



## **English as a Second Language Learners and Teachers' Conceptions of Language Assessment**

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Currently, ministries of education in some developing countries, such as Malaysia and Iran, are planning to transform their often-centralized tests to school-based assessment. This is good news but before making any changes, one must ask if stakeholders in such communities are ready for any changes. The objective of this study was to compare the conceptions of assessments of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and students. Qualitative methods were used to collect the data using a questionnaire with open-ended tasks developed, validated, piloted and refined by the researchers. The data were analyzed through inductive and deductive thematic analysis approaches. The results also indicated that both students and teachers frequently view assessment as tests and scores, and yet there were differences between their conceptions. For example, while teachers were more concerned with standards and validity, themes such as cheating emerged from students' data. Assessment was also found to be stimulator of both adaptive behavior (such as an instrumental motivator) and maladaptive behavior (such as cheating) among students. These results offer remarkable implications for language learning, teaching, and testing for education policy-makers in developing countries.

**Keywords:** assessment beliefs, conceptions, language assessment, testing

### **Introduction**

Success of an educational policy is largely dependent on how well it is implemented by teachers. The conception or the way teachers think and feel (Brown, Gebril, & Michaelides, 2019) about a policy will translate into how teachers teach leading to desired educational outcomes to the benefit of students (Fives & Buehl, 2012). In recent years, there has been a shift from centralized tests to school-based assessment (SBA) in several countries such as Hong Kong (Tong & Adamson, 2015), Bangladesh (Begum & Farooqui, 2008), Iran (Kakia & Almasi, 2008; Porahmadi, 2008), and Malaysia (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013). This shift is significant as students' learning progress will be assessed by teachers.

As Malaysia begins implementing SBA across the national schools, it becomes important to better understand how teachers view assessment. This conception teachers have about assessment will invariably influence how their students conceive assessment (Brown & Hirschfeld, 2008). The way in

which teachers and students feel and think about assessment will have an impact on the teaching-learning process, particularly, their motivation and purpose for learning. Failure to recognize these cognitive and emotive views toward assessment would determine the effectiveness of education delivered and by extension the success of the education policy shift.

Understanding conceptions of language assessment brings about three significant points. Firstly, they highlight the value that is placed on this phenomenon. This illustrates how assessment is understood as a representation of students' excellence or students' continuous educational growth. Secondly, known conceptions towards language assessment will be useful in engaging and correcting any misconceptions of teachers and students regarding language assessment. Finally, an informed understanding of how language assessment is viewed will provide shape and guidance for education policy.

### **Past Studies**

There have been numerous studies looking into teachers' conceptions of assessment (Brown et al., 2019). Research on students and teachers' conception of assessment began to attract attention in the 1990s. Entwistle (1991) observed that students' education progress is very much affected by how they view the whole learning experience; part of this learning experience would include assessment. Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) reviewed the literature on students and teachers' conceptions of the purpose of assessment from the 1990s to early 2000s. Their review found that teachers viewed the purpose of assessment as (i) being helpful to enhance the lesson delivery; (ii) empowering students to take responsibility of their own learning; (iii) ensuring schools and teachers to be accountable on the education that they provide; and (iv) being pointless. Similarly, they found students viewed the purpose of assessment as (i) enhancing their performance; (ii) enabling them to be responsible for their learning; (iii) being pointless; and (iv) being fun. Subsequent research into assessment covered a variety of perspectives involving different stakeholders (Brown, 2011; Tong & Adamson, 2015).

In line with the trend, Malaysia too, saw an increase in the number of assessment-related studies. This can be attributed to the shift in the Malaysian Education policy towards implementing School-Based Assessment (SBA) (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). Studies were conducted to understand the concerns, challenges and preparedness surrounding SBA (Azman, 2016; Chew & Muhamad, 2017; Majid, 2011). At the same time, many studies looked into assessment practices as SBA was implemented (Khatab, 2012; Looi-Chin & Rethinasamy, 2013; Suah & Ong, 2012; Talib, Kamsah, Naim, & Latif, 2014; Veloo, Ramli, & Khalid, 2016). These studies conducted in Malaysia were helpful in describing the extent of SBA implementation in the form of assessment practices across the nation.

While these studies on assessment practices are numerous, they were mainly carried out in foreign countries (Brown et al., 2019). What is noticeably absent in both Malaysian and global research is the viewpoint of students. As students are active participants in the teaching-learning process, it is important that both students and teachers' views are taken into account for successful implementation of SBA and towards creating meaningful assessments.

In summary, there is a gap in the literature on the conceptions of teachers and students on assessment in the Malaysian context. This study seeks to fill in that gap so that all relevant stakeholders may have a clearer understanding on how the teacher-student community in Malaysia views assessment.

### **Objective and Research Questions**

This present study aims to explore a group of ESL learners and English language teachers' conceptions of language assessment. The research questions that were addressed are:

1. What are the most common terms associated with assessment for ESL learners and teachers?

2. What do the learners and teachers conceive to be the purpose of language assessment based on the analysis of the metaphors that they wrote about assessment?
3. What major themes emerge as a result of analyzing the experiences that the learners and teachers have of school-based assessment?

## Method

Qualitative methods were followed in conducting this study. The methods used in collecting and analyzing the data are presented in the following sections.

### Participants

The participants of this study comprised 25 ESL students from a public university in Malaysia and 30 teachers from secondary schools in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. This sample was a convenience sample.

### Instrument

Participants were given a questionnaire that consisted of three main parts that researchers developed for this study. The first part was an association task in which participants were instructed to list five words or expressions that came to their mind when they thought of the word 'assessment'. The second part required participants to create a metaphor by completing the sentence: 'World without assessment is ...' and then to explain their metaphor. In the third part, participants wrote about their personal experiences of 'school-based assessment'. After the questionnaire was developed, it was validated, checked for feasibility and refined before the actual data collection was conducted.

### Data Collection

Data were collected in February 2018. The questionnaires were distributed and collected after 20-30 minutes. This enabled researchers to elicit participants' real and immediate conceptions of assessment. Allotting an extended period for completing the questionnaire would have allowed the participants to change their responses and this could have contaminated the data.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using content analysis, deductive thematic analysis, and inductive thematic analysis. The corresponding research questions, classification and levels of analysis methods were as follows:

Content analysis was used to analyze the data collected for the *first research question*: (What are the most common terms associated with assessment for ESL learners and teachers?).

Terms were ranked based on their frequencies for both groups of participants.

The data collected for the *second research question* (What do the learners and teachers conceive to be the purpose of language assessment?) was based on the analysis of the metaphors they wrote about assessment. They were analyzed through deductive thematic analysis and based on Fulcher's (2010) classification of test purposes, which included:

1. To control: assessment as a gatekeeping tool

2. To empower: vehicle by which society can implement equality of opportunity or learner empowerment
3. To motivate: to attract the interest of a pupil and directing it into the desired channels
4. To guide: a tool directing us to make decisions
  - a. To select: to render information to aid in making intelligent decisions about possible courses of action
  - b. To place: to place learners into classes
  - c. To evaluate achievement: to discover how much they have achieved
  - d. To diagnose: to diagnose difficulties that individual learners have

Finally, the data collected for *the third research question* (What major themes emerge as a result of analyzing the experiences that the learners and teachers have of school-based assessment?) were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis method with the following levels of coding:

1. Open-coding (textual data to phrases)
2. Axial-coding (linking the codes)
3. Selective coding (selecting the core categories that emerge)

## Results

### Themes Associated with Assessment

The first research question focused on the most common terms associated with assessment for the ESL learners and English language teachers. As Table 1 shows, the most themes that emerged frequently were assessment as tests, scores, and anxiety for both learners and teachers. The rest of the emerging themes had relatively low frequencies. The emerging pattern confirmed that Malaysia, like most other Asian countries, is indeed an exam-oriented country since for the students and teachers the term assessment is associated with tests and marks. Despite the fact that some respondents remembered terms which are related to the assessment *for* learning paradigm, for most participants what really mattered is assessment *of* learning. The results also showed that anxiety emerged as a recurring theme. There is empirical proof that test anxiety has a connection with assessment disempowerment (Cassady, 2010; Hembree, 1988), which could, in turn, contribute to the loss of students' self-efficacy and motivation. 'Motivation' was never mentioned even though it is considered one of the functions of assessment. Indeed, what was mentioned in the student responses was 'not motivated' which makes one wonder if assessment is doing what it is supposed to be doing in this context.

Further analysis of the existing data disclosed the fact that some terms were expectedly stated by the teachers including time-consuming, reliability, validity, standard, summative, formative, analysis, plan, and learning outcome which had to do with assessment principles or types of assessment, and test design cycle. On the other hand, a term which was mentioned only by student respondents was 'cheating'. Any educator would find this result alarming since one of the central missions of any school would be to inculcate moral values like integrity in students.

Although assessment is meant to help learners learn and develop, overall, the themes which emerged from both learners and teachers indicated that assessment triggers debilitating emotions. Some of the words that occurred infrequently were feedback, on-going improvement, teamwork, assignment, evaluation checklist, teaching-learning process, learning, reflection, transparency, eagerness, and excitement. Low frequency of a word like feedback could imply students did not experience feedback sufficiently and regularly. On the other hand, many negative emotional terms were mentioned. These were headache, unhappy, uncomfortable, memorize, demotivated, troubled, loser, depression, cannot,

failing, laziness, and loneliness. These could indicate warning sign that assessment seems to be perceived as a method of punishment for both learners and teachers.

TABLE 1  
*Emerging Themes Associated with Assessment*

Participants	Repeating ideas ( <i>f</i> )	Theme	<i>f</i>
Learners (n = 25)	Test (13), Exam/examination (7), Evaluation/evaluate (6), Quiz (3), Task (1), Trial (1), Invigilator (1)	Tests	32
	Anxiety (3), Nervous (3), Stress (3), Tired (2), Challenge (2), Increase heart rate (1), Cold (1), Alone (1), Hopeless (1), Headache (1), Self-doubt (1), Depression (1), Troubled (1)	Anxiety	21
	Mark (7), Result (4), Goal (2), Grade (2), Rating (1), Level of proficiency (1), Judgment (1), Right answer (1)	Scores	18
	On-going (4), Presentation (2), Assignment (2), Exercise (1), Activities (1), Things to be completed (1), Teaching-learning process (1), Check (1)	Assessment for learning	13
	Study (2), Performance (2), Learning (2), Skills (2), Improvement (1), Achievement (1), Improving (1), Plan (1)	Learning	12
	Feedback (3), Constructive criticism (1), Critical analysts (1), Dislike (1)	Feedback	8
	School (2), Teacher (2)	Schooling	4
	Compete /competition (2), Failing (1), Winner or loser (1)	Competing	4
	Cheat (2)	Cheating	2
	Teamwork (1), Honest (1), Individual (1), Laziness (1), Opinion (1), List (1), First impression (1), Detailed (1), Meticulous (1), Not motivated (1), Direct assessment & indirect assessment (1)	Others	12
	Mark (11), Grading /Grade (8), Score (2), Results (3), Band (2), Rating (1), Levels (1), Benchmark (1), Answer scheme (1)	Scores	30
	Test (8), Evaluation (5), Examination (5), Papers (4), Summative (2), Task (1), Quiz (1), Valuation (1), Objective (1)	Tests	28
	Anxiety (2), Stress (3,7), Fear (2), Worry (1), Uncomfortable (1), Insecure (1), Unhappy (1), Headache (1), Inconvenience (1)	Anxiety	17
	Reflection (1), Project-based assessment (1), Formative (2), On-going (3), Course work (1), Presentation (1), Project (2), Assignment (1)	Assessment for learning	12
Reliability (2), Validity (2), Standard (3), Scope (1)	Assessment principals	8	
Analysis (3), Plan (4), Organize (1)	Test design	8	
Students (3), School-based (1), School's curriculum (1), Execute (1)	Schooling	7	
Memorize (1), Revision (1), Learning outcome (1), Competence (1), Able (1), Preparation (1), Practical (1)	Learning	7	
Time-consuming (3), Pressure (1), Sleepless night (1), Tiredness (1)	Workload	6	
Improvement (1) Growth (1), Progress/progression (2), Develop (1), Follow through (1)	Progress	6	
Feedback (2), Dislike (1), Compulsory for students (1)	Feedback	4	
Tools (3), Transparency (2), Eagerness (1), Excitement (1), Self-access (1), Inclusive (1), Consolidation (1), Opposition (1), Topics covered (2), Quality (1), Individual (1), Oral (1), Writing (1), Difficult (1)	Others	17	

## Purposes of Assessment

The second research question attempted to identify the frequencies of test purposes indicated by metaphors. The metaphors were analyzed thematically and deductively based on the categories of test purpose proposed by Fulcher (2010).

The results in Table 2 indicated that in general, the most frequently reported purposes were 'to empower' ( $f = 18$ ) and 'to motivate' ( $f = 17$ ) and the least frequent purpose was 'to control' ( $f = 4$ ). More specifically, detailed analysis of the metaphors showed that for teachers the most frequent aim is related to 'empowerment' ( $f = 12$ ) followed by 'to guide' ( $f = 9$ ), 'to motivate' ( $f = 6$ ), and 'to control' ( $f = 2$ ). 'Empowerment' can be observed in the metaphors such as 'kids without brains', 'a cell without the nucleus', and 'a school without teachers.' These metaphors could imply that teachers primarily consider assessment as the core of learners' empowerment. The next assessment target which emerged in teachers'

metaphors was 'to guide'. The reported metaphors like 'a world with no direction' or 'a marathon runner who can't see the finish line' could certify that for teachers assessment gives direction and meaning to learning. Then they looked attentively at assessment as a tool for motivation. For example, the stated metaphors like 'love without trial' regarded assessment as a necessary struggle to achieve true and substantial learning. As to the teachers' conception about the purpose of assessment to 'control', the frequency rates showed that they have not mainly considered assessment as a tool for controlling the students or class.

TABLE 2  
*Frequencies of Test Purposes Indicated by Metaphors*

Test Purpose	Learners	f	Teachers	f	
<b>Guide</b>	a. to select	Students without books and notes A world without direction A world without sun The lost ship	4	A world with no input A world with no direction	2
	b. to place	Having gold without knowing its value	1	A world without progress A world that is not progressing A world without progression A world without improvement	4
	c. to evaluate achievement	A world covered in boxes	1	Life without test A world with no challenges	2
	d. to diagnosis			A marathon runner who can't see the finish line	1
<b>Empower</b>	Cooking without tasting A car whose steering wheel is set on the loose & would definitely crash A world without improvement A world without improving people A world of emptiness An unjust world	6	A cell without the nucleus A world without focus or aim Kids without brains World without capabilities A world without judgments River without water Jungle without trees A school without teachers World without standard and quality A world without standards An incomplete world A baseless world is not complete	13	
<b>Motivate</b>	An incomplete jigsaw puzzle Population without growth Seeing rainbow without any rain An easy world without hardship A world without trump Less stressful and more meaningful A world of justice A world of freedom A blissful world A world with less stress and more meaning	11	A paradise with talent & appreciation World full of peace Successful world A world free from tension A world without learning Love without trial	6	
<b>Control</b>	A world without boundaries Losing my way in a maze	2	Getting ready in the morning without a mirror Going to the bathroom for a reason	2	

However, the organization of these purposes was reported differently by ESL learners. For students the most frequent aims are related to 'motivation' ( $f = 11$ ) followed by 'guide' ( $f = 6$ ), 'empowerment' ( $f = 6$ ), and 'control' ( $f = 2$ ). For example, 'motivation' can be seen in the metaphors like 'an incomplete jigsaw puzzle' or 'seeing rainbow without any rain'. These metaphors could indicate that students mainly consider assessment as a tool for enthusiasm. Seeing rainbow without rain also creates an overall feeling of happiness since rain is sad and gloomy. The following assessment purpose which recurred in students' metaphors was 'to empower'. 'A car whose steering wheel is set on the loose & would definitely crash' and 'a world without improvement' are the related samples. As to the 'control', students' perceptions were similar to the teachers'.

Further analysis of the data revealed that there were some misconceptions about assessment in both groups. Teachers' misconceptions can be discerned in the metaphors such as 'Life without tests', 'A paradise with talent and appreciation', 'World full of peace', and 'A successful world'. Similarly, students' fallacies can be seen in the metaphor like 'a world of justice'. This metaphor was in contrast to 'an unjust world' written by another student, who explained, 'hurting others by disregarding their needs'.

## Experiences of School-based Language Assessment

Regarding the third research question, the participants' experiences of school-based language assessment were analyzed based on the inductive thematic analysis method. The participants' personal experiences were primarily analyzed by the researchers. Then, the recurring notions that emerged were identified and classified into themes that would indicate the candidates' experiences of the school-based assessment. Table 3 shows the themes which emerged.

TABLE 3  
*Experiences of Language Assessment*

Emerg Themes	Frequency		
	English language teachers	ESL learners	Total
Diagnosis tool	15	4	20
Fair assessment	7	6	13
Subjective evaluation	6	5	11
Motivation tool	6	4	10
Test anxiety	4	5	9
Teaching to the test	4	3	7
Promoting learner collaboration	4	2	6
Promoting critical thinking	2	3	5
Unfair gatekeeping	3	4	4
Cheating	1	2	3

As Table 3 shows, in general the most frequently reported theme was 'Diagnosis Tool' ( $f = 20$ ) whereas the least frequent theme was 'Cheating' ( $f = 3$ ). Moreover, a closer look at the data in both groups revealed that the recurred themes in most of the teachers' personal experiences were 'Diagnosis Tool' ( $f = 16$ ), 'Fair assessment' ( $f = 7$ ), 'motivation tool' ( $f = 6$ ), and 'subjective evaluation' ( $f = 6$ ). And what repeated in most of the students' personal experiences was 'fair assessment' ( $f = 6$ ), 'test anxiety' and 'subjective evaluation' ( $f = 5$ ), 'motivation tool' and 'diagnosis tool' ( $f = 4$ ). For example, regarding the 'diagnosis tool', many teachers mentioned that assessment is educationally useful. One of the teachers mentioned in his personal experience that school-based assessment is "a tool for measurement." This could imply that for most of the teachers measuring and reporting learning outcomes (summative assessment) is prominent. Another teacher stated that assessment "allows teachers to give immediate and constructive feedback to students." This indicated that teachers believe in the importance of the assessment as a critical element in helping students learn (formative assessment). In a similar vein, one of the teachers stated "school-base assessment helps students to learn and to determine whether they understand what they have learnt."

Another outcome concluded from the comparison of the two groups of participants is about negative and positive themes that emerged. Figure 1 shows the negative themes emerging from experiences with school-based assessment.

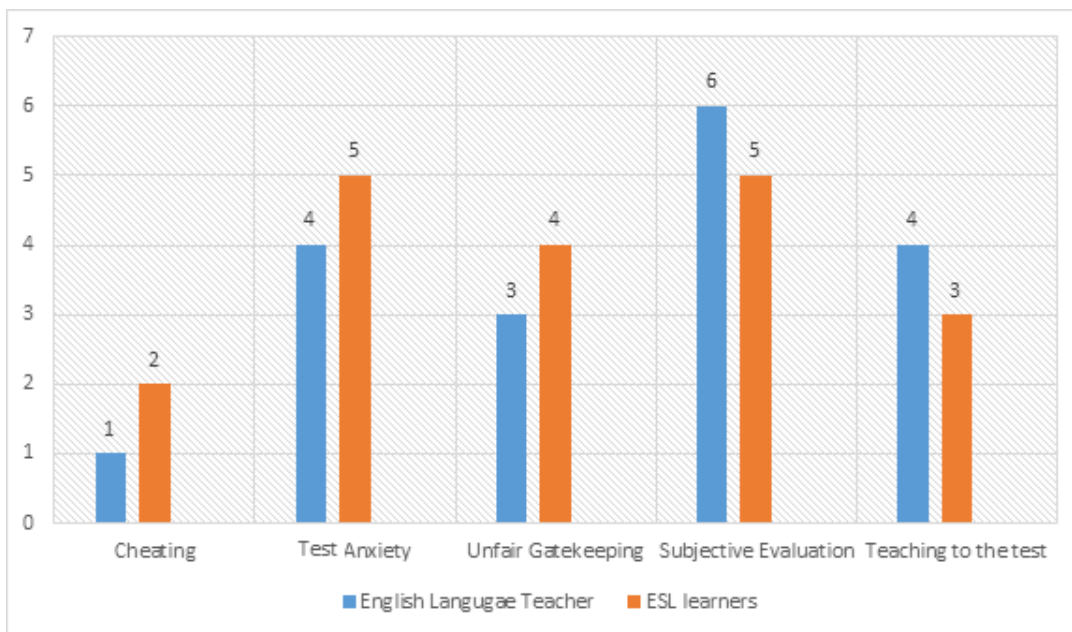


Figure 1. Negative themes emerged from experiences with school- based assessment.

As can be seen in Figure 1, ‘Cheating’, ‘Text Anxiety’, and ‘Unfair Gatekeeping’ are themes more commonly experienced by students compared to teachers. For instance, one student had the personal experience of cheating during the exam (Cheating) because he was afraid of failing (Test anxiety). However, he failed despite cheating. Other negative themes include negative attitudes about ‘Subjective Evaluation’ and ‘Teaching to the test’ as they are probably more conscious about the negative effects of the lesson delivery. Besides, one teacher, who believed school-based assessment was acceptable and reliable 20 years ago, now experienced cheating by her students (Cheating). This teacher believed that assessment is no longer effective in the academic system (Unfair Gatekeeping) and it is just fake (Subjective Evaluation) and stressful (Test Anxiety).

Figure 2 shows the positive themes emerging from experiences with school-based assessment.

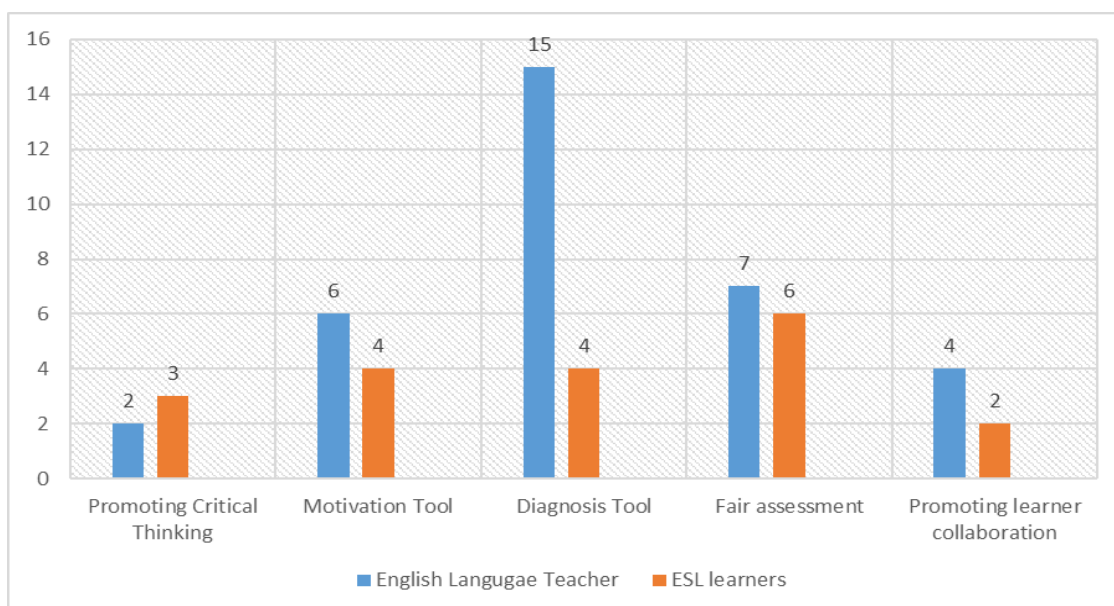


Figure 2. Positive themes emerged from experiences with school-based assessment.



As can be seen in Figure 2, 'Promoting Critical Thinking' was the only positive theme that was reported in the students' experiences more than the teachers.' The other positive themes showed higher frequencies for teachers. This result expressed the idea that teachers were more conscious about the positive effects of assessment such as 'Motivation Tool', 'Diagnosis Tool', 'Fair Assessment' and 'Promoting Learner Collaboration'. For instance, some teachers assessed students individually such as group discussion or pair work activities (Promoting Learner Collaboration). Another teacher experienced monitoring and evaluating academic progress through the assessments to design helpful strategies to be applied on students (Diagnosis Tool).

## Discussion

Previous investigations that examined how learners viewed assessments were associated with their final success (Brown & Hirschfeld, 2008). On the other hand, many studies were conducted in Malaysia on assessment practices of teachers (Khatab, 2012; Looi-Chin & Rethinasamy, 2013; Suah & Ong, 2012; Talib et al., 2014; Veloo et al., 2016). Therefore, exploring both teachers and learners' conception about assessment and the comparison between them seemed to bring some new notions about language assessment.

In this study, ESL learners and English language teachers' conceptions of school-based assessment were investigated through the analysis of their words, metaphors, and experiences associated with assessment. The analysis of the words (Table 1) indicated that students experienced assessment more negatively as they reported more negative words (Anxiety, Nervous, Stress, Cheat, Tired) when compared to teachers who only reported the word 'Stress' as a negative concept. Therefore, assessment can be said to be viewed more positively by teachers. In terms of technical aspects of assessment, who wrote listed scientific terms (Evaluation, Reliability, Validity, Standard) when compared to students. However, students associated positive words with assessment like 'Evaluation' which shows that they are rather conscious about the purpose of assessment as well.

In the Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) study, a comparison of the four major views of teachers and learners about assessment showed close similarity. Most of the views were positive which would lead to adaptive behavior and eventually to learners and teachers' development. They also reported that assessment was viewed as enjoyable by both learners and teachers and it made learners and teachers accountable and improved the learning-teaching process. The only negative feature that the teachers and learners reported was that assessment is sometimes irrelevant. These findings were not entirely similar to this study.

The analysis of metaphors (Table 2) revealed both groups of participants in the current study covered all the outlined purposes of assessment by Fulcher (2010). The result is parallel with the results of an investigation around language assessment in a group of postgraduate students (Nimehchisalem & Hussin, 2018) that concluded their participants were well-conscious of all purposes of language assessment. Moreover, the comparison of two groups of participants in the current research showed this awareness was rather high in the teachers' group as frequency and diversity of their metaphors. Thus, we can conclude that the teachers' group mostly believed the purpose of assessment is 'to guide' the learners and 'to empower' the teaching curriculum. This outcome is close to what Niveen et al. (2017) which suggested assessment plays a vital role in guidance and improvement of learning and teaching. Moreover, the purpose with the lowest frequency in Niveen's research was 'to empower' which is similar to this study. Nevertheless, the teachers' conception is in contrast and revealed a higher level of awareness of teachers on the role of empowerment of the assessment in learning and teaching. It can also be observed that the learners' group emphasized the purpose of motivation. This finding is parallel with other past studies (Azis, 2012, 2015; Remesal, 2011) where assessment made learners more competitive to obtain higher scores.

Results from this study are similar to what Majid (2011) found regarding English teachers' attitudes towards SBA. He concluded that teachers were not certain about the effectiveness of SBA. However, Figure 2 revealed that in the teachers' group there were positive experiences, concerns, and attitudes about assessment. In other words, teachers reported more positive dimensions of conducting assessments.

Tong and Adamson (2015) also reported negative attitudes and dissatisfaction about assessment in the educational system among students who indicated behaviors such as anxiety, cheating and prejudice. Such behaviors cannot be effective in promoting learner development. The analysis of personal experiences in the current study somehow corroborates Tong and Adamson's (2015) finding. As it was reported in this study, negative themes, such as Anxiety, Cheating and Unfair Gatekeeping, are largely experienced by students.

However, a word of caution that should be mentioned here is that classifying a particular attitude or behavior as positive (or adaptive) and negative (or maladaptive) may be questionable (Barrett, 2012). In fact, for long-term development a behavior may be adaptive in a particular context while in another context it may be maladaptive (Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008). Therefore, replications of this study are needed before one can confidently generalize its results.

## Conclusion

Traditionally what often comes to one's mind when one thinks of assessment is sleepless nights before exams, painful hours in the exam hall, and more stressful days waiting for test results. Unfortunately, what rarely comes to mind is learning, improvement, and development. The story, of course, is different in communities where the educational system is based on a humanistic approach to teaching, learning, and assessing. When education is humanized, while teachers analyze their learners' needs and engage them in purposeful tasks, learners are self-invest in and are responsible for their own learning. Assessment in humanistic education is learner-centered. It is far from being centralized, school-based, or classroom-based; rather, it is learner-based. Therefore, in such a system assessment is customized according to every single learner's needs. The teacher's focus is not merely on the mean score of the whole class but rather on the baseline and progressive development of every individual learner. In such a system, assessment is painless and free from anxiety.

The objective of the current study was to identify the conceptions of school-based language assessment among teachers and learners by analyzing the associated words, metaphors, and personal experiences reported in a questionnaire. Based on the content analysis of words associated with assessment written by two groups of participants, it was found that learners have the more negative attitudes toward assessment than teachers who wrote the more scientific and technical terms.

In comparison to Fulcher's (2010) study, our results indicated that assessment was not viewed as a means of controlling or as a gatekeeping tool since these are the lowest frequency metaphors written by both groups. It may be logical to conclude that steps need to be taken to improve assessment to be a suitable gatekeeping tool in the future. However, assessment was considered an effective instrument of empowerment and motivation from the teachers and learners' viewpoints, respectively. This result shows the existing positive attitudes toward assessment as an effective tool that empowers the process of teaching and motivates students for better learning. Based on the inductive thematic analysis, the positive and negative themes that emerged indicated not only students but teachers also experienced negative aspects of school-based assessment.

Our findings highlighted the existing value of assessment. The outcomes of this study would be beneficial for teachers, experts, and specialists to correct any misconceptions of teachers and learners to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the future. Finally, comprehending how language assessment is conceived and considered could change the direction of assessment policy.

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