

Students As Partner In The Assessment Of Learning Outcomes: A Conceptual Framework For Vietnamese Higher Education

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Abstract

In the trend of global higher education reformation, assessment and evaluation (A&E) have transcended their traditional functions as mere technical tools for knowledge measurement and instead emerged as a strategic pillar for quality assurance and the holistic development of learners. Rather than being relegated to passive recipients of administrative protocols and testing techniques, students are now envisioned as active agents (or subjects), directly involved in the co-construction, monitoring and adjustment of assessment practices. This study focuses on examining the role of students as subjects throughout the entire A&E organization process, from planning to feedback and quality improvement.

Keywords: *Assessment, evaluation, learning outcomes, students engagement, students as partners*

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I. Introduction

In the context of higher education transitioning from a traditional approach to a learner-centered approach, A&E of academic performance is no longer merely a tool for measuring knowledge. Instead, it becomes a strategic component to ensure quality within higher education institutions. This new trend has created a demand to restructure approaches to the A&E process, especially the role of students.

II. Literature Review

Previous studies have pointed out a close relationship between assessment methods and students' learning behaviors. When the A&E used is aligned with learning objectives and learners' characteristics, it can motivate students to actively engage in the learning process (Young et al., 2003). In addition, the transparency of assessment forms, criteria reflects the clarity of the A&E process, which is an important factor in encouraging students' active participation and competencies (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2016). In Vietnam, the A&E process is required to ensure reliability and validity in implementation (Duc, 2012). Meanwhile, a shift from knowledge-based assessment to competency-based assessment reflects a transformation toward learner-centered approaches (Nhan, 2023).

However, in practice, the A&E have largely been approached from a managerial perspective or evaluated primarily in terms of implementation effectiveness. The role of students in the assessment and evaluation has not yet been systematically examined in a comprehensive manner. Students are often regarded as research subjects rather than active partners involved in the assessment and evaluation. This situation leads to a lack of transparency in defining roles, rights and responsibilities of students at different stages in the A&E, including preparation, implementation, post-assessment feedback and improvement. The Students as Partners (SaP) have been identified as an important theory for structuring the relationship between lecturers and students in academic activities. SaP highlights shared responsibility, collaboration and students' active participation in the design and implementation of teaching activities, including assessment and evaluation. Applying this approach to the A&E allows the repositioning of students' role as active partners, thereby enhancing the transparency and effectiveness of the assessment and evaluation process.

III. Data And Research Methodology

This research analyzes the role of students as active partners in the assessment and evaluation (A&E) of learning outcomes in Vietnamese universities, using Students as Partners (SaP), combined with relevant legal and regulatory documents. The study addresses three main objectives: (1) To systematize the theory of the assessment and evaluation (A&E) learning outcomes with students as active partners; (2) To analyze the current legal

framework related to students' rights and responsibilities in A&E; (3) To propose a theoretical framework that positions the role of students as active partners in the assessment and evaluation (A&E) of learning outcomes in Vietnamese universities. The study aims to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the roles, rights and responsibilities of students in A&E, thereby providing a strong theoretical foundation for educational innovation toward a learner-centered approach.

IV. Results And Discussion

Definition

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes have been approached from various perspectives by different scholars. Young et al. (2003), learning outcomes refer to the total knowledge acquired and the skills developed by students after completing the learning activities of a course. Adam & Expert (2008) expanded this concept by stating that learning outcomes are an integrated combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that individuals acquire through a set of specific educational experiences. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (2011) defines learning outcomes as "the level of attainment in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies in comparison with the objectives set out in the education curriculum".

In general, learning outcomes can be understood as the overall achievements attained by students after a learning process, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies, reflecting the comprehensive development of learners in accordance with the objectives of the educational program.

Assessment and evaluation of Learning Outcomes

In education, the A&E is an indispensable part of the teaching process and plays an important role in ensuring and enhancing the quality of education. A review of existing studies indicates that the nature of A&E can be understood through three core aspects. First, A&E is considered a systematic process involving the collection, analysis and interpretation of information in order to make judgments about students' learning outcomes (Tong, 2005, as cited in Thuy 2019). Second, regardless of how A&E is defined, it fundamentally reflects the extent to which instructional objectives have been achieved. These include 3 main objectives: cognition, behavior and emotion. For each subject, these objectives are specified into objectives related to knowledge, skills, attitude (Kieu, 2004, as cited in Thuy, 2019). Third, the goal of A&E is to provide essential and timely feedback with a view to adjust learning activities and also improve the effectiveness of education management (Thanh, 2021).

Accordingly, the evaluation and assessment (A&E) of learning outcomes can be understood as a purposeful, planned and systematically organized process aimed at collecting, comparing and analyzing information regarding the extent to which learners achieve the intended educational objectives. This process is not merely measured through grades or ranking, but also aims to define the level to which learners develop competencies and personal attributes. The results, therefore, serve as a basis for adjusting teaching and learning activities and for improving the overall quality of education at universities.

Students as Partners Theory

The Students as Partners (SaP) model advances this concept by proposing a relationship based on equal collaboration and mutual respect between lecturers and students. SaP is based on three core factors: respect (recognizing one another as collaborators capable of making meaningful contributions), reciprocity (sharing responsibilities in designing and analyzing education) and shared responsibilities (challenging the traditional hierarchical structure in which lecturers are supposed to be the sole experts) (Felten et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Applying SaP in A&E enables students to develop management skills, critical thinking abilities and enhance engagement with the academic community.

Within the context of contemporary higher education reform, the Students as Partners (SaP) model is considered a pedagogical approach based on collaboration and mutual support between lecturers and students, highlighting the central role of students in educational activities (Kaur & Noman, 2020). Unlike traditional models, SaP places students' active participation at the core of the education process, considering education in general and assessment in particular as a "shared activity". Within this framework, assessment and evaluation (A&E) is specified through 5 aspects:

In terms of assessment objectives, the SaP approach reorients the A&E to not focus solely on students' learning outcomes but also emphasize students' progress and experiences throughout the process. A partnership-based relationship enhances students' ability to receive, understand and apply feedback in order to improve their own learning outcomes (To, 2025). This enables students to move beyond a passive attitude and engage deeply in the learning method (Kaur & Noman, 2020).

In terms of decision-making rights, SaP redefines the hierarchical structure of traditional educational models by reducing the distance and power between lecturers and students, creating a more open environment for

students to actively discuss and respond. This approach emphasizes the sharing of decision-making power and responsibilities between lecturers and students throughout the A&E process (To, 2025). By reducing traditional power boundaries, SaP enables a flexible and supportive learning environment in which knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted in a one-way direction from lecturers to students (Barnes et al., 2010 as cited in Kaur & Noman, 2020).

In terms of implementation, students as partners (SaP) actively participate in the A&E process. Deeley & Bovill (2017) identify several forms of students' participation in assessment: (1) Lecturers and students collaboratively create assessment criteria; (2) Students conduct self-assessment based on agreed criteria in order to compare with lecturers' feedback and (3) Conduct assessment and evaluation among peers to have diverse academic perspectives.

In terms of response, SaP forms responses and feedback based on mutual support rather than judgmental comments delivered solely by lecturers. SaP considers responses as a way of equal discussion and support among lecturers and students, allowing students to engage with feedback confidently, proactively and without hierarchical barriers. Through responses and feedback, both lecturers and students are able to actively discuss, thereby reaching a shared understanding of learning outcomes and objectives (To, 2025).

In terms of psychological perspective, SaP provides a positive impact on psychology and motivation for students. When students are involved in decision-making processes, they feel supported, respectful and more strongly connected to the academic community (Kaur & Noman, 2020). More importantly, students are empowered to become self-directed learners who have greater responsibility for their own learning development (Deeley & Bovill, 2017).

Overall, the SaP approach defines the role of students in the A&E process. Rather than being treated merely as subjects of the process of assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes, students are expected to act as active partners who participate in and share responsibility for the A&E process. This shift requires students to develop both awareness and active engagement, thereby providing a foundation for analyzing student participation at different stages of the A&E process.

Table 1. Comparison between traditional and modern assessment models

Factors	Traditional models (Students as subject)	Modern models (Students as Partners)
Purpose	Assess students' learning outcomes.	Assess students' learning progress (emphasizing learners' experiences and collaboration throughout the learning process)
Ways of implementation	Implement based on learners' predetermined requirements.	Learners collaborate with lecturers to develop assessment criteria, conduct self-assessment, peer assessment, receive lecturer evaluation, two-way communication and continuous feedback throughout the learning process.
Decision-making authority	Decisions are primarily made by lecturers.	Shared responsibilities between learners and lecturers.
Feedback mechanisms	One-way feedback from lecturers	Feedback is based on discussion, mutual support and two-way communication.
Psychological position	Passive, under pressure, limited responsibility	Proactive, respected and empowered in the learning process.

Legal framework for the assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes in universities

The assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes in universities is regulated by the government through legal documents to ensure consistency, objectivity and equality. The general legal framework governing higher education training, including regulations on students' rights and responsibilities as well as the obligations of educational institutions in conducting assessment activities, is stipulated in the Law on Higher Education (National Assembly, 2012) and the Law amending and supplementing several articles of the Law on Higher Education (National Assembly, 2018). Based on this framework, the Ministry of Education and Training (2014) issued further guidelines through Consolidated Document No. 17/VBHN-BGDĐT, promulgated on May 15, 2014, concerning the Regulations on Undergraduate and College Training under the credit-based system (which consolidates Decision No. 43/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT and its amendments under Circular No. 57/2012/TT-BGDĐT). Subsequently, the Ministry of Education and Training (2021) provided more detailed provisions through Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT, promulgated on March 18, 2021, regarding the Regulations on Undergraduate Education. This circular indicates more specific and comprehensive regulations governing the assessment and evaluation of students' learning outcomes.

These regulations provide clearer guidance on the assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes, including requirements for course assessment whereby each course must include at least two component scores (process assessment and final examination). The regulations also mention instructions to convert a 10-point grading scale into a letter-grade scale (A, B, C, D, E, F) and a 4-point scale for the calculation of the cumulative

grade point average (GPA); regulate forms of final examination (written examinations, oral examinations, multiple-choice tests, major assignments and projects) and requirements for examination security, invigilation procedures and grading processes. The regulations indicated that the assessment and evaluation process must be conducted in a rigorous, secure and objective manner throughout the entire process from the examination materials to invigilation, grading and results announcement. In particular, higher education institutions are required to publicly disclose assessment results to students after each course, while also facilitating students' exercise of related rights, such as requesting a review of their results in accordance with established regulations.

Overall, the assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes is proposed by a solid legal framework that ensures its implementation in a systematic, objective and equitable manner. At the same time, this framework ensures students' rights throughout their participation in the assessment and evaluation process.

Students' participation in the assessment and evaluation (A&E) process as active partners

Based on the Students as Partners (SaP) framework and the aforementioned legal foundations, learners are positioned as active partners in the assessment process. In this role, they actively participate through the following activities:

Steps	Stages	Work description	Students' role
1	Before examination	Receive the assessment and evaluation (A&E) plan and complete information (formats, methods)	Students have shared responsibilities (cognitive role) and plan to execute assessment objectives. Students actively review and verify information and provide feedback on errors related to their examination schedule or registration. This reflects shared responsibilities in ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the assessment and evaluation (A&E) Process.
2		Verify personal information and course examination schedules	
3		Register for re-assessment (for students with deferred or suspended examinations)	
4		Review, feedback on and sign for confirmation on assessment scores	
5	During examination	Comply with examination regulations	Students demonstrate competencies and academic integrity. Students conduct and supervise during examinations. Academic integrity is not only about complying with regulations but also showing students' commitment to the value of their qualifications and the reputation of the institution.
6		Supervise and provide feedback on facilities and invigilators' conduct	
7		Conduct examination with honesty	
8	After examination	Follow the A&E process	Students respond and provide feedback with a view to enhance quality. Students review their results, request re-evaluation where necessary and participate in feedback surveys. Rather than viewing grades as an endpoint, students engage with them as part of a "two-way feedback mechanism". Re-evaluation and survey participation are not considered to be complaints, but the action of partnership aimed at identifying issues and improving education quality.
9		Request for re-evaluation (if necessary)	

Based on the table, the roles of students in the assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes can be synthesized across three key stages:

In the pre-examination stage, students play a role as active partners in planning. They proactively acquire relevant information and develop their own learning plans. When institutions announce examination schedules, assessment formats and evaluation criteria, students are expected not only to review this information but also to critically engage in order to prepare effectively for the assessment process. According to Nguyen Quoc Tuan (2021), when students are informed comprehensively and timely about examination plans, they tend to learn more proactively and have more motivation to prepare for examinations. In addition, students are expected to carefully review the course syllabus to understand the structure of the assessment, including its components, grading distribution and required levels of cognitive engagement. Based on this understanding, they can develop personalized revision plans, allocate their time effectively and plan appropriate learning strategies based on different assessment formats. This reflects the characteristics of self-directed learners who take responsibility for their own learning processes.

In the examination stage, students act as active partners who demonstrate competence and academic integrity. They do not merely complete examinations to evidence their learning outcomes but also play an active role in safeguarding the integrity of the assessment through their attitudes and adherence to regulations. Dang Hung Vu and Nguyen Hoang Long (2021) emphasize that academic integrity is of critical importance, reflecting

the core ethical values of students during examinations. Any form of dishonesty does not only affect the assessment results but also adversely impacts the credibility of both the individual and the educational institutions. Furthermore, students demonstrate responsibility by identifying and reporting irregularities in examination materials, such as ambiguous questions, inconsistent information, or typographical errors. In such cases, they are supposed to respond proactively and promptly inform invigilators to ensure fairness for all candidates. Thus, students act not only as examinees but also as contributors to maintaining the rigor and authenticity of the assessment process.

In the post-examination stage, students as active partners are supposed to have self-reflection and self-adjustment. According to Tran Thi Tuyet Oanh (2016), the real purpose of assessment is to provide students with information with a view to enhancing performance. Instead of viewing assessment results as an endpoint, students should consider them as critical feedback that directs their long-term learning process. When receiving results, students should engage in self-reflection by asking questions: Where did I make mistakes? Why did I make mistakes? What adjustments should be made to improve performance in subsequent courses? If students are uncertain about grading or evaluation criteria, they should proactively ask lecturers to gain clearer understanding. In cases where students perceive results as inaccurate, they have the right to request a re-evaluation of their exam results in accordance with institutional regulations. This not only serves to protect their legitimate rights but also enables institutions to verify the accuracy and reliability of the grading process. By actively providing feedback on the assessment process, students are considered to be active partners, directly contributing to the continuous improvement of the institutional quality assurance process.

V. Conclusion

The assessment and evaluation process (A&E) is not a separate activity, but an integral part of the knowledge construction process. The role of students as active partners in the assessment process is an essential requirement of modern education that needs to be affirmed and promoted. When students are empowered and entrusted with the responsibility to actively participate in this process, they not only achieve better learning outcomes but also develop key attributes such as responsibility, integrity, planning competence and self-reflection.

In the future, with the rapid growth of artificial intelligence and flexible learning models, the role of students will continue to expand. Higher education institutions need to continuously innovate their assessment and evaluation process, invest in technological infrastructure, and, most importantly, transform their management mindset to foster a transparent, equitable and truly learner-centered assessment environment. This transformation is important for enhancing the quality of education and strengthening institutional standing within both national and international education systems.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on learner-centered assessment by providing a conceptual framework that redefines students' roles as active partners. It also offers practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to enhance transparency, engagement and quality assurance in assessment practices.

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