Perceptions of Language Assessments Among ESP Learners at a Finance and Economics University in China

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This study investigates Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' attitudes toward and perceptions of the language assessment framework developed in the context of a College English Program (CEP) transition, primarily from an English for General Purposes (EGP)-based to an English for Specific Purposes (ESP)-featured program at a university of finance and economics. An online questionnaire was devised and administered to collect students' perceptions of the array of tests required for college students, including school-level achievement tests, the nationwide College English Test (CET) Bands 4 and 6, and international-scale language tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL. The findings enabled course designers and instructors to gain a better understanding of test-taking attitudes and beliefs in these tests. For nationwide and international tests, the respondents demonstrated strong motivation to take these tests, whether due to school policy requirements or personal aspirations for studying abroad or continuing their education. The results will be valuable for teachers and school administrators involved in ESP-based program design to evaluate course content, assessment procedures, and program administration.

Keywords: assessment framework, College English Program (CEP), perception, Chinese EFL learners

Introduction

The College English Program (CEP) in China's tertiary educational institutions has undergone a significant transformation nationwide over the past decades. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)-based syllabi are being designed to replace the English for General Purposes (EGP)-focused CEP to meet students' diverse and specific needs for English courses (Cai, 2012; Cheng, 2016; Shi, 2018). Additionally, the instruction hours for College English Courses will be reduced significantly in response to concerns from subject teachers that English has been overly emphasized in recent decades (Shi, 2018).

In response to the nationwide CEP reform prompted by the *Guidelines on College English Teaching* (2015), issued by the College English Teaching Advisory Board for reference in teaching College English across universities and colleges, *X* University of Finance and Economics (XUFE) launched a school-level ESP-based CEP redesign set to take effect from fall 2016.

The School of Foreign Studies at XUFE was tasked with designing ESP-based syllabi, teaching materials, methods, and evaluation frameworks in collaboration with faculty from economics and business disciplines and the school administration.

Assessment is often an overlooked component that is not given proper attention when designing a new ESP program (Schmitt & Hamp-Lyons, 2015). Previous studies on language assessment in China's higher education

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context mainly focus on national policies (Cheng, 2008; Cheng & Curtis, 2010), validation of College English Tests (CETs) (Wang & Zhou, 2005), and washback effects on English language teaching and learning (Jin, 2006; Xie & Andrews, 2013; Zhan & Wan, 2014). Few empirical studies have examined learners' perceptions of different levels of language assessments for Chinese EFL students at universities, although there are studies on Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' test-taking strategies on large-scale standardized tests (Xie & Andrews, 2013). Following the initial implementation of the new CEP, a comprehensive study was conducted using an online questionnaire, along with follow-up structured interviews with students to gather their feedback on the program. The study focused on aspects, such as test-taking motivation, methods, time management, and perceptions of the assessment tool specifically.

Therefore, this study on the assessment framework of a newly designed ESP-based CEP through empirical investigation of learners' perceptions helps teachers and administrators understand students' attitudes toward the new assessment process and the challenges they face in the program. As a result, the findings are likely to provide data-driven evidence for policy recommendations and program adjustments while the program is still in its early stages.

By examining the perception of the language assessment framework among Chinese EFL learners within the context of the ESP/EAP-focused CEP, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

1. How do university-level EFL learners perceive the language assessments related to the new CEP?
2. What expectations do they have for the courses in CEP regarding test content and structure?
3. What strategies will they use to prepare for these tests?

Language Assessment of Various Functions

English language tests for Chinese EFL learners at the university level can generally be divided into three categories: school-level tests, which include individual course tests, placement tests, and exit exams; nationwide standardized tests; and international-scale EAP or ESP tests, despite variations in testing practices among different universities concerning specific policies for language assessments.

New College English Program

The new CEP differs from the prior program in the following aspects:

First, the new CEP consists of ESP-based multi-modular courses designed by specific teaching teams based on students' needs analysis, faculty expectations, and the expertise of available language teachers. These courses mainly target business and finance purposes or academic studies in business and economics.

Second, unlike the mandatory class hours used in the previous CEP, the current CEP features shorter instruction hours for the compulsory module and introduces additional instruction hours for multiple optional modules. Specifically, there used to be four consecutive terms of mandatory English language courses for students, each lasting about eighteen weeks, with students attending four hours per week for classroom instruction. The new CEP states that English courses in the compulsory modules will only be offered during the first two consecutive terms with four contact hours each week, supplemented by non-mandatory modules in the terms following the first two.

Table 1 summarizes the new CEP, which features a credit structure of "8+4+4" (meaning the compulsory module is worth eight points; the specialized optional module is worth four points; and the general optional module is worth four points). This differs from the previous CEP, where all 16 points of credit were assigned to

compulsory College English Courses for general purposes, evenly spread over the first four terms with four points allocated to each term.

Table 1

New College English Program

College English Program 2016								
		Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Total
EGP-based courses for 10% of the total enrollment	Points of credit	4	4	2	2	2	2	8+4+4
	Compulsory/ optional	Compulsory	Compulsory	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional	
	Courses	EGP Level 1	EGP Level 2	EGP Level 3	ESP courses	ESP courses	ESP courses	
	Time for tests		CET-4	CET-6				
ESP-based courses for 90% of the total enrollment	Courses	ESP courses	ESP courses	ESP courses	ESP courses	ESP courses	ESP courses	8+4+4
	Time for tests	CET-4	CET-6					

Language Tests for Non-English Majors

There are three levels of language tests available for university students who are not majoring in English. These can be administered either by the university and educational authorities as mandatory tests or by testing agencies as external or supplementary assessments to meet individual needs. First, the school-level tests include course-specific tests, placement tests, and exit tests. The course-specific language tests are designed to evaluate how well registered students have achieved the required language proficiency or possess a solid command of the knowledge covered in the courses. School-level placement and exit tests are arranged to ensure students are placed in the appropriate level of language class after enrollment and to verify that students meet the university's internal standards of language proficiency upon graduation. Second, there are nation-level English language tests, which the College English Testing Board designs on behalf of the education authority to gauge the extent to which full-time university students have attained the proficiency required in the *Guideline of College English Teaching* (The National College English Testing Committee, 2016). The College English Test (CET) Bands 4 and 6 are two nationwide, large-scale standardized English tests available for Chinese university students. These are administered twice a year across the country, usually in June and December. Third, optional language tests are part of the university curriculum and are internationally administered by foreign testing organizations. These tests assess EFL learners' language abilities in specific domains, including IELTS and TOEFL, which evaluate academic skills, and Business English Certificates (BEC) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), which measure communicative abilities in workplace and business settings, among others. As for ESP-based exams, Cambridge Assessment developed ILEC and ICFE in the 2010s to assess language in law and financial English, respectively, but these two short-lived tests were discontinued in 2016. The "Professional English in Use" textbooks, published in 2006, prepare students for exams in ESP fields and are recommended as high-quality resources for learning ESP-focused English language and professional skills.

To address the concerns and confusion among newly admitted students regarding CEP and tests, a language assessment framework was created. Students were informed about the tests through orientation sessions designed for new students, aiming to help them plan and organize their language study and test schedules based on the current set of assessments.

As Table 2 shows, we provided a general information guide for students enrolled in 2016 regarding the

internally required language tests and externally administered tests, including suggested test-taking times, test purposes, test preparation, and reasons for taking these tests.

Table 2

Assessment Framework

Language assessment framework for students 2016				
Tests	When?	For what?	How to prepare?	How to opt?
Placement test	First week of school entry	Students being placed on proper levels of courses	N/A	Required by school syllabus
ESP/EGP course assessments	Terms open for registration	Credits attached to the courses	Referring to course description	Required by school syllabus
CET-4	Terms 1, 2, 3, 4	Being tested by the College English syllabus	Self-training	Required by school and national syllabus
CET-6				
TOEFL	Terms 5, 6, 7	Studying abroad		On requirements of overseas school
IELTS				
GRE	Terms 6, 7	Studying Master degrees or above abroad	Individual efforts or + preparation courses by training agency	On requirements of overseas school
GMAT				
BEC	Terms 5, 6	Learning English for career prospects		On career interest and planning
ILEC	Terms 7, 8			
ICFE				

Notes. ILEC stands for International Legal English Certificate, which was discontinued from December 2016; ICFE stands for International Certificate of Financial English, which was discontinued from December 2016.

The Study

The study began before the new CEP started and was conducted for five years under the new CEP.

Research Context

As scheduled, students recruited in the autumn of 2016 took a school-level placement test within one week after completing registration at XUFE. They were divided into two groups based on their performance: the EGP group, accounting for less than 10%, and the ESP group, making up more than 90%, as shown in Table 1. The placement test was designed by the local College English teaching and research council, mainly consisting of receptive items on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and listening skills, along with a smaller section of productive items on short essay writing. This placement tradition began in 2003 when a policy of teaching based on students' language proficiency levels was introduced to tailor instruction accordingly. Students were placed into four levels: Band 3, Band 2, Band 1, and Band preparatory. Before 2016, the results of the placement test held significant importance for participating students because the level at which they were placed determined their eligibility for the first registration of the nationwide English test, CET Band 4. According to CET policy and local educational authority requirements, only students who reached Level 4 were eligible to take CET-4; specifically, students placed in Level 3 could register for CET-4 in Term 2 once they reached the Level 4 prescribed by the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (Ministry of Education, 2007). Lower-level students were not eligible until Term 3 or Term 4 when they were expected to reach Level 4. However, as students' proficiency levels increased—likely due to improved teaching and learning effectiveness in Chinese high schools—the scores from these tests showed a rising trend. This led to complaints from students and parents about the timing of CET-4 registration, with many believing that earlier testing would lead to better results. They

filed complaints with the school governance board based on the widespread belief that the CEP, which aims to enhance communicative skills, was less focused on preparing students for standardized tests. While the nationally scheduled College English Test in early June was heavily coached and students peaked in testing skills during the National College Entrance Exams, it was presumed that proficiency in such tests would decline gradually over time after students entered college.

The university submitted an application to the local education authority for approval of an earlier registration of the CET-4, based on statistical analysis of previous test results that show increasing scores over the years and the conclusion that students' proficiency should qualify for an earlier attempt at the CET-4.

Following the permission granted, the approved first-time registration for CET-4 was moved forward by one term from the year 2014, meaning students in Level 3 could take the test in the first term, while students in Levels 2 and 1 were eligible to sit for the tests in the second term. The students welcomed the new policy, as it would give them more opportunities to try the tests during college years in case, they were unsatisfied with previous test scores.

For students enrolled in 2016, there was a significant change in test registration, allowing all students, regardless of their placement levels, to register for the test in the first term after we obtained approval from the education authority for further policy adaptation.

Participants

To incorporate student feedback and improve the program, a university-wide online questionnaire was designed and administered annually to CEP registrars. Routine end-of-term interviews were also conducted to explore learning issues, using Chinese in both the questionnaire and interviews. Students were invited to voluntarily respond to the online questionnaire anonymously. Additionally, a randomly selected group of registrars from the cohort was given a structured interview, also anonymously, to gather further data that might not be accessible through the questionnaire.

Table 3 presents a summary of the respondents' demographic information.

The questionnaire in 2016 was completed by 572 valid respondents out of a student body of 2,500. These students were from 56 Bachelor's degree programs across disciplines such as finance, accounting, business, economics, law, social sciences, arts, and mathematics. They were placed into two levels, namely EGP level (College English Level 1) and ESP level, based on a placement test. Regarding the courses they registered for in Term 1, ESP courses included business, culture, academic, and advanced specific language skills related courses. The EGP course refers to College EGP.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Respondents to the Online Questionnaire

Levels, majors and registered courses of the respondents ($N = 572$)				
Levels placed	Number of respondents	%	Majors or disciplines of respondents	ESP/EGP courses being registered
EGP	59	10	Creative arts, media, business management, sport management, etc.	College English for general purpose
ESP	513	90	Finance, accounting, business, economics, law, language, sociology, etc.	Business English, EAP for business majors, American culture, current issues and debating, news reading for business and finance, etc.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data from the online questionnaire were subjected to statistical analysis to generate responses to the research questions regarding attitude, perception, and strategies related to the specific tests mentioned in the language assessment framework.

Results and Discussion

The findings from the data showed that the students surveyed attached great importance to the English language courses for their degrees, had higher expectations of achieving better results in the tests, and were strongly aware of their test preparation strategies. The analysis of CET-4 tests results indicated that the respondents did not meet their expectations in the CET-4 in terms of the aggregated scores gained on their first attempt of the test scheduled in Term 1, for which multiple reasons were likely responsible: overestimating their language proficiency, testing environment factors, and personal anxiety.

Perception of Language Assessment Framework

In this section, respondents were asked to respond to the evaluative comment on the language assessment framework and to share their attitudes toward placement tests, end-of-course exams, speaking tests, CET-4 and CET-6, and external assessments. They were also asked about their expectations regarding the structure of the test papers and the types of items to be included in the end-of-course exams.

Table 4 shows that respondents' satisfaction with the placement test and streamed teaching in 2016 is mixed, with 46.1% of respondents choosing "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied", while more than half express confusion or dissatisfaction with the current practice. Satisfaction levels from the 2014 intake are higher than those from the 2016 intake. The satisfaction gap may partly result from the limited availability of ESP-based courses, which operated on a "First come, first served" basis when students were informed of their placement test results before selecting courses from the online course options for their CEP registration. Additionally, students placed in EGP courses were not allowed to choose courses at their discretion; they were involuntarily placed in College EGP.

Table 4

Satisfaction to the Placement Test and Streamed Teaching: Year 2016 vs. Year 2014

Year 2016 ($N = 572$)			Year 2014 ($N = 469$)	
Options	No. of options	%	No. of options	%
Very satisfied	57	9.7	57	12.1
Satisfied	208	36.4	253	53.9
Neutral	247	43.2	143	30.5
Less satisfied	39	6.8	12	2.6
Not satisfied	21	3.7	4	0.9

Perception of and Expectation to Course-Specific Tests

This section asks students' perceptions of and attitudes toward the school-level and course-specific language assessments.

Regarding the syllabus knowledge provided by course instructors, Table 5 shows that more than half (69.6%) of the respondents stated they were either neutrally or inadequately informed about the course syllabi.

Regarding the evaluation of registered courses this term, more than half of the respondents (61.9%) felt they had insufficient information about the course assessment.

Table 6 shows that the respondents' perception of the test components contributing to the final course

assessment, where students could select more than one option, places the final paper-based exam at the top, followed by attendance, assignments, and classroom activity engagement.

Table 5

How Well Do the Students Know the Course Syllabi and Assessments?

Rating on syllabi and assessments ($N = 572$)				
Sufficient knowledge on course syllabus			Sufficient knowledge on course assessments	
Options	Number of options	%	Number of options	%
Strongly agree	27	4.7	29	5.1
Agree	147	25.7	189	33
Neutral	252	44.1	234	40.9
Disagree	124	21.7	91	15.9
Strongly disagree	22	3.8	29	5.1

Table 6

Assessment Components of the Course Registered

Rating of formative assessment components that lead to the final scores ($N = 572$)		
Options	Number of options	%
Attendance	509	89
Classroom activity involvement	354	61.9
Assignments	405	70.8
Final paper exam	519	90.7
In-class quiz	234	40.9
Other tests	103	18
Speaking test	239	41.8

In response to the preferences for test items on the final paper-based exam, where students could select more than one option, the respondents, as shown in Table 7, ranked reading comprehension, writing, listening comprehension, and translation from English to Chinese as the top four test item formats.

Table 7

Test Items Formats in the Paper-Based Exam

Ranking of test item format to be tested in the final paper and pencil exam ($N = 572$)		
Options	Number of options	%
Listening comprehension of MC	328	57.3
Listening and noting taking	219	38.3
Reading comprehension of MC	403	70.5
Reading comprehension of short answers	165	28.9
Reading comprehension with matching	172	30.1
Vocabulary of MC	201	35.1
Vocabulary of gap filling	233	40.7
Translation from Chinese to English	241	42.1
Translation from English to Chinese	307	53.7
Writing	395	69.1
Others	34	5.9

Regarding the ratio of receptive to productive items to be tested in the final exam, most (71.9%) preferred a

ratio where receptive items make up 60%-90%, with the remaining being productive items, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Attitudes to Receptive vs. Productive Items

Rating of the ratio of receptive vs. productive items in the final paper and pencil exam ($N = 572$)		
Options	Number of options	%
Evenly accounting for 50% each	49	8.6
Receptive: 60-90%; productive: filling the rest	411	71.9
Receptive: 10-40%; productive: filling the rest	64	11.2
All receptive items	42	7.3
All productive items	6	1

Perception of CET-4 and CET-6

As shown in Table 9, among the main motivations for learning language courses, "for passing CET-4 and CET-6" was ranked as the top motivation, followed by "for credits in the courses". These two motivations are significantly higher than others, such as "personal interest", "for studying abroad", or "for linguistic or cultural literacy".

Table 9

Perceived Importance to CET-4 and 6

Ranking of motivation for CET-4 and 6 against other motivations of learning English language by priority ($N = 572$)							
% of the respondents who place motivation as the _____ priority							
Motivations	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	AR
For credits	23	25	21	15	18	21	2.84
For personal interest	9	8	9	14	32	27	4.33
For studying abroad	10	10	14	19	18	29	4.12
For passing CET-4/6	30	24	18	14	9	6	2.63
For securing better jobs	12	20	25	22	14	8	3.27
For linguistic and cultural literacy	15	13	13	17	18	24	3.81

Regarding the expected timing for taking the CET-4 and CET-6 tests, most respondents preferred to take CET-4 in either Term 1 or Term 2, followed by CET-6 in Term 2 or Term 3. As previous surveys show, they prefer to take the tests as early as possible so they have a better chance of achieving higher scores.

Table 10

Expected CET-4 Score Versus Score Obtained on First Attempt

Scores expected to achieve in CET-4 and CET-6 ($N = 572$)			Scores obtained from CET-4 first try in Term 1 ($N = 2,279$)	
Score ranges	Number of options	%	Number of test takers	%
No idea	20	3.5	N/A	N/A
Less than 425	0	0	63	2.8
425-499	55	9.7	321	14.1
500-549	115	20.1	652	28.6
550-599	205	35.8	850	37.3
600-660	177	30.9	393	17.2

Regarding score expectations for CET-4 and CET-6, the majority of respondents (86.8%) anticipated achieving a score above 500 points out of a total of 710 points for the test (The National College English Testing Committee, 2006). According to the *College English Testing Syllabus* (2006), the score report is "criterion-related

norm-referenced", where the criteria are based on the *Syllabus for College English Teaching*, and the norm is pre-determined through pilot tests. Although there is no explicit passing score, a total score of 425 points is officially regarded as passing by universities, based on the interpretation of the *College English Testing Syllabus* (2006). *The College English Testing Syllabus* (2016) states that a total score of 425 indicates the test-taker has reached the "basic requirement" proficiency level as defined by the *Guideline of College English Teaching* (2015). When the CET Band 4 results were released by the authorities, a statistical analysis was conducted on the results from test-takers enrolled in autumn 2016. As shown in Table 10, the score distribution among those students indicates that the pass rate is acceptable, with the vast majority (97.2%) passing the test by scoring above 425 points. However, the results show that students' expectations for their ideal scores exceeded their actual first attempt performance. Specifically, 54.5% of test-takers scored above 550 points (presumably considered "Excellence"), which was significantly lower than the 66.7% of respondents who expected to score above 550 points in the questionnaire. This suggests that students tend to overestimate their test performance, although factors such as test environment variation and data reliability might affect their results.

Perception of International Scale Tests

Table 11

Necessity of Sitting the International Tests vs. CET-4 and CET-6

Rating of the necessity CETs and international tests during college days ($N = 572$)				
Necessity of taking CET-4 and CET-6			Necessity of taking international tests	
Options	Number of options	%	Number of options	%
Very necessary	276	48.3	135	23.6
Necessary	197	34.4	193	33.7
Neutral	75	13.1	188	32.9
Less necessary	19	3.3	41	7.2
Not necessary	5	0.9	15	2.6

Table 11 shows that more than half of the respondents (57.3%) considered it necessary or very necessary to take the international tests, while a small portion of the group (9.8%) viewed international tests as not very necessary.

While comparing the importance of taking CET-4 and CET-6 with that of taking international tests, we can see that the vast majority of respondents (82.7%) believed it was necessary to take the CET-4 and CET-6. We assume that the requirement for students to take the CET-4 and CET-6 as mandatory exams contributed to the higher motivation respondents felt toward these tests. Additionally, the financial costs of taking these tests may also influence their motivation and how necessary they perceive the CET-4 and CET-6, as well as other external tests.

Table 12 shows that IELTS and TOEFL are considered the top two international tests, followed by BEC and GRE.

As mentioned in the language assessment framework, time preference for international language tests shows that the respondents were aware that these tests would be taken after completing compulsory language courses, encouraging them to work toward a specific goal in language learning, whether for continually improving their language skills or for preparing to study abroad.

Table 12

Preference for International Language Tests

Ranking of choosing international language tests by priority (*N* = 572)						
% of the respondents who place the test option as the _____ priority						
Tests	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	AR
IELTS	33	46	13	5	2	1	2.01
TOEFL	27	34	30	6	2	1	2.26
BEC	5	4	26	39	21	5	3.8
GRE	4	10	19	30	33	5	3.94
GMAT	1	5	8	18	39	30	4.78
No ideas	31	2	4	3	3	59	4.22

Expectations From CEP in Terms of Test Preparation

To examine the assumed links between English language learning and high-stakes tests from a test preparation perspective, students were asked to share how they prepare for the tests and what they expect from teachers regarding test prep.

Table 13

Preferred Course Relevance in the Optional Module

Ranking of intended optional courses concerning teaching content relevance by priority (*N* = 572)					
% of the respondents who place area option as the _____ priority					
Area of relevance	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	AR
Exam-taking skills related	23	19	21	20	17	2.88
Specific disciplines related	32	24	21	13	7	2.44
Language skills related (e.g., writing & speaking)	28	22	21	20	10	2.62
Future business & occupation related	9	21	24	30	16	3.22
Inter-cultural literacy related	8	14	13	18	39	4.78
No ideas	31	2	4	17	48	3.84

As Table 13 shows, among the options, the top three options for course relevance are "specific discipline", "language skills", and "exam-taking skills". They prefer courses that are practical in content relevance, emphasizing communication or preparation for a particular test, especially test-taking skills for international language exams.

Test Preparation Strategies Adopted by Students

In this part, the students were prompted to provide responses about their personal strategies for various tests, which allowed us to infer their motivation and beliefs regarding foreign language learning and assessments.

In addition to the online questionnaire, a structured interview and classroom observation were conducted to gather information on their test preparation strategies.

When it comes to school-level exams in ESP courses, most respondents believed that attending classes regularly, paying close attention to lecturers, taking detailed notes on in-class content, and intensely memorizing key language points in the days before the exam could help them achieve a good score on the final assessment. Some respondents complained that there are too many periodic quizzes, homework, and other components that make up a smaller contribution to the final assessment, which should be managed carefully if one wants to score higher on the final.

Regarding strategies for preparing for CET-4 and CET-6, respondents believed that vocabulary size was a key factor in achieving higher test scores, so they spend a significant amount of time learning and memorizing vocabulary lists from word-list books for the tests. Additionally, they practice with some simulated test papers or past exam papers to become familiar with the test formats and manage their time effectively. They also expressed concern that fellow students had told them that the listening comprehension section is usually affected by the broadcasting facilities on test day, as test-takers are exposed to speech or conversations played through loudspeakers instead of headphones.

Regarding international tests, most students believed they would attend a preparatory class offered by training agencies to learn the methods and strategies used in the tests, hoping for a higher score. They assumed that having a substantial vocabulary was an essential factor in succeeding at the questions on these tests.

They believed the most challenging parts of these international tests were speaking and writing, which demand higher language output skills in test situations. However, in the ESP courses they enrolled in, these skills were not explicitly outlined and received little emphasis. They hope the new CEP will place greater emphasis on speaking and writing practice specifically tailored to international language test scenarios.

Conclusion

By examining students' attitudes and perceptions of these language tests included in the language assessment framework for students' planning and arrangement of tests during college years, we found that it is advisable for universities to develop an assessment framework integrated into the language program, especially at the start of the new CEP characterized by ESP/SAP-based course structure. This will help students make well-informed decisions when choosing which language tests to take for credit or personal learning needs.

Regarding their perception of tests in specific school-level courses, we found that students were not well-informed about the course syllabi and assessment requirements by the course instructors, despite the School of Foreign Studies' requirements for teachers to provide students with sufficient information on these matters.

Regarding students' expectations for course-specific tests, we found that students anticipated assessments to include multiple components such as attendance, participation in classroom activities, quizzes, assignments, and speaking tests. These were expected to be combined in a formative way along with primarily summative assessments, mainly in the form of the final exam.

The students expected the final exam to mainly include receptive items tested through multiple choice questions in reading, listening comprehension, and vocabulary sections, with productive items making up a small part of the format, such as translation and short essay writing. This preference for receptive testing methods may partly explain the lower academic writing skills shown by Chinese EFL learners at the university level, as described by Cheng (2016). Previous studies on academic writing assessment (Plakans, 2009; Plakans & Gebril, 2013; Seviour, 2015) will also be important for evaluating Chinese EFL learners' writing abilities.

Regarding nationwide CET Band 4 and CET-6, students view passing CET-4 and CET-6 as crucial motivation for language learning because taking the tests and earning a passing score in CET-4 during college are required by university policy. Additionally, better test results are important for students to secure scholarships during college days and desirable jobs upon graduation.

Their expectation to achieve an ideal score on the CET-4 and CET-6 shows that the majority of the students were highly confident in their ability to earn higher scores on the tests. However, the test results from their first attempt in December 2016 indicated that they might have overestimated their ability to perform well.

The statistics on international language tests showed that these respondents had relatively stronger motivation for international or external language assessments, believing that these tests would help improve their language skills, especially in practical communication abilities.

IELTS and TOEFL are considered the top two external language tests in their rankings, which suggests that about half of the respondents intend to pursue a degree abroad after earning their Bachelor's degree at their home university.

Regarding the expected contents of the optional module in ESP/EAP courses, respondents highly ranked test-related teaching topics, especially hoping for test-taking strategies or methods that could be used for external tests like IELTS, TOEFL, and BEC to be part of the optional modules.

In conclusion, the assessment framework proved to be helpful as it provided current information about the tests likely to be taken during college years. Exploring the assessment framework in relation to the attitudes and perceptions of these respondents helps course designers and instructors stay informed about issues that arise after adopting a new CEP.

Implication

Chinese EFL learners have been taking various tests since they start learning the language, especially those at the university level facing many tests, as shown by the findings in this study.

Moreover, Chinese EFL learners are well known for achieving higher scores on standardized and multiple-choice-dominant language tests, which are unlikely to accurately reflect their language abilities, particularly in aspects of productive skills such as speaking and academic writing (Cheng, 2016).

This study's results echo previous findings that Chinese students view language tests as a means for professional or social upward mobility rather than for communication, which motivates them, influences their perceptions, and shapes their behaviors toward the tests (Cheng, 2008; Xie & Andrews, 2013).

At the crossroads of College English reform, students face greater availability of ESP/EAP-based courses, which are presumably meant to give students more informed choices tailored to their individual wants and needs. At the same time, they are offered reduced service hours for compulsory language courses, which could mean they will spend less time on language learning driven by pragmatic motivations behind their learning behaviors, even though optional modules will still be available.

By the time the 2020 graduating class took the national postgraduate entrance exams, the majority of the cohort had already completed the required English test in the exams. When we conducted a comparative study of the test scores from the English test of the postgraduate entrance exam with students who enrolled in 2014, we found that students from the 2016 intake performed statistically worse than their peers from the 2014 intake.

In summary, it is recommended that an assessment framework be adopted in the new program, and that ongoing studies be conducted to identify issues that arise when implementing an ESP/EAP-based program, with responses provided through evidence-supported remedial steps.

However, there are limitations to the study because the results offer a broad and general, non-exhaustive review of the attitudes and perceptions of the respondents. It does not include a deeper exploration of specific motivations and strategies for particular tests, which could be topics for future research.

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