



STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT IN THE GENERAL ENGLISH 3 COURSE TOWARD ACHIEVING THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OUTCOME AT LEVEL 3

Le Huu Triⁱ,
Nguyen Hoang Phuong
Nam Can Tho University,
Cantho, Vietnam

Abstract:

This study investigates the extent to which students perceive constructive alignment among educational components in the General English 3 course at Nam Can Tho University, and how such alignment supports achievement of the English proficiency at level 3, as defined by Vietnam's 6-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework. Drawing on Biggs' (2003) Constructive Alignment theory, the research adopts a sequential mixed-methods design, comprising a quantitative survey of 1128 non-English-major students and qualitative interviews with 25 students. The findings indicate moderate to positive perceptions of alignment across key domains, including intended learning outcomes (ILOs), course content, teaching methods, and assessment-feedback approaches. However, gaps persist in students' understanding of ILOs, active engagement in class, and clarity in assessment criteria. The study concludes by offering pedagogical recommendations for improving curriculum design, enhancing alignment, and supporting students in achieving the required foreign language learning outcomes.

Keywords: constructive alignment, language proficiency at level 3, English language education, student perception

1. Introduction

The need for English proficiency is constantly at the top of the list of worries in this era of globalization. Stakeholders have responded to this by emphasizing the development of a constructive curriculum that meets learners' goals of using English at a high level of proficiency, with a focus on the practice of constructive alignment. The constructive alignment strategy, which is seen to be a way to help students reach the learning objectives, acknowledges that information is created by the students themselves rather than being imparted straight from the teacher to students (Biggs, 2003). Given the positive

ⁱ Correspondence: email lhtri@nctu.edu.vn

alignment, teachers are essential in creating an active learning environment that supports students' learning toward the intended learning outcomes, while students actively create their own knowledge through meaning, reflection, and context (Biggs, 2003). Biggs (2003) also states that the teacher's planned learning objectives are the things that students should understand in order to be able to apply that knowledge by the conclusion of the course. Making sure that the teaching and learning activities, as well as the assessment tasks, are in line with the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) is a fundamental component of creating a curriculum that promotes constructive alignment. Over the past few decades, a number of scholars have become interested in putting the constructive alignment theory into practice (Fullan, 2007; Braun, 2005; Kozulin, 2004; Brown, 2007; Biggs and Tang, 2011; Berry, 2011; Gallagher, 2017; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). According to Fullan (2007), for students to be able to apply their university-acquired knowledge and skills to future jobs, the learning materials and content must be genuine and pertinent to the training program's desired learning outcomes. Similar to this, Braun (2005) listed several criteria for the best language resources, such as being educational, realistic, illustrative (i.e., based on real-world usage patterns rather than theoretical explanations), and current. Since students actively construct their knowledge in a meaningful way rather than receiving direct instruction from the teacher in the constructive alignment approach, deep learning is more likely to be valued when students are inspired to complete difficult but doable tasks (Kozulin, 2004). Furthermore, students usually find it easier to negotiate meaning with others through peer teaching and group projects rather than one-way lectures (Brown, 2007). Furthermore, students' learning is greatly influenced by their past information and experiences; for this reason, teaching-learning activities must be well-structured and linked to existing knowledge (Brown, 2007).

According to Biggs and Tang (2011), the assessment procedures and grading standards should be explained to students before the assessment takes place so that they have enough time to get ready for the test. Additionally, the assessment procedures and grading criteria should be in line with the intended learning outcomes. The goal of assessment, according to Berry (2011) and Gallagher (2017), is to determine how learners learn, what they can and cannot do, and how to support them in learning more efficiently. For this reason, the assessment tasks ought to represent the range of learning outcomes. Additionally, teachers can use formative assessment, which is intended to help students learn, by testing them frequently to learn more about their learning progress and to help them achieve the desired learning outcomes (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). In order to give students a constant flow of information that would enable them to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and come up with solutions, the teacher would prefer to give continuous feedback after each formative assessment. In this sense, students' self-regulated learning in pursuit of the intended learning outcomes is greatly aided by formative assessment and regular feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2004).

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Vietnam has put into effect a law related to educational reform that emphasizes the development of students'

knowledge, abilities, and attitudes through learner-centered instruction. Therefore, it is expected of education stakeholders to value students' opinions and provide them with a top-notch curriculum that enables them to meet their desired learning objectives. Furthermore, a framework for assessing the quality of a program is necessary in order to evaluate it in higher education. The 2020 ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) guide to Assessment at Program Level, version 4.0, is one of the most widely utilized measurement approaches among educational administrators in ASEAN nations. Eight criteria make up the AUN-QA model: output and outcome, academic staff, student support services, program structure and content, teaching and learning approach, student assessment, facilities and infrastructure, and intended learning objectives (AUN-QA, 2020). The AUN-QA guide states that the first four criteria—intended learning objectives, learning contents, teaching strategies, and assessment techniques—are quite similar to the elements of Biggs's (2003) constructive alignment theory. Circular No. 4, which established criteria for evaluating the quality of higher education training programs, was released by the Vietnamese MoET in 2016 with the purpose of assessing the quality of tertiary programs. Eleven criteria for assessing a program's quality were outlined in depth and given clear guidance in this publication. According to the third criterion, the program's content and structure must be rationally developed in light of the learning objectives it seeks to achieve (MoET, 2016a). The MoET then issued Document No. 1074/ 2016 with general guidelines on the application of standards for evaluating program structures and contents in accordance with Circular No. 4/2016. The curriculum should be designed in a way that will help students achieve the desired learning outcomes through effective teaching and learning strategies and student assessment techniques (MoET, 2016b). In this regard, the training program's curriculum is thought to be in line with Biggs's (2003) Constructive Alignment method, which highlights the close relationship between assessment, teaching and learning activities, and targeted learning objectives.

Another change is that, especially during the era of global integration, the English language has been crucial in the Vietnamese context. Nguyen and Burns (2017) discovered that Vietnamese people must speak English as an international language, at least to a level of comprehension, in order to join organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). As a result, the need to study English continues to be a top priority. Therefore, it is now more important than ever to have a training program that can satisfy the learners' goal for proficient English usage.

It is anticipated that non-English majors will be able to meet the output standards of language proficiency, particularly level B1, according to the 6-level Foreign Language Competency Framework for Vietnam, with the use of Biggs' (2003) Constructive Alignment theory in the design of the basic English course. In actuality, though, numerous universities continue to administer English courses with a disconnect between theory and practice. As the main participants in the educational process, students may lack a thorough understanding of the connections between the many educational

components of the course they are taking. Their degree of interest, motivation to learn, and, eventually, their output outcomes are all directly impacted by this. Specifically, General English 3 is one of the foundational courses at Nam Can Tho University that helps students meet the output standards for foreign languages. Few studies have, however, explicitly looked into how students perceive the degree of relationship between elements like learning objectives, course content, teaching strategies, and assessment forms. The program's improvement and the quality of the training are hampered by this lack of useful information. Thus, the subject matter "*Student perceptions of constructive alignment in the general English 3 course toward achieving the B1 foreign language proficiency outcome*" is of crucial significance. In addition to helping to clarify the perspectives of students, who are a significant stakeholder in education, the topic offers lecturers and schools a useful foundation for reworking the course's methodology, material, and evaluation in a way that is more efficient and synchronous. The findings of the study will also help achieve the objectives of reaching output standards, enhancing English proficiency, and fostering learners' overall development as well as their demands for international integration. As a result, the topic aims to address the following two research questions:

- **Question 1:** How do Nam Can Tho University students perceive the relationship between the course's educational elements (intended learning goals, learning content, teaching strategies, and assessment techniques) in General English 3?
- **Question 2:** How does students' perception of constructive connection affect the way they approach learning and prepare for achieving foreign language output standards?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Biggs's (2003) constructive alignment theory

The "constructive" and "alignment" aspects are the two halves of constructive alignment, according to Biggs (2003). While the latter assumes what the teacher does to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes, the former refers to the idea that students independently construct meaning through pertinent learning activities rather than through the explicit transmission of knowledge by teachers (Biggs, 2003). The key assumption is that the teaching strategies and evaluation tasks are in line with the learning activities presupposed in the expected outcomes so that students can be guided toward the learning objectives. Defining the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), choosing teaching and learning activities that are likely to lead to the ILOs, evaluating students' actual performance to see how closely it matches the ILOs, and assigning a final grade are the four sequential steps that Biggs (2003) outlined in his theory to specify the levels of understanding that teachers want students to achieve. Biggs (2003) went on to explain on the processes that should be taken in order to determine which teaching methods and learning materials are appropriate, starting with the formulation of the learning

outcomes. The assessment activities should then be created with the anticipated results and classroom learning experiences in mind. The curriculum creator or course designer can determine what the students can do and the degree to which the learning objectives are met by using an appropriate assessment. This allows them to make any necessary adjustments.

2.2 The relationship between the course General English 3 and the foreign language outcome standard level 3 (B1)

The foreign language output standard level 3/6 according to the 6-level foreign language competency framework for Vietnam (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014) is defined as the intermediate level of language proficiency, equivalent to level B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). At this level, learners can communicate independently in familiar situations in daily life, study and work. The General English 3 course at Nam Can Tho University is designed to support students in achieving these specific requirements through a system of knowledge and skills integrated according to practical topics and suitable for non-major language levels. About the course content, the course uses the American English File 2 (second edition) textbook from Oxford University Press, including language topics and practical skills revolving around familiar topics such as: self-introduction, daily routines, vacations, personal experiences, social relationships, shopping, fashion, planning, and communication at work. These topics are directly compatible with the standard communication situations described in the Foreign Language Competency Framework Level 3/6.

Regarding the language skills, the relationship between the General English 3 course and the language skills specified in the output standards at level 3 can be summarized in the following table:

Table 2.1: The relationship between the General English 3 course and the language skills

Skill	Required Language Proficiency at Level 3/6	How General English 3 Supports Achievement of Level 3
Listening	Understand the main ideas and specific information in simple, clear speech on everyday topics	Listening activities related to holidays, airports, TV programs, personal stories (Units 2A, 3A, 4C)
Speaking	Participate in conversations on familiar situations; describe experiences and express opinions	Practice in dialogues, interviews, oral presentations, personal descriptions, and plans (Units 1A, 1B, 3B, 4B)
Reading	Understand short texts, identify main ideas and specific details	Reading texts on people, travel, technology, society; true/false questions, information selection (Units 1B, 2B, 3C, 4C)
Writing	Write letters, emails, and short paragraphs expressing clear ideas	Writing personal descriptions, recounting events, composing personal emails (Units 1B, 2B, 4B)

Regarding autonomy and responsibility, level 3 output standards also aim to develop personal abilities such as self-study, language awareness, and integration. The General English 3 course creates conditions for students to clearly perceive the importance of English in study and career (CO6). At the same time, the course creates opportunities for students to actively participate in group activities, discussions, and self-directed learning (CO7).

Thus, it can be seen that the General English 3 course plays a fundamental and practical role in helping students achieve the English output standards of level 3/6, not only in terms of language skills but also in terms of learning methods and attitudes towards using foreign languages. This is an important stepping stone for students to continue to conquer higher levels of ability and develop the ability to use English independently in study, career, and life.

2.3 Related Studies

The effectiveness of matching desired learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks in a Language Development course was investigated quantitatively by Jaiswal (2019) at a Bahraini university. Following the implementation of constructive alignment based on Bloom's and SOLO taxonomies, the study found a significant improvement in student performance as determined by paired-samples T-test analysis of pre- and post-test results.

Nguyen (2020) investigated the use of constructive alignment in an AUN-standard Speaking course at Van Lang University in Ho Chi Minh City using a qualitative case study. Although students acknowledged the advantages of alignment, data from interviews and observations in the classroom showed that some learning outcomes were not well supported by instructional strategies or evaluation techniques.

In another study, Jani et al. (2020) surveyed 142 pre-service teachers in Malaysia using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed the data using the Rasch Model. The findings showed high levels of student approval for the constructive alignment practices used by instructors. The study emphasized the importance of clearly communicated learning outcomes and objective assessment criteria using rubrics.

In order to investigate how constructive alignment affects learning practices, Hailikari et al. (2021) conducted qualitative interviews with 37 students from a Finnish institution. The findings demonstrated that whereas traditional lecture-based courses resulted in more surface-level learning strategies, active, coordinated teaching activities encouraged deeper learning.

However, there are still a number of research gaps. First, fundamental English courses—which provide the basis for non-English majors in Vietnamese universities—have received little attention, while the majority of studies have concentrated on specialized courses or particular training programs. Second, a lot of research has looked at how teachers feel or how well students do academically following pedagogical interventions, but not many have looked at how students feel about constructive alignment in a particular course.

Third, no study has examined how students' views of constructive alignment relate to their goals of reaching the B1 English proficiency standard, particularly in light of Vietnam's continued adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Given these gaps, it is both necessary and significant from a theoretical and practical standpoint to undertake a study on students' perceptions of constructive alignment in the General English 3 course with an emphasis on the B1 English competence standard. In order to help students achieve the intended learning objectives, the study is theoretically based on Biggs' (2003) idea of constructive alignment, which stresses consistency across learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks. Examining how students view this alignment not only reveals their comprehension and attitudes toward the course, but it also makes clear how alignment influences students' study strategies and attitudes toward learning. In practice, the study can provide specific recommendations for enhancing the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment and improving course design, which will help students reach the academic program's B1 competency requirement.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

In order to answer the research questions, the current study was created as a descriptive investigation using a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative questionnaire was created to evaluate students' perceptions of the constructive alignment in the General English 3 course that aids them in obtaining the English proficiency outcome at the level 3. In an attempt to obtain more detailed information, 25 randomly chosen students from the group participated in semi-structured interviews to collect the qualitative data.

3.2 Participants

1128 Nam Can Tho University non-English majors who have finished the General English 3 course participated in this study. These students had varied degrees of English competence, were from different academic disciplines and faculties, and used English mostly for academic and future career goals rather than for language specialization. The researcher asked 25 of the 1128 students who answered the questionnaire to take part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to confirm the findings of the questionnaire and learn more about how students felt about the course's constructive alignment with the B1 English proficiency standard. Depending on the length and complexity of the participants' answers, each interview lasted roughly fifteen minutes. Every response was noted in order to analyze the data.

3.3 Instruments

The data collection process lasted eight weeks and consisted of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Participants' personal information, such as their name, phone

number, gender, and student email address, is covered in the first section of the questionnaire. In the main section of the questionnaire, there are 28 statement items in all, and the survey component is broken up into five clusters. Students' levels of agreement with each contributing element may be measured because all survey items employ a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. Brown (2001) asserts that the Likert scale is a widely used and successful instrument in language research because it allows researchers to evaluate learners' attitudes, perceptions, and feelings quantitatively.

To guarantee that all participants could comprehend the information and give appropriate answers, the questionnaire was produced in Vietnamese. A modest pilot study was conducted to evaluate the questionnaire's clarity and reliability before it was formally distributed. Following changes, 1369 non-English major students who had finished Nam Can Tho University's General English 3 course were given the questionnaire using Google Forms. The author then obtained 1128 valid replies, which were used for analysis.

For the interview, every interview question centered on how students felt about the General English 3 course's constructive alignment with the B1 output standard and how they thought this alignment could be improved. Ten major questions about students' opinions of the positive alignment of the learning objectives, learning materials, instructional strategies, assessment-feedback techniques, and the influence on their learning orientation were thus included in the interview.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results

According to descriptive statistics, 1128 valid student replies were gathered. On a 5-point Likert scale, the survey items' mean values varied from 2.14 to 4.07, with an overall average of 3.01 (Mean = 3.01; Standard Deviation = 0.28).

This shows that students generally had a somewhat positive opinion of and satisfaction with the educational components of the General English 3 course, which means that they tended to agree with the statements that were polled to a minor extent. The comparatively low standard deviation (0.28) indicates that there was minimal variance among respondents and that responses were generally consistent.

Table 4.1: Students' Average Perception of Constructive
Alignment of Educational Components (N=1128)

Value	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Students' average perception	2.14	4.07	3.01	0.28

Furthermore, the findings were explained in terms of the four main course components, which correspond to the fundamental components of education: (1) intended learning

outcomes, (2) learning contents, (3) teaching methods, and (4) assessment and feedback. Table 4.2 below provides an overview of these results.

Table 4.2: Average Perception by Educational Component

Survey component	Min	Max	Mean	Sd
ILOs	1.00	5.00	2.99	0.79
Learning contents	1.00	5.00	3.04	0.72
Teaching methods	1.57	4.57	3.00	0.52
Assessment & feedback	1.36	4.45	3.01	0.43

According to the study, the average scores for the four groups varied between 2.99 and 3.04, indicating that students' opinions of the components of the survey were usually somewhat positive. With an average score of 2.99 (SD = 0.79), the group pertaining to intended learning outcomes in particular demonstrated a rather moderate level of awareness regarding the course objectives.

With the highest average score of 3.04 (SD = 0.72), the learning content group demonstrated that students were largely content with the material's applicability and relevance in helping them reach the B1 output requirement.

With an average score of 3.00 (SD = 0.52), the teaching methods group demonstrated a comparatively high and stable degree of student agreement.

With the lowest standard deviation and an average of 3.01 (SD = 0.43), the assessment and feedback group showed that students' opinions of the course's assessment and feedback procedures were steady and reliable.

In the parts that follow, the author will provide a thorough qualitative analysis to go deeper into how students perceive constructive alignment in each educational component.

4.2 Qualitative Results

25 non-English major students who had finished the General English 3 course participated in in-depth interviews as part of the study to learn more about their perceptions of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The analysis concentrated on two main areas: (1) whether the course objectives were explained to the students in a clear and concise manner, and (2) whether the students felt that the objectives were useful in directing their learning.

According to the majority of students, the instructor mostly used introduction slides or the Learning Management System (LMS) to present the course objectives during the first week. Students' comprehension depth and clarity, however, differed. Some students claimed that they did not fully comprehend the specified objectives and that they only understood general information:

"I recall that during the first week, the teacher presented the objectives, but I didn't pay much attention because it seemed like administrative material." (Student 3)

Other students reported that it took them a few weeks to start understanding the course objectives:

"At first, I didn't understand the objectives, but I gradually knew what to focus on after completing exercises and listening to the teacher emphasize the skills we needed to practice." (student 11)

In addition, most students commented that the basic course content was suitable for the B1 standard, especially the content related to necessary skills such as writing paragraphs, describing pictures, presenting opinions and practicing listening. These skills are considered to be similar to the VSTEP B1 exam.

"The course content is quite similar to the B1 exam, especially the letter writing and expressing opinions. I think this course helps me feel more confident when taking the exam." (student 10)

Some students also appreciated the integration of communication content and thematic vocabulary, helping to expand vocabulary suitable for the exam context:

"There are many lessons on familiar topics such as travel, shopping, helping me practice speaking in the form of VSTEP questions." (Student 6)

However, there are still some opinions that some of the content is not really directly related to the exam or course objectives, for example, the lessons are heavy on grammar theory with little application.

"Some theoretical parts on advanced past perfect tense or type 3 conditional sentences are a bit difficult, but the B1 exam does not need to be that level." (Student 13)

During the interview, students were asked to share specific lessons or content that they found impressive, useful, or inappropriate. Many students appreciated highly applicable lessons, such as writing emails, describing people, and describing places, because these are parts that often appear in the B1 exam and are easy to apply in practice.

"I remember the most are writing a job application letter and describing a close friend. These types of topics can be found in both speaking and writing." (Student 2)

Some students also mentioned learning activities such as group work and presentations, saying that they both help improve speaking skills and increase interest in the lesson.

"Lessons that involve group discussion or competition are easier to remember. The travel lesson we did role-playing, it was fun and we learned a lot." (Student 19)

On the contrary, some opinions say that some lessons are academic or abstract, not really connected to the practice of non-specialized students, or not flexibly applied according to the class's capacity:

"The lesson on globalization is a bit difficult, the vocabulary is too abstract, I feel stuck for ideas when doing the speaking test." (Student 15)

From the above sharing, it can be seen that students appreciate the learning content that is applicable, familiar and closely follows the actual exam, while learning content that is highly academic or does not have specific practical instructions is easily considered inappropriate.

In terms of teaching methods, most students said that the lecturers used a combination of methods, including lectures, group discussions, academic games, and presentations in pairs or groups. Many classes were rated as lively, encouraging students to participate actively.

"The teacher teaches in an easy-to-understand way, and each lesson often has group activities or small games. Sometimes, we even do speaking exercises in groups and then present them." (Student 7)

"Every time we learn writing skills, the teacher lets me write directly, then corrects them on the board. Sometimes we correct each other's work according to the model." (Student 24)

However, some students also said that the level of participation depends a lot on the students' initiative and how each lecturer organizes the class, especially in large classes:

"My class has more than 40 people, so sometimes only a few students get to answer. I don't feel like they participate much, especially in speaking." (Student 5)

In addition, most students positively evaluated the effectiveness of the teaching method, especially when that method combined many skills, had specific instructions and stimulated interest in learning.

"The teacher taught slowly, often used illustrative examples, and did exercises on the spot, so I understood the lesson better and remembered it longer." (Student 9)

"When we study speaking, the teacher asks us to play roles – for example, as a customer or a tour guide. This helps me feel more confident when communicating." (Student 18)

Students also clearly see that active teaching methods help them learn more proactively and motivate them to practice:

"For group discussions, I have to prepare in advance and look up vocabulary in advance. I learn new words and practice speaking at the same time." (Student 12)

However, some students also said that the quality of the learning experience depends on the teaching style:

"Some teachers teach very well and encourage interaction, while others read a lot and do little group activities, so I find it a bit boring." (Student 14)

These comments reflect a moderate level of satisfaction, but there is potential for improvement in the teaching method group. Teachers' methods, such as using useful English in the classroom, self-study guidance, and knowledge extension, are showing positive feedback from students about the benefits of such teaching methods, but there is still room for improvement in classroom organization and personalization of the learning experience.

Regarding assessment and feedback, the majority of students said that the test content was generally consistent with what they had learned in class, especially the paragraph writing and listening and speaking practice sections. However, some students still had difficulty determining the focus of their review, especially if there were no specific instructions from the beginning of the semester.

"The test was similar to what we did in our assignments, with a speaking assignment based on the topic we had practiced, so I found it reasonable." (Student 1)

"The mid-term test had reading comprehension and paragraph writing sections exactly like the content in the book, so I studied carefully and was able to do it." (Student 23)

However, some students also reported a lack of consistency in the way assessments were organized between different classes, and some students felt that they lacked time to prepare because the test matrix was not clearly announced from the beginning of the semester:

"I didn't know exactly which parts would be on the test, so I studied haphazardly, and in the end I didn't have enough time to review everything." (Student 8)

"In other subjects, the teacher gave the test matrix from the first week, but in my class, we only found out the type of questions near the exam." (Student 16)

Students do receive feedback from lecturers, but the specificity and effectiveness of the feedback vary greatly between classes. Students whose teachers give feedback directly or via the LMS system highly appreciate the effectiveness of this feedback in improving their writing and speaking skills.

"After each essay, the teacher comments on strengths and weaknesses, then sends suggestions for revision via Zalo to the class group." (Student 13)

"The teacher commented immediately when I made a mistake, but spoke gently, helping me remember how to use the correct words." (Student 17)

However, some students also said that the feedback from the lecturer was not clear, sometimes just general comments or just gave marks without saying why it was right or wrong:

"The teacher only recorded the points, not detailed comments, so I didn't know where I went wrong." (Student 5)

"There was a day when I submitted my speech but didn't get any comments, just the points." (Student 20)

Students generally rated the relevance of the test to the learning content well, but there was a lack of tools to support assessment orientation from the beginning of the semester. At the same time, feedback from lecturers - a factor that helps students improve their skills - was lacking in depth and not consistent between classes. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the construction of the test matrix from the beginning of the semester and increase specific feedback according to graduation criteria.

When asked about desired improvements to help strengthen constructive engagement, students offered many specific and practical suggestions. Some notable suggestions included:

First, increase the amount of time spent practicing for the actual exam, for example, doing B1 simulations.

"I want more time to do practice exams, both speaking and writing. That way, we will know where our weaknesses are and how to improve them." (Student 4)

Second, students need to be provided with clear grading criteria from the beginning of the course.

"If there were grading criteria for speaking and writing from the beginning, I would practice more closely." (Student 7)

Third, students want to diversify learning methods to increase initiative.

"Students should be allowed to choose some topics they like to practice speaking or writing, because following books all the time is boring." (Student 22)

Fourth, students want to increase the level of personalization and classify their levels to provide appropriate support.

"My class has many students with different levels, if we divide them into groups according to their ability, they will learn better." (student 12)

The above responses confirm that students not only clearly recognize the role of the AVCB 3 course in the preparation process to meet the B1 graduation standard, but also want to receive more strategic support, in terms of content, teaching methods, and assessment forms.

Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, it can be seen that students evaluate the positive impact of the AVCB 3 course on reaching the B1 graduation standard, especially when there is specific guidance and appropriate practice activities. However, for better support, students suggest improvements in the direction of clarity in terms of goals - assessment criteria, while increasing flexibility and personalization in teaching.

5. Conclusion

The study "The perception of students of Nam Can Tho University on the constructive connection of educational elements in the General English course 3 towards foreign language graduation standards" was conducted on the basis of the theory of constructive connection by Biggs (2003). Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study reached the following important conclusions.

Students have an average perception of the constructive connection between educational elements in the General English 3 course. The average survey score of 3.01/5 shows that students slightly agree with the elements implemented in the course, but there are still many points that need to be improved to increase satisfaction and learning efficiency.

Although most students are aware of the learning objectives, the level of clarity and systematicity in announcing expected learning outcomes is limited. This affects students' ability to learn in a oriented and self-regulated manner - a core requirement in Biggs's theory (2003).

Students positively evaluate the learning content in the course, especially when the content is applied and close to the VSTEP exam format. However, there are still

theoretical parts that are academic in nature, not really necessary for non-specialized learners.

Teaching methods are evaluated by students as diverse and support learning well. However, the level of active participation of students has not been maximized, especially in large classes, leading to the failure to optimize the effectiveness of active teaching methods.

Students are generally satisfied with the test content, however, the announcement of the test matrix, scoring criteria and feedback has not been implemented synchronously. Feedback after assessment is still lacking in depth, not helping students adjust their learning strategies effectively.

The General English 3 course has a positive impact in inspiring confidence and adjusting learning strategies towards graduation standards. However, students still need more support in terms of documents, exercises and orientation information to achieve B1 standards more effectively.

6. Recommendations

Based on the research results and related previous studies, the research team proposes the following solutions to improve the constructive connection of educational components in the General English 3 course at Nam Can Tho University. Firstly, enhance the publication and specification of expected learning outcomes. Lecturers need to provide clear, specific expected learning outcomes that are directly related to each lesson right from the first week. In addition, lecturers should integrate expected learning outcomes into learning materials, lectures and LMS for students to easily look up. At the same time, kick-off activities at the beginning of the semester should also be organized to help students understand the role and significance of achieving B1 English graduation standards. Second, develop practical and competency-appropriate learning content. Some recommendations related to learning content include: reviewing and adjusting unnecessary academic content for the B1 goal. Students also requested to increase the number of skill application exercises, such as description, letter writing, and argumentation - common parts in VSTEP. In addition, differentiating materials according to the input level of non-major students to improve learning efficiency was also suggested. Third, improve teaching methods towards an active-cooperative direction. To improve teaching methods, lecturers need to increase group learning activities, role-playing, and simulation to stimulate active participation of students. Reduce the rate of one-way presentations, increase the time for group discussions and individual feedback. In addition, organizing internal training for lecturers on designing active and learner-centred teaching activities is extremely necessary. Fourth, standardize the testing, assessment and feedback process. To standardize the testing process, lecturers need to announce the test matrix and assessment criteria from the beginning of the semester. Ensure that post-test feedback is specific, personalized, constructive and linked to the B1 graduation standard. Increase regular assessment, mid-term assessment and formative

assessment to support learners in a timely manner. Finally, design a clear learning orientation to prepare for the B1 English graduation standards. To enhance students' learning orientation, practice activities and VSTEP test simulations should be integrated into the course content. Organize separate consultation sessions or workshops on the B1 exam roadmap, review materials, and how to register for the exam. Provide sample exam sets, question banks, and self-study tools on the LMS platform.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Le Huu Tri is a dedicated faculty member of the foreign languages department at Nam Can Tho University in Vietnam. Curriculum design, constructive alignment, grammar, academic writing, online learning, motivating teachers and students, and testing and evaluation are some of his favorite teaching topics. He is dedicated to improving English instruction and supporting efficient methods of language instruction.

Email: lhtri@nctu.edu.vn

Nguyen Hoang Phuong teaches English at Nam Can Tho University in Vietnam. His main areas of interest in research are teaching and learning methodologies, learning media, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.

Email: nhphuong2501@gmail.com

References

- Ali, L. (2018). The Design of Curriculum, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education with Constructive Alignment. *Journal of Education and e-learning Research*, 5(1), 72-78. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1173088.pdf>
- Berry, R. (2011). Assessment reforms around the world. *Assessment reform in education* (pp. 89-102): Springer. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0729-0_7
- Biggs, B. J. (2003a). *Aligning teaching for constructing learning*. Hong Kong: the Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255583992_Aligning_Teaching_for_Constructing_Learning
- Biggs, B. J. (2003b). *Teaching for quality learning at university (2nd edition)*. Buckingham: Open University Press/Society for Research into Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215915395_Teaching_for_Quality_Learning_at_University
- Biggs, J. (1993). From theory to practice: A cognitive systems approach. *Higher education research and development*, 12(1), 73-85. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/From-Theory-to-Practice%3A-A-Cognitive-Systems-Biggs/c6c650b92212cb394e2d02db02e3dfda2ebe5c19>

- Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher education*, 32(3), 347-364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00138871>
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university*: McGraw-Hill education (UK). Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215915395 Teaching for Quality Learning at University](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215915395_Teaching_for_Quality_Learning_at_University)
- Biggs, J., Tang, C., & Kennedy, G. (2022). *Teaching for quality learning at university 5e*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK). Retrieved from [https://books.google.ro/books/about/Teaching for Quality Learning at Univers.html?id=pseVEAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y](https://books.google.ro/books/about/Teaching_for_Quality_Learning_at_Univers.html?id=pseVEAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y)
- Biggs, J. (1999). *Teaching for quality learning at university*. The UK: Buckingham: SRHE/OU Press.
- Braun, S. (2005). From pedagogically relevant corpora to authentic language learning contents. *ReCALL*, 17(1), 47-64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0958344005000510>
- Brindley, G. (1989). The role of needs analysis in adult ESL programme design. *The second language curriculum*, 63, 78. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/second-language-curriculum/role-of-needs-analysis-in-adult-esl-programme-design/2C0EE1E8CE896012238CA7C107A4D0C2>
- Brown, D. J. (2001). *Using surveys in a language program*. NY: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=952374>
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (5th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman. Retrieved from <https://gustavorubinoernesto.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/H-Douglas-Brown-Principles-of-Language-Learning-and-Teaching.pdf>
- Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*: ERIC. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED397672>
- Carless, D. (2015). *Excellence in University Assessment: Learning from Award-winning Practice*. Routledge. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315740621>
- Cohen, M. L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6th Ed). New York: Taylor & Francis e - Library publishers. Retrieved from <https://islmblogblog.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/rme-edu-helpline-blogspot-com.pdf>
- Council of Europe. (2011). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>
- Edwards, J. (1991). *Evaluation in adult and further education: a practical handbook for teachers and organizers*: Workers' Educational Association. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000193933>

- Freeman, D. (2000). *Designing Language Courses: A Guide for Teachers*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle. Retrieved from <https://www.library.brawnblog.com/Designing%20Language%20Courses-A%20guide%20for%20teachers-p320.pdf>
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The New Meaning of Educational Change 4th*. New York: Teachers College Press. Retrieved from <https://michaelfullan.ca/books/new-meaning-educational-change/>
- Gallagher, G. (2017). Aligning for learning: Including feedback in the Constructive Alignment model. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, 9(1).
- Genon, L. J. D., & Torres, C. B. P. (2020). Constructive Alignment of Assessment Practices in English Language Classrooms. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 3(3), 211-228. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1283061.pdf>
- Guide to AUN-QA Assessment at Programme Level version 4.0 (2020), Bangkok: Thailand.
- Gillham, B. (2008). *Developing a questionnaire*. London: A&C Black. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Developing_a_Questionnaire.html?id=EpKvAwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
- Hailikari, T., Virtanen, V., Vesalainen, M., & Postareff, L. (2021). Student perspectives on how different elements of constructive alignment support active learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787421989160>
- Hall, D., & Hewings, A. (2001). *Innovation in English language teaching: A reader*: Psychology Press. Retrieved from <https://www.routledge.com/Innovation-in-English-Language-Teaching-A-Reader/Hall-Hewings/p/book/9780415241243?srsId=AfmBOoqwQaIy-XaCOvcBhJqQZa4VzHHopQb5MUfb2tuHW0HGEjVV4RYS>
- Hussain, A., Dogar, A. H., Azeem, M., & Shakoor, A. (2011). Evaluation of the curriculum development process. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(14), 263-271. Retrieved from https://vulms.vu.edu.pk/Courses/EDU402/Downloads/Evaluation_of_Curriculum_Development_Pro.pdf
- Jaiswal, P. (2019). Using Constructive Alignment to Foster Teaching and Learning Processes. *English Language Teaching*, 12(6), 10-23. Retrieved from https://vulms.vu.edu.pk/Courses/EDU402/Downloads/Evaluation_of_Curriculum_Development_Pro.pdf
- Jani, M. D. B. M., Latif, A. B. A., Talib, R. B., & Is, N. B. M. (2020). The implementation of constructive alignment at the teachers' education institute using Rasch analysis. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(11), 659-665. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.11.120>
- Kozulin, A. (2004). Vygotsky's theory in the classroom: Introduction. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 3-7. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2004-21115-001>

- Lợi, N. V., & Hằng, C. T. T. (2014). Các Yếu Tố Ảnh Hưởng Năng Lực Tiếng Anh Của Sinh Viên Sư Phạm Tiếng Anh, Trường Đại Học Cần Thơ. *Tạp chí Khoa học Đại học Cần Thơ*, (32), 67-74.
- Macaro, E. (2001). *Learning strategies in foreign and second language classrooms: The role of learner strategies*: A&C Black. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/learning-strategies-in-foreign-and-second-language-classrooms-9780826451354/>
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Mahwah: NJ Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-02697-000>
- Markee, N. (1997). *Managing curricular innovation*: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273120013_Managing_Curricular_Innovation
- McCombs, B. L. (2001). What do we know about learners and learning? The learner-centered framework: Bringing the educational system into balance. *Educational Horizons*, 182-193. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234626800_What_Do_We_Know_about_Learners_and_Learning_The_Learner-Centered_Framework_Bringing_the_Educational_System_into_Balance
- McKay, P., & Graves, K. (2006). *Planning and Teaching Creatively within a Required Curriculum for School-Age Learners*: ERIC. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234568757_Planning_and_Teaching_Creatively_within_a_Required_Curriculum_for_School-Age_Learners
- MoET (2014). *Khung năng lực ngoại ngữ 6 bậc dùng cho Việt Nam*. Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo.
- MoET. (2016a). The Circular promulgates regulations on standards for assessing the quality of training programs at higher education levels. 04/2016/TT-BGDĐT.
- MoET. (2016b). General guidance on the use of standards for assessing the quality of training programs at higher education levels. *Documentary No. 1074/KTKĐCLGD-KĐDH/ BGDĐT*.
- MoET. (2018). General Education Program - Master Program. *Circulars No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT*.
- Morrison, M. (2007). What do we mean by educational research? *Research methods in educational leadership and management*, 2, 13-36. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/What-do-we-mean-by-educational-research-Morrison/3b7dc68de1f061001ded99c41bccd6f1046c837e>
- Mukhtar, U., Ahmed, U., Anwar, S., & Baloch, M. A. (2015). Factors affecting the service quality of public and private sector universities comparatively: an empirical investigation. *Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce*, 3(1), 132-142. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317328880_FACTORS_EFFECTING_THE_SERVICE_QUALITY_OF_PUBLIC_AND_PRIVATE_SECTOR_UNIVERSITIES_COMPARATIVELY_AN_EMPIRICAL_INVESTIGATION

- Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane - Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self - regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in higher education*, 31(2), 199-218.
- Nunan, D. (1988). *Syllabus Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Syllabus_Design.html?id=xp7h2xT907kC&redir_esc=y
- Nguyen, T. M. (2020). *Constructive alignment in teaching English at the tertiary level: an insight into an AUN-designed course*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 8th OpenTESOL International Conference 2020, Ho Chi Minh City Open University. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342976992_CONSTRUCTIVE_ALIGNMENT_IN_TEACHING_ENGLISH_AT_TERTIARY_LEVEL_AN_INSIGHT_INTO_AN_AUN-DESIGNED_COURSE
- Nguyen, T. V. S., & Laws, K. (2019). Changes in higher education teachers' perceptions of curriculum. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* 11(1). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-06-2018-0097>
- Oliva, P. F., & Gordon II, W. R. (2012). *Developing the curriculum*: Pearson Higher Ed. Retrieved from https://books.google.ro/books/about/Developing_the_Curriculum.html?id=wW8vAAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies*. New York, 3. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/languagelearning0000oxfo>
- Print, M. (1993). *Curriculum development and design*: Allen & Unwin. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003115328>
- Reid, N. (2003). *Getting started in pedagogical research in the physical sciences*. LTSN: Physical Sciences Centre. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242482113_Getting_Started_in_Pedagogical_Research_in_the_Physical_Sciences_written_by
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. the USA: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/curriculum-development-in-language-teaching/CF5B24C0ADF73DE76BC6638B892661AF>
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190>
- Saberton, S. (1985). Learning partnerships. *Herdsa News*, 7(1), 3-5. Retrieved from <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/aeipt.23740>
- Weerasinghe, I. M. S., & Fernando, R. L. S. (2018). Critical factors affecting students' satisfaction with higher education in Sri Lanka. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 26(1), 115-130. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-04-2017-0014>
- Williams, E. N., Soeprapto, E., Like, K., Touradji, P., Hess, S., & Hill, C. E. (1998). Perceptions of secrendipity: Career paths of prominent academic women in

- counseling psychology. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 45(4), 379. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0167.45.4.379>
- Worthen, B. R. (1990). Program Evaluation. In H. Walberg & G. Haertel (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of educational evaluation*. Toronto: ON: Pergammon Press. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000170217>
- Zineldin, M., Akdag, H. C., & Vasicheva, V. (2011). Assessing quality in higher education: new criteria for evaluating students' satisfaction. *Quality in Higher Education*, 17(2), 231-243. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ935665>

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions, and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions, and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Foreign Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage, or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations, and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed, and used in educational, commercial, and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).