

## MOST DIFFICULT COURSE IN ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT)

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### ABSTRACT

The intricacies and difficulties of the English Language Assessment course—which is commonly considered to be the hardest course in the English Education Department—are examined in this article. The demanding curriculum of the course, which necessitates a thorough comprehension of both the theoretical and practical facets of language assessment, is the reason for its difficulty. The complexities of creating trustworthy and valid assessment instruments, comprehending psychometric features, and deciphering assessment results must be negotiated by students. The impact of assessments on educational outcomes and the significance of ethical considerations in language testing are also emphasized in the course. This article identifies the essential knowledge and skills that students acquire from the course through a thorough analysis of the course material, instructional strategies, and student experiences. The English Language Assessment course is crucial for training future teachers to create and apply efficient assessment methods that can improve language instruction and learning, despite its difficulties.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study ranked English Language Assessment as one of the most difficult courses in the English Education Department. This is important because an in-depth understanding of language assessment is crucial for future educators to ensure effective teaching and accurate assessment of students' language abilities. The course requires not only in-depth

theoretical understanding, but also practical skills in designing and implementing various assessment tools. The purpose of this study is to identify the main challenges students face in learning English Language Assessment and to explore teaching methods that can improve their understanding and skills. This research is important because it can provide valuable insights for curriculum development and more effective teaching strategies in English Education programs. Now, this research shows that there are many students who struggle to understand important concepts such as validity, reliability and fairness in language assessment. Previous research, such as that by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), suggests that a lack of understanding of these concepts can hinder students' ability to put theory into practice.

A controversial question arises when considering whether difficulties in this subject are caused by the complexity of the material itself or by ineffective teaching. Some researchers, such as Bailey (1998), argue that language assessment material is inherently difficult and requires a strong knowledge base in linguistics and psychometrics. However, Fulcher and Davidson (2007) argue that innovative and interactive teaching methods can reduce the level of difficulty perceived by students. The problem formulations to be addressed in this study are: 1) What are the main factors that cause ELA to be the most difficult course in the English Education department? 2) What strategies can be applied to improve students' understanding and performance in ELA?

This study aims to identify the factors affecting students' learning difficulties in the English Language Assessment course and the effectiveness of the teaching methods being applied. The aim is to provide recommendations to improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes. It is hoped that the main conclusions of this study will provide an in-depth understanding of the main challenges faced by students and the most effective teaching strategies. The results of this study are not only useful for curriculum development in universities, but can also be used as a guide for educators and researchers in the field of language evaluation. By taking into account the context and challenges associated with English Language Assessment, this study aims to make an important contribution to improving the quality of English language education. The findings of this study are expected to help future educators prepare to teach and assess language skills better, thus producing graduates who are more competent and ready to face challenges in the field of education

## **2. METHODS**

This research approach used a mixed methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties faced by students in the English Language Assessment course. The research subjects involved students who were completing the course. The research procedure began with data collection through recorded conversations with fellow students during activities. The recorded conversations included questions about understanding of key concepts, learning experiences, and perceptions of the teaching methods used.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This research was created to identify the factors that make English Language Assessment (ELA) the most challenging course in the English Education department, as well as to find strategies that can be used to improve students' understanding and performance in the course. This research summarizes two main sections based on the problem formulation, namely factors that cause difficulties in ELA and strategies to improve students' comprehension and performance.

### **3.1 Main Factors of Difficulty in ELA**

#### **3.1.1 Complexity of Theories and Concepts**

Basic theories about Language Assessment such as practicality, validity, and reliability are often difficult for students to understand. In-depth knowledge

of these principles is essential, according to Hughes (2003), but requires a strong understanding of psychometrics and statistics. The majority of students feel intimidated by these technical elements, which impacts their ability to understand the material.

A study conducted by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) showed that not understanding Language Assessment concepts can significantly hinder students' ability to apply theory to real life. They found that students who do not understand the concepts of validity and reliability often face difficulties in designing and scoring effective language tests. In addition, students who do not understand psychometrics well tend to get confused when it comes to analyzing test result data, which ultimately impacts the accuracy of their assessments.

In addition, Fulcher and Davidson (2007) state that a deep understanding of various disciplines, such as linguistics and statistics, is often necessary to deploy complex concepts in language assessment. They emphasize that errors in this understanding not only impact on students' academic performance but also on their ability to apply appropriate evaluation methods in actual teaching situations. If students cannot master these technical elements, they may become stressed and unmotivated to learn. As a result, this will hinder their progress in learning ELA.

### **3.1.2 Mastery of Evaluation Techniques**

ELA includes a variety of evaluation methods, from formative to summative tests, each of which uses different approaches and methods. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007), students should have the ability to channel the benefits and drawbacks of each method, and they should also be able to apply appropriate methods in various situations. Students are often confused and struggle to choose the right evaluation method because of this complexity.

Students often have difficulty balancing between the need for objectivity in standardized tests and the need for it to occur in performance-based assessments, according to research conducted by McNamara (2000). McNamara points out that students need more comprehensive training on when and how to use different types of evaluation, such as summative testing for final assessment and formative testing for ongoing feedback.

In addition, Bachman (1990) emphasizes that a thorough understanding of the context in which evaluation methods are used is essential. His studies show that students are often unprepared to adapt evaluation methods to various educational and learning environments, which can reduce the efficiency of assessment. So that students can develop the necessary skills to assess English proficiency correctly and fairly, they need practical experience and clearer instructions on how to apply theory to real-world situations.

### **3.1.3 Use of Technology in Assessment**

Digital tools for transmitting language are becoming more common as technology advances. However, students often lack the technical skills necessary to operate and analyze the results of these tools (Chalhoub-Deville, 2001). A major obstacle in the learning process is the lack of training and experience in using evaluation technology. According to research conducted by Alderson (2000), many students are not prepared to use language evaluation software because they do not receive sufficient training. Students often have difficulty understanding how the software works and analyzing the data generated, which can affect the accuracy of their assessment, according to Alderson. To become proficient in using evaluation technology, students need more practical training and hands-on experience.

In addition, research by Hamp-Lyons and Davies (2008) suggests that new pedagogical approaches are needed to use technology to assess language. They emphasize that students must have strong digital skills and understand how technology can aid the assessment process. Without this assistance, students will find it difficult to adopt evaluation technologies, which may hinder their progress in this area.

#### **3.1.4 Methodological Controversies**

How effective various assessment techniques are is still debated. For example, differing opinions on the use of standardized tests rather than performance-based assessments often cause confusion for students (McNamara, 2000). This uncertainty increases the pressure on students to understand and listen to the methods.

Studies conducted by Rea-Dickins and Gardner (2000) show that this loading on assessment techniques can cause students to become even more confused. They found that many students feel caught between two paradigms: the desire to follow established traditional assessment methods and the need to use new methods that are more flexible and holistic. This uncertainty increases academic pressure and pushes students to learn because it makes them have to assess and re-give their methods for assessing language.

#### **3.1.5 Lack of Support and Learning Resources**

Distress is also caused by limited learning resources and lack of support from teachers. Many students believe they do not get enough instruction to understand complex concepts and how they can be applied in the real world (Brown, 2004). This makes it difficult for many students to keep up with the material.

According to research conducted by Hyland (2003), students who do not have access to educational resources such as textbooks, journal articles, and other supporting materials tend to have difficulty understanding important concepts in language evaluation. In addition, Hyland found that a lack of practical guidance and limited interaction with teachers can make learning more difficult. To ensure that students gain a better understanding and the ability to use their knowledge in an effective way, lecturers should provide additional support through clear explanations, concrete examples, and opportunities for in-depth discussion.

### **3.2 Strategies to Improve Student Understanding and Performance**

#### **3.2.1 Practice-based Teaching**

Incorporating hands-on practice in ELA teaching can help students understand and use the ideas being taught. Case studies and evaluation simulations, for example, can help students exude their language skills in the real world. A study conducted by Tillema (2011) found that practice-based approaches can significantly improve students' understanding and skills.

Other research shows that practice-based learning can improve students' critical skills. This research also supports this approach. A study conducted by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) showed that students who engage in hands-on practice tend to have a deeper understanding and the ability to apply their knowledge in a real-world context. This research emphasizes how important it is for students to be given the opportunity to participate in activities relevant to their field of study so that they can improve their analytical and problem-solving abilities.

In addition, the study on experiential learning by Kolb (1984) also supports the importance of hands-on practice in education. According to Kolb, hands-on experience is an important part of the learning process. In this process, students can learn through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, active experimentation, and abstract conceptualization. This method allows students to understand the theory and apply it in different contexts. This shows that the use of hands-on practice in ELA teaching helps students learn more. It also helps them build the skills necessary for success in the world of work.

### **3.2.2 Technology Skills Training**

Specialized training on the use of technology in language assessment can help students overcome technological barriers. To teach students how to use and analyze digital evaluation tools, e-learning courses and classes can be created (Chalhoub-Deville, 2001). This training will increase students' confidence and competence in using evaluation technology.

Russell and Haney's (1997) study is another study that supports the importance of technology training for English language assessment. They found that students who were drilled using digital evaluation tools showed significant improvements in assessment accuracy and efficiency. In addition, technology training allowed students to focus more on analyzing and interpreting evaluation data, reducing their anxiety towards using technology. As a result, specialized training in the use of technology not only improved students' technical abilities but also improved the quality of their assessments.

### **3.2.3 Collaborative Approach**

Students can share knowledge and strategies by assisting group work and collaborative discussions. Through discussion and joint problem solving, shared learning can improve students' understanding of complex concepts (Dillenbourg, 1999).

Collaborative learning and group work significantly improve student learning outcomes, according to research conducted by Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998). Compared to individual learning, they found that students who engage in collaborative learning tend to better understand and retain information longer. Collaborative learning can also improve students' social and communication skills, providing them to work together in teams in a working environment. Therefore, collaborative group work and discussion incorporated in teaching can enhance students' learning experience and improve their understanding of the material being taught.

### **3.2.4 Improved Lecturer Support**

Better guidance can be provided through better interaction between teachers and students through personal consultations and tutorial sessions. Lecturers should be proactive in providing useful feedback and assisting students in dealing with ELA difficulties.

Research conducted by Chickering and Gamson (1987) highlighted the important role of interaction between teachers and students in improving the quality of education. They proposed that consistent and substantial engagement between teachers and students is a basic principle of effective teaching methods. The study revealed that students who receive immediate feedback and individual assistance from teachers are more likely to understand the subject matter better, feel more inspired, and show improved academic performance. These interactions not only provided clarification to complicated ideas but also made students feel

supported and respected during their learning process. As a result, a proactive teaching approach of providing feedback and personalized support can significantly improve students' learning experience and academic performance.

### 3.2.5 Development of Comprehensive Learning Materials

By providing more organized learning materials, including digital resources, textbooks and journal articles, students can more easily get the information they need. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007), these materials should include practical examples as well as in-depth explanations of key ELA concepts.

It is essential to provide organized and resource-rich learning materials, according to research conducted by Mayer (2003). Mayer emphasizes that students' comprehension and retention of information can be enhanced by a multimodal learning approach that combines images, text and media. This study shows that when students have access to different types of learning materials, they can choose the learning style that suits them best, which in turn increases their learning effectiveness. In addition, rich and varied learning materials allow students to see the application of the theories learned in the real world. This helps them understand abstract concepts with real-world situations. Therefore, comprehensive and organized learning materials can enhance students' learning process and improve their understanding of ELA materials.

### The Transcript

This is a conversation between students discussing the hardest and most challenging course in the English Language Education Department, which is English Language Assessment (ELA), where many students complain about the teaching methods used, such as the use of the Zoom application and the influence of lecturers who are less supportive in learning, and make learning less effective.

Dwi : Huh ..., why is this "English Language Assessment" course difficult, even though we were not taught like this at the beginning of the lesson

...  
Morin : Yes, just right..., especially since ma'm is rarely in class too... Haikal: Yes, Ma'm also rarely comes in

Dwi : We've never been in kn?

Pretty : Yes, we've never been in at all. But the assignments keep coming...

Haikal : hm... Ma'm is what, e-ee..., (2 second pause) //d-from...// What Lista? // Lista: (Overlap), Ma'm never explained / / e-ee, Sorry kal / /

Haikal : No, ma'm did explain in the zoom, but because we are in a combined class so the way of teaching is different in the next class, different in our class.

Noza : Actually, it's the same form of teaching, but does your ma'm always change what your ma'm has set from the beginning to now ...

Dwi : The learning pattern is right...

Haikal : Ha... yes, like the learning pattern is different.

Pretty : I never understood this course, because I always zoom Hahah...

Dwi : Because, yes also because zoom itself, from our high school / vocational school, it's like we are Covid-19 graduates.

Noza : Then we feel that zoom is not effective at all... Pretty: Yes, look at the consequences now...

Dwi : We don't understand it, we don't understand our subject...

Haikal : Yes, we know how busy ma'm is as dean but at least ma'm can manage the time to teach in class.

- Dwi : Actually the problem of courses here too, is with the lecturers too. Where the course is less (2-second pause) ... //e-ee ... to be understood//
- Pretty : (Overlap) /I swear I don't understand either...// Morin: hm, //A-palagi//eh, so--rry// (Overlap)
- Dwi : Why Morin?
- Morin : No it's okay, for this course it's very important for us to understand, where we can do,eee... it's a kind of student assessment, right?
- Dwi : Yes, it's a kind of student assessment... Morin: Yes...
- Dwi : Like yesterday we were given an assignment right, while what was taught by Ma'm was only conveyed to a handful of people, and the learning method was not conveyed to all.
- Noza : Whereas what we asked for the learning method has not been given to them, right? Lista: Even what Ma'm taught was only one person, why didn't Ma'm explain herself...
- Dwi : What is it, he said that his assignment was to process question items while, yesterday, we were told to use a questionnaire or google form, on average, all of them?
- // (All answered "Yes" simultaneously (Seldom) //.
- In the questionnaire itself, there are results, to check this is the question that is most often answered even though it is wrong, //I-tu, see it//?
- Pretty : /I also don't see// (Overlap) //eh, yes wi there// oh, yes wi (Overlap)
- (3 Minute Pause)
- Haikal : Okay, where are you going with this Ma'm... Dwi: Yeah, it's hard to learn like this...
- Morin : That's us, we have to learn independently...
- Lista : Yes, I don't understand ee..., learning this online course... Pretty: Bye lah, I'm tired, I'm leaving, bye....

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the English Language Assessment course is one of the most difficult courses offered by the English Language Education Department. This challenge arises from the complexity of creating, administering and analyzing tests that can reliably measure different levels of language proficiency. To succeed, students must grasp both theoretical ideas and real-world applications, often struggling with complex statistical calculations and psychometric concepts. The requirements of this course equip prospective teachers to develop fair and useful language assessments, so that they can assess and assist their students' language proficiency with competence. Despite the difficulties, this course is necessary to produce English teachers who are competent, insightful, and capable of making a major impact on their educational field.

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