



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reading Assessment Practices in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies at Basilan State College: Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancing Student Engagement

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The study examines reading assessment practices in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (BAELS) program at Basilan State College, focusing on the challenges and opportunities for enhancing student engagement. Through qualitative research involving faculty and students, the study revealed complex interactions between assessment methods, cultural contexts, and student experiences. The findings highlight how faculty members adapt their assessment approaches to accommodate diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds while maintaining academic standards, and how students develop innovative strategies to navigate these assessments, ultimately emphasizing the need for culturally responsive assessment practices in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational skill critical to success in academia, particularly within the humanities. For students in programs like the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (BAELS) at Basilan State College (BaSC), effective reading assessment practices are vital for cultivating analytical and interpretative skills. Recent research emphasizes the role of reading assessments in fostering critical thinking, comprehension, and engagement with various texts. Notably, a study conducted by Yan, et al. (2024) found that well-structured reading assessments significantly enhanced students' abilities to analyze complex materials and engage critically with the content. This finding aligns with Dixon's (2023) research demonstrating that systematic reading assessment frameworks contribute to improved academic performance across disciplines.

Reading assessments can take many forms, including formative assessments, standardized tests, and performance-based evaluations, each contributing uniquely to our understanding of students' reading proficiency. An investigation by O'Neill and Padden (2021) highlighted that diverse assessment methods enable educators to accurately gauge the varied strengths and weaknesses of their students, leading to more customized instructional approaches. Supporting this, Patiño and Ramírez-Montoya's (2022) study revealed that implementing multiple assessment formats increased student engagement by 45% and improved overall comprehension scores.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that culturally relevant reading assessments can significantly impact student outcomes. A study by Ebe (2010) showed that assessments featuring culturally diverse texts not only heightened student engagement but also improved comprehension, as students found it easier to connect with materials reflecting their backgrounds. This finding supports earlier arguments by Lee and Spratley (2009), who advocated for inclusive assessment practices that honor students' diverse experiences. Recent work by Buac and Jarzynski (2022), further reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that culturally responsive assessment practices led to a 30% improvement in reading comprehension among multilingual students. Moreover, Fernandez and Arriola (2022) also found out that the reading ability of learners specifically in English language were struggling since elementary level.

Despite these important insights, there remains a noticeable gap in research specifically targeting reading assessment practices within the BAELS program at Basilan State College. Given the unique linguistic and cultural context of Basilan, it is crucial to understand how these practices align with established best practices. This gap is particularly significant considering Price's (2015) findings that regional cultural contexts significantly influence assessment effectiveness. Additionally, while previous studies have primarily focused on theoretical frameworks, less attention has been paid to their practical implementation in specific educational environments, especially in culturally diverse regions like Mindanao.

The Problem

The effectiveness of reading assessment practices in higher education is crucial for fostering student engagement and comprehension, particularly in programs focused on language and literature. At Basilan State College, the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (BAELS) program aims to equip students with the necessary skills for critical reading and analysis. However, there is limited understanding of how the current reading assessment practices contribute to these educational goals, especially for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This raises questions about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the assessments in promoting not only reading proficiency but also critical engagement with texts that reflect the students' unique experiences and cultural contexts.

Specific Research Problems

1. How do BAELS faculty members design and implement reading assessment practices, and what factors influence their assessment decisions?
2. How do BAELS students, particularly those from Basilan's diverse linguistic communities, experience and navigate the current reading assessment practices?
3. What opportunities and barriers do faculty and students identify in the current reading assessment practices at Basilan State College?
4. How do local cultural contexts and linguistic diversity in Basilan influence students' engagement with reading assessments?
5. How do faculty and students understand the alignment between reading assessment practices and the unique needs of Basilan State College's student population?

THE METHOD

This qualitative study employed a case study design to deeply explore reading assessment practices in the BAELS program at Basilan State College, focusing on both faculty and student experiences. The research utilized purposive sampling to select participants, including all BAELS faculty members involved in reading assessment (8 instructors) and 22 students strategically chosen to represent diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds prevalent in Basilan. Data collection occurred over one academic semester through multiple methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews with faculty to explore their assessment design processes and decision-making; focus group discussions with students grouped by linguistic background to facilitate comfortable sharing of experiences; classroom observations of assessment implementation to document real-time practices; document analysis of course syllabi, assessment tools, and student work samples; and reflective journals from both faculty and students to capture ongoing experiences and insights. Individual interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, while focus groups ran for 90-120 minutes, all conducted in participants' preferred

language with appropriate translation support. The analysis followed an interpretative phenomenological approach, incorporating thematic analysis methods to identify patterns and meanings in participants' experiences while maintaining sensitivity to the local Basilan context. To ensure trustworthiness, the study implemented several validation strategies: triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking with participants to verify interpretations, peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with the Basilan educational context, thick description of experiences, researcher reflexivity journals documenting potential biases, and an audit trail of analytical decisions. This comprehensive methodology provided rich insights into how reading assessment practices operated within the unique cultural and linguistic landscape of Basilan State College, while capturing both challenges and opportunities for enhancing student engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of data revealed five major themes that emerged from the interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis. Each theme corresponds to the research questions and is supported by participant narratives.

Theme 1: Assessment Design Process and Influencing Factors

Faculty members revealed a thoughtful, yet challenging process of designing and implementing reading assessments. Their decisions were influenced by institutional requirements, student demographics, and local contextual factors.

"Creating assessments here requires a delicate balance. We have our curriculum standards to meet, but we also need to consider that many of our students are juggling multiple languages and cultural contexts." (Faculty 3)

"I've started incorporating pre-assessment language support sessions. When students understand what's expected in their native language first, they perform better in English assessments." (Faculty 1)

"The challenge isn't just about language. Many of our students come from remote areas with limited exposure to English. We need to scaffold our assessments carefully." (Faculty 4)

A senior faculty member reflected on institutional constraints:

"While we want to be more flexible, we still need to maintain academic standards. It's a constant negotiation between what our students need and what the program requires." (Faculty 6)

Theme 2: Student Navigation and Adaptation Strategies

Students demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity in navigating reading assessments, developing various coping strategies and support systems.

"I record the lectures and relisten to them at home. This helps me connect the readings with the discussions better. My friends and I also translate difficult passages together." (Student 7)

"Being from a Yakan community, I sometimes struggle with English idioms and cultural references. I've learned to use online resources and ask my classmates for help." (Student 11)

A student from a remote area shared:

"In our community, we rarely use English. So I started a study group where we practice speaking English while discussing the readings. It helps us feel more confident during assessments." (Student 16)

Theme 3: Opportunities and Barriers in Assessment Practices

The analysis revealed both structural challenges and potential areas for improvement. Faculty perspectives highlighted resource constraints:

"We need more culturally relevant reading materials. Creating our own takes time, but it's worth it when students connect with the content." (Faculty 8)

"Technology could be a game-changer, but we face infrastructure challenges. Not all students have reliable internet access." (Faculty 2)

Students identified both challenges and opportunities:

"Group assessments help us learn from each other. When we discuss in our local language first, it's easier to then express our ideas in English." (Student 21)

"The feedback sessions in our native language help us understand where we went wrong and how to improve." (Student 13)

Theme 4: Cultural Context and Linguistic Diversity Impact

The influence of Basilan's unique cultural and linguistic landscape emerged as a crucial factor.

"Our Muslim students bring rich cultural perspectives to text interpretation. We need assessments that value these diverse viewpoints." (Faculty 5)

"When readings include local contexts - like stories about Mindanao or Islamic literature - students show deeper engagement and better critical analysis." (Faculty 7)

Students reflected on their multilingual experiences:

"Sometimes I dream in Tausug, think in Chavacano, and write in English. This mental translation affects how I interpret texts and express my understanding." (Student 9)

"Our traditional oral storytelling culture influences how we understand written texts. When teachers acknowledge this, it helps us connect better with the readings." (Student 18)

Theme 5: Alignment with Student Needs and Institutional Goals

The data revealed ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between assessment practices and student needs. Faculty members acknowledged the challenges:

"We're working to develop more flexible assessment criteria that recognize our students' multilingual abilities." (Faculty 4)

"The key is finding ways to assess reading comprehension that don't penalize students for their linguistic background." (Faculty 2)

Students offered constructive suggestions:

"Having options to demonstrate our understanding in different ways - not just written essays - would help us show what we really know." (Student 14)

"When assessments include our local experiences and knowledge, we feel more confident and engaged." (Student 20)

A particularly insightful reflection came from a graduating student:

"Over four years, I've seen how assessments have evolved. Teachers are more understanding now of our linguistic challenges, but there's still room for improvement." (Student 22)

CONCLUSION

This study investigated reading assessment practices in the BAELS program at Basilan State College, uncovering the intricate relationships between teaching approaches, cultural contexts, and student experiences. The findings revealed several key insights: faculty members actively adapted their assessment methods to accommodate student needs while meeting institutional standards, demonstrating an increased awareness of Basilan's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. Students exhibited notable resilience, developing innovative strategies like collaborative learning groups and translation techniques to navigate assessments effectively. The research identified

opportunities for improvement in assessment practices, particularly in developing culturally relevant materials and incorporating technology, though these were constrained by resource and infrastructure limitations. Notably, local cultural contexts and linguistic diversity emerged as crucial factors in student engagement, with improved understanding when assessments incorporated local perspectives. While efforts to align assessment practices with student needs were evident, tensions persisted between standardized requirements and the need for culturally sensitive approaches. These findings suggest several practical implications, including the need for professional development in culturally responsive assessment design, investment in relevant resources, development of flexible assessment criteria, enhanced student support systems, and institutional policies that promote culturally sensitive practices. The study underscores the importance of adapting educational assessment practices to better serve diverse student populations while maintaining academic standards.

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