

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING OUTCOME ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY AT NONG LAM UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. This study analyzed how learning outcome assessment was perceived by Nong Lam University students across four dimensions: Improvement, External attribution, Affective/Social and Irrelevance. Adopting a mixed-methods design, quantitative data were gathered by an adapted version of Brown's (2008) Student Conceptions of Assessment (SCoA) scale, supported with qualitative analysis from interviews with 25 students from different majors to investigate the experiences and perceptions of assessment practices. Results showed strong endorsement of the Improvements and Affect/ Social, demonstrating participants' favouring of assessment as a formative and motivational tool. The moderate agreement in the External Attributions indicated some awareness of assessment's signaling role whereas the Irrelevance dimension recorded the lowest mean scores and the greatest variability, indicating mixed perceptions of fairness and usefulness. With the exception of Irrelevance, where male students showed greater agreement, gender analysis revealed no significant differences. Taken together, these findings offer both conceptual and contextual contributions to the literature on students' conceptions of assessment. The study extends the SCoA framework to learning outcome assessment in Vietnamese higher education and shows that students' perceptions reflect a transitional assessment culture, in which strong support for improvement and social engagement coexists with concerns about fairness, pressure, and over-assessment.

Keywords: perceptions of assessment, Improvement, External Attribute, Irrelevance.

1. Introduction

Assessment plays a central role in higher education; it only tracks students' progress but also encourages better teaching through feedback. In recent years, assessment has shifted from a purely summative to a formative process that promotes deeper learning, active engagement, and personal growth (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This development highlights the need to view assessment as a multidimensional practice that shapes students' learning, motivation, and perceptions of educational quality. In fact, students' conceptions of assessment strongly influence how they approach their studies. That means when students perceive assessment as constructive and improvement-oriented, they tend to use positive learning strategies. Conversely, when assessment is seen as irrelevant or unfair, motivation may decline (Brown & Hirschfeld, 2008). Therefore, understanding these perceptions is crucial for designing assessment practices that align with students' needs and foster meaningful learning.

However, in higher education, assessment goes beyond the traditional testing and grading. It also reflects cultural and social perspectives. In fact, students' perceptions are often influenced by previous experiences, cultural context, and personal beliefs (Pastore, 2020; Segers & Dochy, 2001). These factors may result in adaptive conceptions, which promote students' responsibility and active engagement, or maladaptive conceptions, which inhibit learning. By recognizing these

patterns, educators and policymakers can develop more effective assessment approaches that enhance teaching quality and learning outcomes.

Prior studies have shown that cultural and educational contexts shape how students understand assessment. In Hong Kong, assessment is often viewed as a tool to gain social status and career prospects whereas Brazilian and New Zealander students see it as a learning-oriented process that promotes personal growth and institutional accountability (Brown, 2022). Meanwhile, Turkish students tend to prefer assessment alternatives that prioritize critical thinking and stress reduction (Brown, 2022). Despite continuous revisions to support genuine student-centered approaches, summative evaluations continue to be the major evaluation method in Vietnam due to the influence of Confucian heritage culture (Nguyen, 2017).

Although international studies have extensively examined students' conceptions of assessment (Brown, 2008; Brown & Wang, 2016; Flores et al., 2020), several important gaps remain, particularly in the Vietnamese higher education context. First, few studies focus specifically on students' perceptions of learning outcome assessment, despite its increasing significance in quality assurance and competency-based education. Second, few large-scale mixed-methods studies have examined both the breadth and depth of Vietnamese students' assessment experiences. To address these gaps, this study was conducted, seeking the answer to the question: How do students perceive learning outcome assessment across the four dimensions of the SCoA framework?

2. Review of literature

2.1. Assessment

Assessment has long been the focus of researchers (Bresciani et al., 2004). Nitko (1996) defined assessment as a systematic process of collecting information to make decisions about students, curricula, and educational programs, emphasizing its functional role across multiple educational levels. In a similar vein, Black & Wiliam (1998) stated that assessment is the process of collecting and interpreting evidence of student learning to make informed decisions. Harlen (2007) further emphasized the formative role of assessment as "the process of gathering, interpreting, recording, and using information about students' responses to educational tasks."

2.2. Students' perceptions of assessment

Students' perceptions of assessment play a crucial role in shaping their learning strategies and outcomes. According to Brown & Hirschfeld (2008), perceptions of assessment refer to students' perceptions about assessment's meaning and purpose based on their personal experiences. Flores et al. (2020) described them as beliefs about assessment's role in learning improvement and accountability, while Peterson & Irving (2007) highlighted its impact on their confidence and motivation. When students believe that assessment is helpful, informative and improvement-oriented, they are more likely to engage in adaptive learning behaviors. However, if they believe that assessment is irrelevant or unfair, they may develop maladaptive behaviors.

2.3. Previous studies on students' perceptions of assessment

Researchers have now paid increasing attention to how students perceive assessments, not only in terms of general beliefs but also in relation to specific assessment methods and tasks. For example, Wang & Brown (2014) looked at general perceptions of assessment, Flores et al. (2020) examined specific assessment methods, and Gulikers et al (2004) investigated students' opinions on particular assessment tasks. When considered as a whole, these studies show that students' conceptions of assessment are multifaceted and closely connected to the actual design and experience of assessment.

Using the Student Conceptions of Assessment (SCoA) framework, a comparative study by Brown & Wang (2016) found that students in Hong Kong tended to see assessment as irrelevant or discouraging, while Chinese students were more likely to perceive it as beneficial for learning and social development, despite shared historical and cultural values. These differences suggest that students' perceptions of assessment are shaped not only by cultural traditions but also by distinct educational policies and environments.

Similarly, in Hong Kong, instead of being seen as a tool for personal development, assessment was frequently viewed as a way to ensure external approval and future career prospects (Brown, 2011). On the other hand, findings from Brazil and New Zealand highlight more comprehensive, learning-centered ideas of assessment, where personal growth, institutional improvement, and the joy of learning are emphasized (Brown, 2022). When taken together, these studies demonstrate how cultural norms, assessment purposes, and classroom practices interact to shape students' perceptions of assessment. In systems where assessment is strongly tied to ranking, accountability, and future opportunity, students may be more likely to develop external or high-stakes views of assessment. In contrast, students have a greater tendency to view assessment as beneficial to learning and growth in settings that prioritize participation, reflection, and feedback.

In Vietnam, students' perceptions remain deeply influenced by Confucian heritage culture and a strong tradition of summative assessment. Therefore, although educational reforms have introduced alternative forms of assessment such as peer and group assessments, traditional exams remain dominant. Recent studies have indicated that Vietnamese students have shown more interest in diverse assessment methods, and teachers also value authentic tasks to develop pedagogical competence, suggesting a shift toward more student-centered and practice-based evaluation models (Nguyen, 2017). This indicates that assessment practices in Vietnamese higher education may be undergoing a gradual transition rather than a complete shift. However, important gaps remain in the literature. Research on students' perceptions of learning outcome assessment in Vietnamese higher education is still limited, especially within a large-scale mixed-method design. Specifically, little is known about how students simultaneously see assessment in terms of irrelevance, social involvement, improvement, and external signaling. Therefore, to address these gaps, this study was conducted using the SCoA framework (Brown, 2008).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study used a mixed-methods design to gather Nong Lam University students' perspectives and understanding of assessment. For the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire adapted from the SCoA inventory was used to examine students' perceptions across four dimensions: Improvement, External Attributions, Affect/Social, and Irrelevance. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 25 students from a range of majors and year levels.

3.2. Data collection

To assess students' perceptions of assessment, a structured questionnaire adapted from Brown's (2008) SCoA Inventory, Version IV was used. The instrument consisted of two main sections. The original four-factor structure of the model - Improvement, External Attributions, Affect/Social, and Irrelevance - was retained. No new dimensions were added; however, some items were reworded to better fit the context of learning outcome assessment in Vietnamese higher education. Rather than changing the original theoretical framework, the adaptation aimed to increase contextual clarity. Prior to the main survey, a pilot test was carried out, and minor revisions were made based on the feedback. The final structure of the questionnaire was as follows:

Part I collected demographic information, including gender, academic major, recent academic performance (both GPA and classification), and cumulative GPA.

Part II addressed students' perceptions and beliefs regarding the roles and purposes of assessment in higher education. It comprised 33 items categorized into four conceptual dimensions: (1) Improvement (assessment as a tool for feedback and learning development), (2) External Attributions (assessment as a reflection of intelligence or institutional quality), (3) Affect/Social (assessment's influence on motivation and classroom dynamics), (4) Irrelevance (perceptions of assessment as unfair or unimportant).

An extensive interview guide with open-ended questions was used to gather qualitative data. The questions were designed to explore students' general learning experiences, use of feedback, and understanding of the relationship between assessment and academic development. Additionally, they covered emotional and social experiences such as stress, motivation and collaboration with peers. The open-ended format allowed respondents to give their opinions freely and share personal examples.

3.3. Participants

3.3.1. Population and sample

Participants of this study came from various academic disciplines and were selected using convenience sampling based on their accessibility and willingness. In the quantitative phase, survey data were collected from multiple faculties to ensure diversity and representativeness across the university. As shown in Table 1, the sample was balanced by gender and academic years, with most students belonging to the 2020-2024 cohorts, in line with the existing undergraduate students when the data was collected.

Table 1. Demographic information of the sample

		Count	%
Gender	Male	2532	43.9
	Female	3242	56.1
Grade	Below Average	220	3.8
	Average	984	17.0
	Fair	3076	53.3
	Good	1322	22.9
	Very good	172	3.0
Batch	2014	1	0.0
	2015	4	0.1
	2016	4	0.1
	2017	38	0.7
	2018	62	1.1
	2019	158	2.7
	2020	447	7.7
	2021	1388	24.0
	2022	1222	21.2
	2023	1105	19.1
	2024	1345	23.3

3.3.2. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. First, the four dimensions of students' perceptions - Improvement, External Attributions, Affect/Social, and Irrelevance were summarized using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and

percentages). In addition, independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in students' conceptions of assessment. Statistical significance was determined at the $p < .05$ level.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and recurring ideas. First, codes were applied to meaningful passages to summarize recurring meanings, and then they were grouped into broader themes representing key concepts in the data. This process aimed to identify the diversity of students' experiences with assessment and the common patterns shared among respondents. To ensure consistency and reduce potential bias, codes and themes were cross-checked and refined iteratively for clarity and accuracy.

3.4. Reliability of the instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test with participants who were not involved in the main study. After that, minor changes were made to improve question clarity and coherence based on the feedback. Cronbach's Alpha was then used to estimate the internal consistency, which produced an overall value of 0.96 and subscale values ranging from 0.93 to 0.96 (Table 2). This indicates that the measurement of students' perceptions of learning outcomes is highly reliable.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Subscales	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha of subscales	Cronbach's Alpha of the scale
Improvement	11	.96	.96
External attributions	6	.93	
Affect/social	8	.96	
Irrelevance	8	.96	

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Quantitative and qualitative results

Descriptive statistics were conducted for four conceptual dimensions: *Improvement*, *External Attributions*, *Affect/Social*, and *Irrelevance* in order to better understand students' perceptions of assessment. These dimensions reflect how students interpret the role of assessment in their learning experiences. The mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to identify overall trends and variations in students' levels of agreement. The findings provide an overview of how students connect assessment with learning, motivation, institutional accountability, and emotional engagement. Qualitative insights, on the other hand, helped reveal the feelings, experiences, and logic that underlie these perceptions. Emotional Reactions, Social Dynamics, Impact on Learning and Career Prospects, General Perceptions of University Learning, and Engagement with Assessment and Feedback are the five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. When combined, they provide a comprehensive picture of how Vietnamese higher education students perceive and react to assessment practices.

4.2. Improvement

Students generally perceived assessment as a crucial component of learning and personal development. Table 3 shows that ratings for the Improvement dimension were consistently high ($M = 4.11-4.17$, $SD = 0.80-0.86$), especially for the statement "I use assessment to identify what I need to study next" ($M = 4.17$). These findings suggest that students saw assessment as a useful tool for identifying their learning needs, guiding their future coursework, and encouraging self-regulation.

This viewpoint was strongly supported by interview data. Many students stated that they often reviewed results to identify areas of weakness and plan future learning ("I carefully review results to

identify mistakes”). Others highlighted how fast and targeted feedback helped them improve (“My instructor's feedback improved my voice control”). However, when feedback was unclear or delayed, some participants expressed dissatisfaction, which diminished its usefulness. In general, the interviews presented assessment as a positive tool for motivation, self-regulation, and progress.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the Improvement dimension

	Mean of item	Std. Dev. of item	Mean of subscale	Std. Dev. of subscale
I pay attention to my assessment results in order to focus on what I could do better next time.	4.16	.86	4.14	.69
I look at what I got wrong or did poorly on to guide what I should learn next.	4.14	.84		
I make use of the feedback I get to improve my learning.	4.12	.83		
I use assessment to take responsibility for my next learning steps.	4.14	.82		
I use assessment to identify what I need to study next.	4.17	.80		
Assessment helps teachers track my progress.	4.13	.81		
Assessment is a way to determine how much I have learned from teaching.	4.14	.81		
Assessment is checking off my progress against achievement objectives and standards.	4.13	.80		
My teachers use assessment to help me improve.	4.13	.82		
Teachers use my assessment results to see what they need to teach me next.	4.11	.83		
Assessment shows whether I can analyse and think critically about a topic.	4.13	.83		

Note: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree

4.3. External attributions

Table 4 illustrates that students viewed assessment not only as a measure of their own learning, but also as an indicator of institutional performance, signaling future potential, and sharing their progress with others. The mean scores, which ranged from 3.82 to 3.99 with moderate variation (SD = .84–.94), indicated that this view was relatively common among students.

These ideas are also strongly illustrated by the qualitative data. Many students saw grades as an indicator of effort and potential and linked them to future prospects (“Grades impact career opportunities”), but some were more skeptical, arguing that practical skills and character also play a role in success (“Character and soft skills are more important than grades”). These divergent views show that although assessment continues to have social significance, students are becoming more aware of its limited capacity to predict achievement in the real world.

Students showed strong external attributions toward assessment when they viewed it as a means of accountability and communication. The items with the highest mean values were “Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing” (M = 3.99, SD = .84) and “Assessment tells my parents how much I’ve learnt” (M = 3.99, SD = .86). This indicates that students perceived assessment as a tool to report progress to parents and reflect institutional quality. Additionally, they linked assessment to future possibilities, concurring that it affects professional opportunities (M = 3.96, SD = .87) and forecasts future performance (M = 3.93, SD = .89). “Assessment results show how intelligent I am” was rated slightly lower (M = 3.82, SD = .94), but it still indicated a belief in evaluation as a measure of students’ own ability.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the External attributions dimension

	Mean of item	Std. Dev. of item	Mean of subscale	Std. Dev. of subscale
Assessment results show how intelligent I am.	3.82	.94	3.94	.76
Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing.	3.99	.84		
Assessment results predict my future performance.	3.93	.89		
Assessment measures the worth or quality of schools.	3.95	.87		
Assessment is important for my future career or job.	3.96	.88		
Assessment tells my parents how much I've learnt.	3.99	.86		

Note: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree

4.4. Affect/social

Table 5 shows that students generally viewed assessment as a positive and socially engaging experience. For example, the mean subscale score (M = 4.01, SD = 0.75) indicates strong agreement that assessment encourages not only collaboration but also motivation. Furthermore, items such as “Assessment encourages my class to work together and help each other” (M = 4.04, SD = .85) and “Assessment makes our class cooperate more with each other” (M = 4.03, SD = .84) highlight the role of assessment in fostering peer support and a constructive classroom atmosphere. Overall, students perceived assessment not only as a measure of performance but also as a source of shared motivation and connection in learning. Interview responses supported this finding. Many students talked about creating study groups before the tests (“Our class often forms study groups,”) or working on group projects that encouraged unity and collaboration (“Group study fosters bonding,”). As a result, assessment was seen as a shared social experience as well as a measure of knowledge. A few participants, however, expressed dissatisfaction with unfairness or cheating, which they believed undermined trust in the fairness of assessment (“Some students cheat and still get high scores”).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of Affect/social dimension

	Mean of item	Std. Dev. of item	Mean of subscale	Std. Dev. of subscale
Assessment encourages my class to work together and help each other.	4.04	.85	4.01	.75
Assessment motivates me and my classmates to help each other.	4.02	.84	4.01	.75
Our class becomes more supportive when we are assessed.	4.02	.85		
When we do assessment, there is a good atmosphere in our class.	3.98	.88		
Assessment makes our class cooperate more with each other.	4.03	.84		
When we are assessed, our class becomes more motivated to learn.	4.03	.83		
Assessment is an engaging and enjoyable experience for me.	3.95	.90		
I find myself really enjoying learning when I am assessed.	4.01	.86		

Note: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree

4.5. Irrelevance

As presented in Table 6, the *Irrelevance* dimension recorded an overall mean of 3.54 (SD = 1.04), addressing negative perceptions such as unfairness, inaccuracy, and low value of

assessment. Notably, the highest mean scores were observed for the statements “Assessment results are not very accurate” (M = 3.70, SD = 1.04) and “Assessment is unfair to students” (M = 3.68, SD = 1.08), which suggests that concerns about fairness and accuracy were common among respondents. In other words, many students appeared to question both the accuracy and fairness of current assessment practices.

Meanwhile, items such as “Assessment is value-less” (M = 3.46, SD = 1.22) and “I ignore or throw away my assessment results” (M = 3.42, SD = 1.24) showed slightly lower levels of agreement, indicating that students were less likely to dismiss assessment entirely. However, these relatively lower mean scores suggest that while some students doubted the value of assessment, the majority did not completely reject it. Taken together, these findings suggest that while students expressed a certain degree of skepticism regarding assessment practices, they still recognized their importance in their learning process.

This understanding was strengthened by qualitative evidence. Some students admitted that taking excessive examinations and the pressure to perform well academically overwhelmed them (“Too many assessments make me stressed”). In addition, others criticized the inconsistency of grading and perceived unpredictability of the results (“Reflects multiple factors, including luck”). While most participants valued assessment as a feedback mechanism, they called for fairer, more authentic, and less repetitive evaluation methods that better reflect real learning. Few students completely rejected assessment itself, which suggests that dissatisfaction arises from implementation rather than the concept of assessment itself.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the Irrelevance dimension

	Mean of item	Std. Dev. of item	Mean of subscale	Std. Dev. of subscale
Assessment is unfair to students.	3.68	1.08	3.54	1.04
Assessment results are not very accurate.	3.70	1.04		
I ignore assessment information.	3.48	1.19		
Assessment interferes with my learning.	3.51	1.18		
Teachers are over assessing.	3.56	1.14		
Assessment is value-less.	3.46	1.22		
I ignore or throw away my assessment results.	3.42	1.24		
Assessment has little impact on my learning.	3.52	1.20		

Note: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree

4.6. Gender differences in students’ perceptions of assessment

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to explore gender differences across the four dimensions of assessment conceptions: *Improvement*, *External Attributions*, *Affect/Social*, and *Irrelevance*. Descriptive statistics and test results are presented in Table 7.

As shown in Table 7, the *Improvement* (p = .085), *External Attributions* (p = .298), and *Affect/Social* (p = .208) dimensions did not show any significant gender differences. Both male (M = 32.98, SD = 5.98) and female students (M = 33.23, SD = 5.24) similarly viewed assessment as a tool to improve academic performance. They both reported comparable scores for *External Attribution* and *Affect/Social* dimension. In contrast, a significant gender difference emerged in the *Irrelevance* dimension (df = 5772. t = 5.503, p < .001), with male students (M = 29.01, SD = 8.23) scoring higher than females (M = 27.80, SD = 8.38). This indicated that male students were more likely to view assessment as unfair, inaccurate, or irrelevant.

Table 7. Gender differences in students' perceptions of assessment

Dimension	Gender	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	95% CI of the Difference
Improvement	Male	32.98	5.98	-1.72	5772	.085	-0.254	[-0.544, 0.035]
	Female	33.23	5.24					
External Attributions	Male	23.69	4.82	1.04	5772	.298	0.126	[-0.111, 0.362]
	Female	23.57	4.33					
Affect/Social	Male	32.19	6.25	1.26	5772	.208	0.200	[-0.111, 0.511]
	Female	31.99	5.78					
Irrelevantce	Male	29.01	8.23	5.506	5772	.000**	1.214	[0.781, 1.646]
	Female	27.80	8.38					

Note: SD = Standard Deviation; t = t-test value; df = degrees of freedom; CI = Confidence Interval. $p < .001$ is considered statistically significant.

The descriptive analysis of students' conceptions across four dimensions – *Improvement*, *External Attributions*, *Affect/Social*, and *Irrelevance* – revealed a more grounded understanding of assessment in Vietnam's higher education context. Rather than showing uniform responses, these findings highlight how students interpreted and responded to assessment practices in comparison with findings in other educational settings. Most students viewed assessments as a means to support learning, inform future learning, and promote self-regulation, as seen by the *Improvement* dimension's highest mean scores and low standard deviations ($M = 4.11\text{--}4.17$, $SD = 0.80\text{--}0.86$). Qualitative data confirmed this perception with statements such as “Assessments help determine the next steps”, reflecting students' awareness of assessment's role in self-regulated learning. These findings are consistent with international studies showing that “assessment for improvement” is a commonly recognized conception among students worldwide. (Brown, 2013, 2022; Lontou, 2021). They also reflect Black & Wiliam's (1998) and Harlen's (2007) view that formative assessment supports learning through feedback and reflection.

Similarly, the *Affect/Social* dimension showed relatively high agreement ($M = 3.95\text{--}4.04$), indicating that students perceived assessment as motivating and collaborative. Most students agreed that assessment encouraged cooperation (“Assessment helps my class work together and help each other”), which is supported by qualitative evidence that students formed study groups and saw collaboration as socially meaningful (e.g., “Group study fosters bonding”). These findings align with the findings of Brown & Wang's (2016) and Ates & Buyukkarci's (2019), suggesting that in collectivist contexts, assessment can foster peer interaction and enjoyment. Nonetheless, some students expressed fairness concerns (“some students cheat and still get high scores”), reflecting moderate variability ($SD = 0.83\text{--}0.90$).

In contrast, the *External Attributions* dimension recorded slightly lower means ($M = 3.82\text{--}3.99$). This suggests that students viewed assessment as a signal of ability and future performance. This idea is supported by qualitative data (“Grades impact career opportunities”), and is consistent with a study conducted in Hong Kong, where assessment was linked to external validation and future achievement (Brown, 2011). Unlike Turkish students, however, Vietnamese students only moderately agreed that assessment results reflect intelligence.

The *Irrelevance* dimension showed the lowest means ($M = 3.42\text{--}3.70$) but the highest variability ($SD = 1.04\text{--}1.24$), revealing diverse attitudes toward assessment fairness and usefulness. This variability was further clarified by students' qualitative comments, where several described assessment as “stressful,” “unfair,” or even influenced by “luck,” further illustrating how uneven these perceptions were. These results are consistent with Brown's (2022) cross-cultural findings. In

Vietnam, such mixed perceptions may be partly shaped by traditional testing cultures and Confucian educational philosophy, which emphasize summative assessment and hierarchy. At the same time, a study conducted by Nguyen (2017) indicated a tendency toward more student-centered and authentic assessment, a trend that aligns with this study's observation that many students held improvement-oriented and engagement-focused perceptions of assessment.

Overall, Vietnamese students shared several assessment perceptions commonly reported in international studies, particularly their formative and social roles, but these views were also shaped by cultural values and educational traditions. As a result, students valued assessment for improvement while remaining concerned about fairness, pressure, and over-assessment, suggesting that assessment in Vietnamese higher education is in transition between traditional examination-oriented practices and more feedback-oriented, engaging, and collaborative approaches.

5. Conclusions

Four dimensions of Nong Lam University students' assessment perceptions (i.e., Improvement, External Attribution, Affect/Social, and Irrelevance) were examined in the current study. Results indicated that students viewed assessment as a tool for improvement and social engagement, associating it with feedback, social interaction and motivation. They also valued external roles of assessment in signaling performance to parents, institutions, and future employers, though to a lesser extent. However, some students rated assessment as often irrelevant and unfair, expressing doubts about its fairness and accuracy. Gender analysis revealed similar views across most dimensions, except for the Irrelevance dimension where male students expressed stronger agreement. Overall, students' perceptions of assessment were both positive and skeptical, reflecting the tension between Vietnam's exam-focused educational culture and formative assessment values. Pedagogically, the results suggest the need to further reinforce formative and student-centered assessment through authentic tasks, peer assessment and reflective self-assessment activities to deepen learning. In addition, educators should offer clear grading criteria, prompt feedback, and a variety of assessment modes that are in line with students' learning and career objectives in order to alleviate concerns about fairness and over-assessment.

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. First, self-report data may reflect social desirability bias, and the convenience sample at one university limits generalizability. Moreover, first- and second-year students constituted the majority of the qualitative sample. Therefore, further studies should include multiple universities and instructors' perspectives to explore how assessment practices align with students' expectations and influence learning behaviors.

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