ විදාහා නොවන විෂය ආශිත පීඨ පදනම් කරගෙන සිදුකරන ලදී. මෙම පර්යේෂණයේ සොයා ගැනිම් ලෙස, විදහා විෂය ආශිත පීඨ වල සිසුන් තම ඉංගීසි විෂය සඳහා යොදා ගන්නා ඇගැයීම් සහ තක්සේරු කිරීමේ (Assessment and Evaluation) ක්රියාවලිය පිළිබඳ ඉහළ ලෙස සැහිමකට පත්වන බවත් මාර්ගගත ඇගැයීම් පිළිබද සාමානා ලෙස සැහිමකට පත්වන බවත් පෙන්වා දෙන ලදී. විදහා නොවන විෂයන් ආශිත පිඨ සිසුන් විසින් විභාග පශ්ණ පතු ඇගැයීම් ක්රියාවලිය සඳහා එහි ඇති විශ්වසනීයත්වය, විභාග ශිෂා හිතකාමී බව, මාර්ග ගත කුමවේදයන් සිදුවන ඇගැයීම් සහ අඛන්ඩ ඇගැයීම් පිළිබඳව සාමානා ලෙස සැහිමකට පත්වන බව පෙන්වා දෙන ලදී. තවද සියලු ම පිඨ වල සිසුන් විසින් අඛන්ඩ ඇගැයීම (CAT) සඳහා 60% පුතිශතයක් සහ සමාසික අවසාන ඇගැයීම් සඳහා 40% පුතිශතයක් පැවතිය යුතු බව ඉතා පැහැදිලි ලෙස පෙන්වා දෙන ලදී.

මු<mark>බාපද</mark>: ඉගෙනුම් ඉදිරි දර්ශනයන්, මාර්ගගත ඇගැයීම්, සාම්පුදායික නොවන ඇගැයීම්, ශිෂා හිතකාමී ඉගැන්වීම්, විෂය නිර්දේශය

# Introduction

Assessment is an integral part of the curriculum, which determines whether or not the goals of the curriculum are being met. Assessments affect decisions on grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, all of which are mutually inclusive domains in the curriculum. Assessments inspire us to find answers vehemently to the questions: "Are students learning what they are supposed to be learning?", Are the teachers teaching effectively focusing on what they are supposed to be teaching?", "Are the learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum realized?" and "How can teachers, students, and educational administrators improve their respective specified roles in the educational programmes?"

Assessment has been proved to be a vibrant component related to teaching. As Bound (1995) points out, assessments provide students with substantial measurement of expected learning outcomes, the most fundamental prompt for learning. Studies have highlighted the benefits of assessment in the context of learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). The role of assessment in the context of the curriculum with beneficial backwash effects to learning and teaching has been emphasized, and the complementary nature of assessment towards the same has been shown in the Triangular Framework for curriculum development of educational programmes (Dhanapala, 2021). Effective assessment is often transparent, ongoing, purposeful with meaningful intentions, linked to well-defined learning outcomes projected in educational programmes. Effective assessment is targeted to directly measure learning outcomes by way of helping programmes to realize the goals which are developed in keeping with the needs of learners and the intentions of the community.

Further, assessment is universally recognized and accepted as an integral part of teaching and learning. In fact, it is one of the most important components of any curriculum, which plays a pivotal role in determining what learners learn. In the case of learners, they learn most when they are quite precisely certain how their efforts in learning are to be judged and evaluated (Canlin & Edelhoff, 1982).

In educational programmes, the curriculum is a dynamic interplay among learning, content, pedagogy, and assessment. Since assessment is an integral part of the curriculum, it is desirable to ascertain whether the curriculum is delivering its specified objectives with accurate strategies of assessment of pupils' learning and progression towards the targets. The appearance of learner-centred assessment is an extension of learner-centred curriculum development, both of which make provisions to take into consideration of the learner, his or her; needs, interests, abilities, and behaviours.

Student-centred assessment embodies sound assessment practices that can be incorporated into any educational setting but are especially critical in student-centred learning contexts, where active engagement in learning and responsibility for the management of learning are core assumptions (Lea, Stephenson, & Troy, 2003). Literature in education with a specific focus on student-centred learning has emphasised the learner as a lively agent even in the assessment and evaluation process of study programmes (Jonassen, 2000; Weimer, 2002).

# The study

The motivation for the study area originates from the problematic notion that university graduates fail to improve the expected English language competency levels even after undergoing the ESL programmes conducted. In literature, it has been clearly articulated that no curriculum model would be complete without an evaluation element as a principal part (Nunan, 1988, p. 116). An emerging conceptual foundation of curriculum development is learner-centeredness, and in line with the concept, an extension of the same has been developed as student-centred assessment, which embodies sound assessment practices that can be incorporated into any educational setting. As a part of a postgraduate study, this paper aims to ascertain learner perspectives on assessment and evaluation of ESL university study programmes in the Sri Lankan context in the urban and well-developed universities identified as Metropolitan universities. Further, the proposed findings would help improve the ESL curricula in particular and programmes in general of the university sector and improve the assessment and evaluation techniques presently being carried out.

# Statement of the problem

Students' conceptions of assessment are so important, since it is known that their beliefs guide and determine how they study (Brown and Hirschfeld, 2007; Brown and Harris, 2012). Since the purpose of educational programmes is to see that the learning environment of students is enhanced with the required knowledge factor, it is vital to ascertain the perceptions of students on the assessment and evaluation environment so as to incorporate developmental concepts and their productive feedback.

Studies have shown that the assessment practices in the study context were mostly traditional (summative) and that most academics described the purpose of assessment in a dialogical way, emphasizing formative assessment and the importance of feedback for learning or to modify teaching strategies and adapt them to students' specific needs (Moneiro, Mata and Nobrega Santos; 2021). In the context of Sri Lanka, studies on students' perceptions on assessment and evaluation practices are very rare and this is a factor more dormient in the university sector. Further, the nature and the mode of assessment and evaluation practices often vary based on the nature of the faculty. Therefore, it is evident that student perspectives on assessment practices vary based on the nature of the faculty and universities need to identify the type of assessment practices to be adopted with special reference to learner-centered assessment. Hence, the study aims to ascertain the students' perceptions of assessment practices of selected universities in Sri Lanka.

# Literature review

Opportunities for learners to engage in fruitful learning opportunities embrace a growing trend. The concept of a student-centred pedagogical environment is accelerating its momentum in the EFL domain. Incorporating students' perceptions in curriculum development and programme development is getting special attention in learner-centred teaching.

In the education environment, assessments play a vital role to enhance the quality of education. Summative assessments are used to measure what students have gained

from the learning environment at the end of a semester, term, year, or unit. Summative assessments help to measure whether students have met the required standards of a study programme in order to qualify for certification or standard. Also, such assessments help students to move to the next level of a study programme. The function of the formative assessments is to see that students are frequently assessed during the course of study. Furthermore, formative assessments serve to identify learning needs so that the teaching environment can be adjusted and improved appropriately.

With regard to educational programmes, scholars have highlighted how effective assessment as a driving force for learning (Race, 2001; Brown, 2010), and if the feedback derived from the assessment is effective, there is a significant improvement in the achievement of learning (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Race (2001) reported that students complained about the usefulness, narrowness, vagueness, and confusing nature of feedback derived from evaluation. In effective educational programmes, the environment of assessment needs to provide effective feedback with opportunities for students to engage in evaluating their own performance. The logical factor behind encouraging active learning by students is to see that students are considered as active receivers of feedback knowledge-making provisions available for them to access valuable learning experiences (Nicol, Thomson, and Breslin, 2014).

The widely accepted domain of assessment is to see how learning is assessed. This has been termed as 'assessment for learning'. The development of the concept 'assessment of learning' is quite clearly indicative of the fact how assessment foster learning. In learner-centred assessment, the contribution of assessment towards learning is encouraged. What is indicative in 'assessment for learning' is the formative nature of assessment of feedback in order to feedforward and support future learning, whereas in 'assessment of learning', the nature of assessment is considered as an integral part of learning.

There have been debates on the tension between the roles of informal vs formal assessments created to monitor the performance of students (Carless, 2005). Further, whether assessment as a classroom practice or policy development is yet another dilemma of the classroom assessment in the education sector (Black & William, 1998; Daugherty, 1995; Berry & Adamson, 2011). Although scholars in education (Gibbs, Simpson & McDonald, 2003) have elaborated the developmental nature

of assessments being an interactive and cooperative process between teachers and students, in reality, this may not be the real experience of students. The kinds of assessment practices that students have preferred have not yet caught the attention of the educational programme developers. There seems, nevertheless, an array of literature (Hue, Leung & Kennedy, 2015) that throws some light on students and their perception of assessment practices.

In practice, assessment can be seen as; teacher-dominated, student-centered, and teacher-student interactive (Hue, Leung & Kennedy, 2015). While student-centered and teacher-student interactive assessments pose similar characteristics with specific recognition of student perspectives, some studies have shown student preference for teacher-student interactive assessment (Hue, Leung & Kennedy, 2015). Since the purpose of educational programmes is to see that the learning environment of students is enhanced with the required knowledge factor, it is vital to ascertain the perceptions of students on the assessment and evaluation environment so as to incorporate developmental concepts and their productive feedback. The studentcentered perspective of assessment is a development of student-centered learning in which students consider the practices of assessment useful if they (assessments) contribute to students' learning and academic performance. For example, Gibbs, Simpson and McDonald (2003) identified eleven areas under which educational aims of student-centered assessment could be achieved. Provision of sufficient study time, engagement in productive learning activities, distribution of tasks across topics and over time, communication of high expectations to students, provision of feedback that is timely, use of feedback to promote learning and the linking of feedback to the purpose and criteria of assessment are some of them.

Studies done by Boekaerts & Cascallar (2006) and Efklides (2006) have emphasized the self-regulation framework to examine assessment practice and argued that assessment practice cannot be separated from one's own cognition, feelings and actions. Goal setting and peer collaboration are also involved in the process of assessment. When learners are capable of combining these actions and perception within metacognitive monitoring, control and evaluation of the assessment process, greater learning outcomes can be achieved (Zimmerman, 2008).

Rather than taking one of these two perspectives, research shows that student achievement could be improved through teacher-student interaction or interactive-informal practice (e.g., conferences, checklists, questioning and observation), which contain an integrated use of student-centred practice and alternative assessment such as portfolios, peer assessment and self-assessment. (Black & William, 1998; Weeden, Winter & Broad-foot, 2002).

This study focuses on students' perceptions of assessment and evaluation practices towards ESL programme development through needs analysis. The term needs analysis is a diversified concept which is used for the enhancement of the pedagogic and learning environment. According to Brown (2009), needs analysis of programme development focuses on areas such as preparation of tests and programme evaluation strategies.

# **Objective of the study**

The study aimed at identifying the learner perspectives on the assessment and evaluation of the ESL programmes of the Metropolitan universities in Sri Lanka based on the nature of the faculty; science-based and non-science-based. In the study, the samples were obtained from two metropolitan universities that are well-established and situated in the major cities. Hence, University of Kelaniya and University of Colombo were the universities selected for the study.

## Methodology

The study was conducted as a survey, and data were collected with the help of a questionnaire administered online using a Google Form. The questionnaire included 20 areas which were categorized into four main domains, namely; objectives of testing, the flexibility of testing, modes of testing, and online testing. Student perceptions were tested on the areas using a Likert scale measurement. The sample of the study included 224 respondents from the Metropolitan universities. Of the total population, 114 were from the University of Kelaniya and 110 from the University of Colombo. The sample of respondents from the University of Kelaniya included 48 from Science-based faculties and 66 from non-science-based faculties, while there were 52 respondents from the University of Colombo. Data analysis was done quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, IBM Version 21) software.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data, and the study used a five-point Likert scale to measure variables ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree; Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The five-point mean values were condensed and assigned vales with three scales in order to interpret data. The mean values from 1 -2.33 were interpreted as "Low", values from 2.33 -3.67 were considered as "Moderate", and mean values from 3.67 -5 were interpreted as "High".

### **Results and discussion**

The students' perceptions of Metropolitan universities towards assessment and evaluation of the ESL programmes are discussed in the results and discussion. The questionnaire comprised four major variables as discussed in the methodology section, and the students' perceptions were evaluated based on the nature of the faculty; science-based and non-science-based.

One of the areas in the questionnaire was the effect of the objectives of testing. Regarding the effect of objectives of testing, the variable had six questions as subvariables. The results illustrated in Table 7.1 show the sub-variable, the test meeting with the learning outcomes of the ELT programme. As per the data, both students of the science-based faculties and non-science-based faculties had high perspectives with mean values of 4.070 and 4.081, respectively, for this sub-variable. The next question focused on whether students get useful feedback on the tests done. According to the results, students have indicated moderate satisfaction in both sciencebased and non-science-based faculties (mean values=3.500 and 3.250 respectively). For the third question of indirect motivation from tests towards learning, the results showed that respondents of science-based faculties had high satisfaction with a mean value of 3.880 while non-science-based faculties had a moderate satisfaction (Mean=3.145). The purpose of the next question was to find out students' perspectives on the reflection of the tests based on the curriculum. Both science-based and nonscience-based faculties indicated a high perspective with mean values of 4.100 and 4.081, respectively. With regard to the question of marking of tests by the teachers and reliability of the marks given, the respondents in science-based faculties had indicated a moderate satisfaction (mean=3.290), whereas, in non-science-based faculties, respondents had indicated a low satisfaction (mean=2.206). In response to the perceived satisfaction on the credit value assigned for English in the curriculum,

students of science-based and non-science-based faculties had indicated high satisfaction with mean values of 3.910 and 4.282, respectively.

	Science-based faculty			Non-scie faculty	ence-ba	sed	Total		
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD
The tests meet with the learning out- comes of the ELT programme.	4.070	100	.8791	4.081	124	.7168	4.076	224	.7915
Students always get useful feedback on the tests done.	3.500	100	.8989	3.250	124	.9457	3.361	224	.9284
The tests indirectly motivate students to learn.	3.880	100	.6401	3.145	124	.9256	3.421	224	.8197
The tests are based on the contents of the curriculum to a greater extent.	4.100	100	.6667	4.081	124	.8024	4.085	224	.7443
The tests are marked by the lecturers and the marks given are reliable	3.290	100	.7148	2.206	124	.7775	2.749	224	.7486
There is sufficient credit value for the English subject.	3.910	100	1.2399	4.282	124	.8020	4.086	224	1.0352

Table 7.1: Effect of objectives of testing

The next variable of the study was the effect of flexibility of testing, and the results are presented in Table 7.2. The focus of the first question was the students' perspectives on whether the given freedom to do the tests are sufficient or not. According to the results, the students of science-based faculties had indicated a moderate satisfaction while in non-science-based faculties, it was high in perspectives (mean values= 3.610 and 4.081 respectively). To the next sub-variable of tests being learner-friendly, the respondents of the science-based faculties had indicated a high value (mean=3.760) of satisfaction, whereas, in non-science-based faculties, it was low (mean=2.032).

The data in response to the availability of non-traditional forms of assessment in the ELT programmes indicated that the perception of science-based faculties was high, with a mean value of 4.290 indicating the availability. In the case of non-science-based faculties, the results indicated that the mean value is 3.040, indicating moderate satisfaction. The fourth area of concern in the variable was to examine the student perception of the freedom of time given to students when tests are administered. The perceived satisfaction indicates a moderate perspective with mean values of 3.611 and 3.024 for science-based and non-science-based faculties accordingly.

	Science-based faculty		Non-science-based faculty			Total			
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	Ν	SD
Students are given sufficient freedom to do the tests given.	3.610	100	1.0808	4.081	124	.9926	3.838	224	1.0329
Tests given are learn- er friendly and not boring	3.760	100	1.0836	2.032	124	.8355	2.911	224	.9616
Tests given contain non-traditional forms of testing such as projects, reports and portfolios.	4.290	100	.8796	3.040	124	1.0925	3.652	224	1.0086
Tests given do not have time restric- tions and have some freedom of time for students.	3.611	100	1.1254	3.024	124	.9236	3.365	224	1.0298

Table 7.2: Effect of the flexibility of testing

The major variable, the effect of modes of testing, which included six sub-areas is the next area of the study. As per the results depicted in Table 7.3, the perception towards the effectiveness and usefulness of the continuous assessments, the respondents of science-based faculties have indicated a high satisfaction (mean=3.730), whereas, in non-science-based faculties, the satisfaction was low (mean=2.315). For the second sub-variable, usefulness and effectiveness of the end semester tests given, both the faculties had indicated high satisfaction with mean values of 4.170 and 4.153. The statements from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> focused on the preference of mark allocation of CATs and semester-end examinations. The mean values of 3.600 and 3.411, which represent

moderate preference, were indicated for 20% (CAT) and 80% (Semester-end) evaluation criteria by the science-based and non-science-based faculties, respectively. In the same order of the nature of the faculties, the mean values were 3.350 and 3.484 (medium preference) for 40% (CAT) and 60% (Semester-end) evaluations. For the 60% (CAT) and 40% (Semester-end) tests, the preference mean values were high, with mean values of 3.780 and 4.258. For the last area, the usefulness of UTEL tests, science-based faculties have indicated a moderate perception (mean=3.650), but for non-science-based faculties, the students' perspective was high with a mean value of 4.024.

	Science-based faculty			Non-science-based faculty			Total		
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	Ν	SD
The Continuous Assessment Tests given are very effective and useful.	3.730	100	.9625	2.315	124	.9090	3.031	224	.9497
The end-semester tests given are very useful and effective.	4.170	100	.7661	4.153	124	.9199	4.161	224	.8529
My preference mark allocation 1. 20% (CAT) and 80% (Semester-end exams)	3.600	100	.9744	3.411	124	1.2165	3.496	224	1.1165
My preference ^ for mark allocation 2. 40% (CAT) and 60% (Semester-end exams)	3.350	100	1.0860	3.484	124	1.3220	3.424	224	1.2215
My preference for mark allocation 3. 60% (CAT) and 40% (Semester-end exams)	3.780	100	1.1376	4.258	124	1.2996	4.120	224	1.2277
The proposed UTEL tests are very useful for students.	3.650	100	1.0672	4.024	124	.9833	3.839	224	1.0362

Table 7.3: Effect of modes of testing

The last area of the study was the effect of online testing (see Table 7.4). The respondents have indicated moderate satisfaction (mean values of 3.390 in science-based and 3.515 in non-science-based) for the usefulness and effectiveness

of online testing. For the sub-area of the convenience of online testing, sciencebased faculties have indicated a moderate perception (mean=3.120) compared to low perception (mean=2.279) in non-science-based faculties. The next area was to ascertain the student's familiarity with technology to face online tests. The results indicated that science-based faculties had a moderate familiarity with a mean value of 3.570, contrary to a low state of familiarity with a mean value of 2.307. The final area of the study was to find out the students' motivation towards online testing for which science-based faculties indicated a moderate motivation (mean=2.950) while non-science-based faculties indicated a low motivation (mean=2.016).

	Science-based faculty			Non-science-based faculty			Total		
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD
The online testing is very useful and effective for students.	3.390	100	1.0721	3.515	124	1.2711	3.425	224	1.2026
The online testing mode is very convenient for students.	3.120	100	1.2893	2.279	124	1.2270	2.640	224	1.3082
Students are familiar with the technology (such as LMS) to do the tests given online.	3.570	100	1.2412	2.307	124	1.0833	2.868	224	1.1674
Students are motivated to do online testing.	2.950	100	1.3286	2.016	124	1.1755	2.501	224	1.3520

Table 7.4: Effect of online testing

The overall percentages of perception are presented in Table 7.5. Of the 20 subvariables based on Assessment and Evaluation, 10% of low satisfaction, 50% of moderate satisfaction, and 40% of high satisfaction have been indicated by the respondents of the science-based faculties. Based on the results, in non-sciencebased faculties, 30% of low satisfaction, and 35% of moderate and high satisfaction can be observed in each case.

	Low	Moderate	High
Science-based	10%	50%	40%
Non-science-based	30%	35%	35%

# Table 7.5: Overall percentages of perception

# Conclusion

The current study investigated the ESL learner perspectives in respect of Assessment and Evaluation in Sri Lankan Metropolitan universities. It is apparently clear that the majority of science-based faculty students are generally satisfied with Assessment and Evaluation compared to non-science -based faculties. In non-science-based faculties, the areas that low mean values are indicated can be identified as; marking of tests and the reliability of marks, tests being learner-friendly, the usefulness of CATs, the convenience of online testing, and motivation towards online testing while in science-based faculties, there is an indication of low satisfaction for motivation towards online testing. Further, the respondents from both the faculty types have highly preferred to have more percentage for CATs (60%) and less percentage (40%) for semester - end evaluations.

Based on the results of the study, it is indicative the universities need to pay due attention to assessment practices of non-science based faculties as students have indicated mostly moderate satisfaction compared to science-based faculties. Further, in the case of science-based faculties, authorities need to consider learner -friendly online testing practices as they have indicated low satisfaction. Finally, the existing percentages of emphasis paid on CATs by universities are needed to be revised considering the students preference for higher percentage for CATs compared to the percentage assigned to semester end examinations.

As for limitations, the low sample population of the Metropolitan universities is a limitation of the study. Nevertheless, the findings could be used as useful inputs when universities design, develop or revise the existing assessment and evaluation practices of ESL programmes of universities.

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