Undergraduate EFL Students' Perceived Emotions in Assessment: Disclosing the Antecedents and Outcomes

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Abstract

A bulk of research has revealed that emotions play a crucial role in different aspects of second/foreign language (L2) education. However, the emotions that English as a foreign language (EFL) students experience during assessment have been neglected, so far. Against this backdrop, this qualitative study intended to unveil the typologies, antecedents, and outcomes of assessment-related emotions of 24 Iranian EFL undergraduate students studying applied linguistics. To this end, a semi-structured interview and a narrative frame were employed. The results of the thematic analysis demonstrated that undergraduate EFL students experienced different positive and negative emotions before, during, and after assessment practices at the university. Furthermore, it was found that "teacher", "tasks", and "textbook" were the most frequent causes of the participants' perceived emotions in assessment. Concerning the outcomes of assessment-induced emotions, the results demonstrated that "burnout", "frustration", "demotivation", "stress", and "self-doubt" were the most frequent negative outcomes, while "motivation", "learning", "pride", and "excitement" were repeatedly posited as positive outcomes. Finally, the study enumerates some implications for L2 educators and researchers concerning the role of emotions in assessment processes and practices.

Keywords: Assessment; EFL student; emotions; narrative frame; undergraduates

1. Introduction

A mounting body of research has previously acknowledged the omnipresence of emotions in learning second/foreign languages (Derakhshan, 2022; Richards, 2022). Empirical research strongly supports that emotions serve several problem-solving functions, such as motivating, organizing, and regulating behavior (Derakhshan, 2022), all of which are vital in student learning. Given the fact that assessment is an essential aspect of learning (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2022; Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2021b), which is tied to one's emotional states and feelings, different studies have used traditional methods to capture students' perceptions and feelings about assessment (Olave-Encina et al., 2021). In the last 30 years, assessment has been characterized as a profoundly emotional process (Rastegr & Zarei, 2023). The process of engagement with an assessment task can be accompanied by a broad range of emotions from excitement to anxiety. In addition to the time they invest in assessments, students are emotionally engaged by the work they do and the feedback they receive (Higgins et al., 2002).

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Studies have shown that undergraduate students link their academic experiences to their emotions (Buckley, 2021). Therefore, designing a course that leads to students' learning and achievement requires understanding students' emotional responses to assessment. We might be assessing students in a way that adversely affects their learning and well-being rather than enhancing their learning, or vice versa (Wass et al., 2020). As assessment is the key factor in student learning and understanding, the emotional impact that assessment has on those being assessed needs further examination (Falchikov & Boud, 2007). While it is acknowledged that high-stakes testing potentially creates strong feelings (Estaji & Banitalebi, 2023; Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2021b), seemingly less is currently known about the role that university students' emotions play in responding to classroom assessment practices, in terms of their antecedents and outcomes. Therefore, with social functional approaches to assessment studies in mind, there is a need to investigate students' emotional responses when they engage in assessment practices. In light of these debates, this study reveals the types of emotional entanglements, along with their antecedents and outcomes, that are bound up with assessment practices amongst undergraduate students.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Emotions in Second Language Learning: Theories and Concepts

The introduction of positive psychology, "the scientific study of what goes right in life" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4), in second language learning, has broadened our understanding of the range of emotions language learners experience, especially positive emotions that facilitate learning (Wang et al., 2021). In the language teaching literature, emotions have traditionally been viewed as irrational and unmeasurable in comparison to quantifiable facts about second language learning from the 1970s (White, 2018). Therefore, due to the dominance of cognitive paradigms, they have often received limited attention in mainstream second language learning.

However, a shift to affective factors in L2 learning has prompted a reconsideration of the roles that emotions play in language learning (Benesch, 2012). Such a turn to emotions has majorly focused on what emotions do and how they affect L2 learning through classroom interactions, rather than what emotions are (e.g., Barrett, 2017). Against this social perspective, emotions are primarily determined by relationships, social contexts, and individual characteristics. They are not merely something that one possesses, but something that one does (Richards, 2022). In this regard, assessment is seen as a socio-relational process in which both teachers and students are the agents. In simple words, assessment is a situated activity affected by social and material forces (Boud et al., 2018).

Among different perspectives to studying emotions, a social functional approach provides a framework to perceive the causes of particular emotions. In this framework, emotions are defined to coordinate one's behavior in relation to the constraints, contexts, demands, and resources set against their goals and dispositions (Van Kleef, 2009). As such, this approach can best suit the purposes of this study as it is going to discuss the antecedents and outcomes of students' emotions in assessment.

Generally, several emotions, including pride, anger, enjoyment, relief, boredom, and the like have the potential to assist or inhibit learning (e.g., Rowe et al., 2015). According to the control-value theory (CVT), as the theoretical framework of the present research, students'

perceived emotions in academia depend on the controllability, value, and outcome of such emotions (Pekrun, 2006). This theory delineates one's perceived emotions by determining the focus (activity or outcome), value (positive or negative), and controllability of the emotion (low, medium, high) as depicted in Figure 1. The reason behind choosing this theory was the integrative approach it takes to show emotions in education, which are applicable to L2 assessment as well.

Figure 1

The Control-Value Theory (Pekrun et al., 2007, p. 20)

Object Focus	Appraisals		Emotion
	Value	Control	
Outcome / Prospective	Positive (Success)	High Medium Low	Anticipatory joy Hope Hopelessness
	Negative (Failure)	High Medium Low	Anticipatory relief Anxiety Hopelessness
Outcome / Retrospective	Positive (Success)	Irrelevant Self Other	Joy Pride Gratitude
	Negative (Failure)	Irrelevant Self Other	Sadness Shame Anger
Activity	Positive Negative Positive/Negative None	High High Low High/Low	Enjoyment Anger Frustration Boredom

Based on this theory, students' emotions are the outcome of their appraisal of a situation and activity. Positive emotions particularly affect areas of metacognition, self-regulation, strategy use, and motivation, which lead to academic learning, systematic approaches to study, and achieving higher scores (Trigwell et al., 2012). On the other hand, feelings of anger, anxiety, and failure can hamper cognitive processing, motivation, and performance (Pekrun et al., 2002). Some emotions have a *prospective* focus; before an activity, while others are *retrospective* or after an activity.

One point to consider is that not all negative emotions are detrimental, just as not all positive ones are beneficial. For example, negative emotions, such as anxiety or doubt, at the prospect of assessment may even increase subsequent experiences of euphoria (Beard et al., 2014). Positive affect, such as relief, may also result in demotivation (Pekrun et al., 2002). Moreover, students can react emotionally differently to the same situation based on their purposes, perceived control, and capabilities. Together, the existing knowledge of emotions signifies the importance of studying emotion outcomes, rather than simply classifying emotions dichotomously and assuming that positive affect results in positive outcomes and vice versa, which is taken into account in this study.

2.2. Students' Emotions and L2 Assessment

Emotions are widely recognized as a key determinant of student success (Su & Chung, 2015). Assessment is a focal tenet of student understanding and learning since it measures students' learning outcomes (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2019; Wang et al., 2023). Although student assessment has been studied rigorously, less is known about students' emotional experiences of assessment (Rowe et al., 2015). Much of the research evidence on the area of assessment and emotions has heeded the difficult emotional states that surround assessment, such as fear of failure, exam stress, and intimidation of self-esteem (Putwain et al., 2010). Even though not all negative experiences negatively impact learning, Mudhovozi (2011) points out that students are suffering from considerable stress and anxiety due to assessment. When such negative emotional experiences negatively affect student performance, they are a cause for concern.

However, as Trigwell et al. (2012) point out, the majority of this research derives from test anxiety or attributional research on achievement. Therefore, their focal point has been to address a small range of negative emotional states, such as shame and anxiety. There are several factors that contribute to stress and anxiety, such as the embedded tension of the multifunctionality of assessment, how teachers provide feedback, and the way teachers assess (Harland et al., 2015; Kvale, 2007). Further, much of such research associated strong feelings with high-stakes testing, yet how students respond to low-stakes assessments, that is assessment practices in the classroom environment rather than final exams per se, is given less attention. In support of this claim, Shields (2015) argued that low-stakes assessment has the potential to reduce anxiety, given that it offers students another chance to be assessed.

2.3. Students' Emotions in Assessment at University Context

According to Buckley (2021), if we consider the emotional aspects of university students, the air of crisis that abounds higher education assessment might be taken into account more realistically. It seems that the atmosphere surrounding higher education is increasingly more competitive than general education (Bore et al., 2016). More competition results in more pressure to succeed in exams, which, in turn, heightens the degree of stress and anxiety. That is why students perceive studying in higher education as a strongly stressful process (Regehr et al., 2013). Previous research into emotion and higher education has highlighted the importance of a range of positive feelings, including self-esteem, confidence, pride, and power (Barbalet, 2002), which are all significant in assessment, as well. More specifically, in assessment-related studies, it can be implied that the accumulated knowledge exploring emotional responses to assessment has identified several factors that need to be considered in investigating how students engage in assessment.

In a qualitative study, Hill et al. (2021) explored the emotional responses of undergraduate students to assessment feedback in the US, UK, and Canada. The results of interviews and diaries revealed that the participants perceived negative emotional responses, such as stress, frustration, disappointment, sadness, and anger, that decreased their motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem. They also experienced positive emotions, such as joy, happiness, excitement, relief, and pride, that made them feel valued, appreciated, and confident. In another recent study, Christie and Morris (2021) examined undergraduate students' emotions in light of blogging as a new assessment tool in Scotland using focused groups. The

results indicated that students experienced positive emotions such as joy, engagement, pride, excitement, and enthusiasm and negative emotions such as anxiety and discomfort.

In light of prior research, it can be argued that qualitative designs are more powerful in exploring the strength of students' feelings. Further, any preliminary simplistic dichotomy of positive-negative emotions without considering their consequences and functions might seem to be naïve (Rowe et al., 2015). Another significant factor that needs more research is the type of assessment tasks students engage in, which can essentially affect how students feel about such assessments. For example, open-ended questions, such as essays, are likely to induce anxiety. By contrast, multiple-choice questions might create a feeling of comfort (Christie & Morris, 2021). Therefore, in any understanding of how students, especially university students, respond to assessment it is essential to investigate what assessment tasks students deal with.

Moreover, task structure affects how students make sense of assessment tasks. Those tasks that promote a feeling of control and autonomy are positively related to positive emotions, intrinsic motivation, and cognitive flexibility (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1987). It has been found that providing individuals with freedom in task choice, flexible time constraints, and test-retaking opportunities might reduce test anxiety during students' university studies (Christie & Morris, 2021). Lastly, a substantial body of evidence supports the importance of a pleasant classroom atmosphere in forming friendly student–teacher and student-student relationships that shape students' emotional perception of assessment and feedback (Zhou et al., 2020). Studies suggest that such relationships can mediate students' emotions and responses toward feedback (Dowden et al., 2013). Thus, it is presumed that supportive classroom relationships are likely to establish a comforting assessment environment. In summary, many factors might intervene in responding to assessment tasks during university studies. Despite the recently emergent emotional turn in higher education, there is more work to be done to unpack students' wider emotional responses to their assessment practices. To fill this gap, this study aimed to investigate the emotional status of a cohort of Iranian university students studying applied linguistics at the undergraduate level. More precisely, the following research questions were raised in the present study:

1. What types of emotions do undergraduate EFL students perceive in assessment?
2. What are the antecedents and outcomes of undergraduate EFL students' perceived emotions in assessment?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The data of this qualitative study were collected from a sample of 24 Iranian EFL students, who were studying applied linguistics at Allameh Tabataba'i University. They were all undergraduate students in their last semester. As for gender, 10 males (42%) and 14 females (58%) made our sample. In addition, their age spanned from 21 to 34 years old. The participants were non-randomly selected based on a convenience sampling procedure. The inclusion criteria were a university degree (i.e., BA) and willingness to cooperate in the study. The participants were informed of the goals and uses of the results in the future and reassured about the protection of their identity and privacy concerns through a formal consent form.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Background Information	No. (%)
Age	
21-23	11
24-27	8
28-30	3
31-33	2
34-34$^+$	1
Gender	
Male	10 (42%)
Female	14 (58%)
Academic Qualification	
BA	24
Major	
Applied Linguistics	24

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

In this study, the researchers conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interviews included two sections. The first section concerned the participants' demographics, while the second one revolved around EFL students' perceived emotions in assessment. This part encompassed 4 questions on which the respondents were asked to elaborate sufficiently. It should be noted that all the interviews were conducted in English at the university campus each lasting about 20 minutes. To hold the data for a deep analysis, the interviews were audio-recorded by one of the researchers' smartphones.

3.2.2. Narrative Frame

Research on L2 emotions has indicated that narratives are helpful instruments to capture students' perceptions, and actions (Barkhuizen, 2016). Additionally, narratives allow scholars to understand how one's prior experiences and feelings shape practices, cognitions, and identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2021). In tune with this conceptualization, the researchers requested the participants to complete an English narrative frame that echoed their emotional experiences during assessment. The frame was developed according to Barkhuizen and Wette's (2008) proposition, which pinpoints the provision of guidance for the participants to portray a full image of their experiences. Moreover, we asked the participants to share two emotional experiences related to assessment (one positive and one negative as suggested by van Lier, 2010) as can be seen in Appendix B. Before filling out the frame, the participants were instructed to share their real experiences of an L2 assessment situation clarifying how it had emotionally influenced them. Since the participants were taking their final semester and their language proficiency was high enough, the narrative frames were filled out in English.thoughts,

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect the data, the researchers used two qualitative instruments (interview, narrative frame). They were completed by a sample of 24 BA students of applied linguistics in

Iran from December 3, 2022 to January 26, 2023. The interview questions were developed by the first researcher and their content validity was qualitatively assessed by three Ph. D holders of applied linguistics with ample experience in doing qualitative investigations. After ensuring the content validity of the questions, the respondents were asked to inform the researchers about their free time for a face-to-face, semi-structured interview on the university campus. The purpose of the interview was explained to the participants before commencing the data collection. During the interviews, the students were asked about their emotional experiences when they had been assessed in their university courses. Additionally, the causes and consequences of such emotional experiences were sought out. Upon the completion of all interviews, the second researcher transcribed the audios word for word making them ready for final analyses.

Moreover, given the complexities involved in understanding students' emotions, a narrative frame was developed to capture and display the participants' perceived emotions and experiences during university assessments. All the participants were asked to complete the narrative frame (one per person). After double-checking the gleaned data to detect any possible inconsistencies and missing parts, the researchers began their final analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

After gathering the whole data (24 interviews, 24 narrative frames), the researchers conducted a thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. Thematic analysis was selected to analyze the data because it allows researchers to extract codes and categories inductively. It is noteworthy that the guiding theory in analyzing the data was CVT. To do the analysis, first, all the interviews were transcribed carefully. Then the whole data were examined for emerging codes. Next, initial codes were developed through an iterative reading of interviews and narrative frames, leading to a codebook including data sources. In this phase, the researchers wrote memos and carried out member-checking (Charmaz, 1996) to certify the trustworthiness of their interpretations. Afterward, the code sets went through constant-comparison to generate categories. In so doing, similar codes were combined gradually to develop macro categories/themes. This iterative process proceeded until a vivid interpretation could be achieved regarding the purpose of the study.

Throughout the data analysis, the authors had meetings and discussions about the extracted codes/themes to enhance their understanding of the research process and its credibility. Moreover, the interpretations, codes, transcriptions, memos, and notes were given to the participants to ensure the principle of member checking in qualitative research. Likewise, another expert researcher (a university professor) was requested to audit trial the whole data analysis. The ambiguities and disagreements were solved in a face-to-face meeting conducted at the university. Concerning the positionality of researchers, which plays a substantial role in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), it is noteworthy that both researchers had studied and taught in the targeted research context (i.e., university). This positioned them as individuals who knew the targeted sociocultural context and the configurations of assessment structure and culture. While this familiarity facilitated the conduction of the study, it might lead to bias in interpretations. Accordingly, the codes, interpretations, and findings were audit trialed and member-checked.

4. Findings

4.1. Types of Emotions Perceived in Assessment

In answering this research question, which sought out the typology of emotions perceived during assessment by undergraduate EFL students, thematic analysis was conducted on the first interview question and the first part of the narrative frame. The results demonstrated that the participants experienced 9 negative emotions and 10 positive emotions during their university assessments (Table 2). Of the negative emotions, stress, anxiety, and frustration were the most frequently perceived emotions, which were repeated 12, 10, and 7 times in the interviews, respectively. On the positive side, excitement (8), motivation (8), joy (7), and happiness (7) were raised more frequently by the respondents.

Table 2

The Typology of Emotions Perceived in L2 Assessment

Type of Emotion	Perceived Emotion	Frequency
Negative	Boredom	5
	Anxiety	10
	Stress	12
	Anger	6
	Sadness	3
	Frustration	7
	Fear	3
	Hopelessness	5
	Burnout	5
Positive	Motivation	8
	Joy	7
	Excitement	8
	Confidence	3
	Happiness	7
	Pride	5
	Relief	2
	Comfort	2
	Passion	4
	Optimism	3

The following interview excerpts showcase the extracted themes/codes explained above:

When I'm prepared for an assessment, I usually feel relief, which is a positive emotion; but when I'm not prepared for one, I usually feel anxiety and frustration (Interview, S 3).

Well, at the university level, we as students feel different emotions in relation to assessment. So, the emotions are sometimes positive and sometimes negative. I myself have experienced excitement, joy, happiness, stress, anxiety, fear, anger, and even frustration depending on my performance and teachers' practices (Interview, S 21).

In peer assessment, I felt joy and excitement because I like it better when the class activities and assignments blend with teamwork, communication, and friendship. In summative assessments, considering the fact that I am always behind the schedule, I am under stress but in the end, I can manage it successfully (Interview, S 24).

Personally, I feel several negative emotions in assessment because I'm not a good test-taker, especially when it comes to multiple-choice questions. I don't believe in such tests at university level. So, I have gone through negative experiences/feelings such as boredom, anger, stress, anxiety, and sadness. I think many students feel more negatively about assessment than positively (Interview, S 13).

To capture the participants' real and lived experiences of emotions in assessment, we asked them to complete a narrative frame in which they were required to name positive and negative emotions, their circumstances, and their significance. Regarding positive emotions, the results of the narrative frame's analysis indicated that undergraduate EFL students had most frequently experienced "confidence" (33%), "pride" (33%), "relief" (16%), and "happiness" (16%) in their assessments (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Students' Perceived Positive Emotions
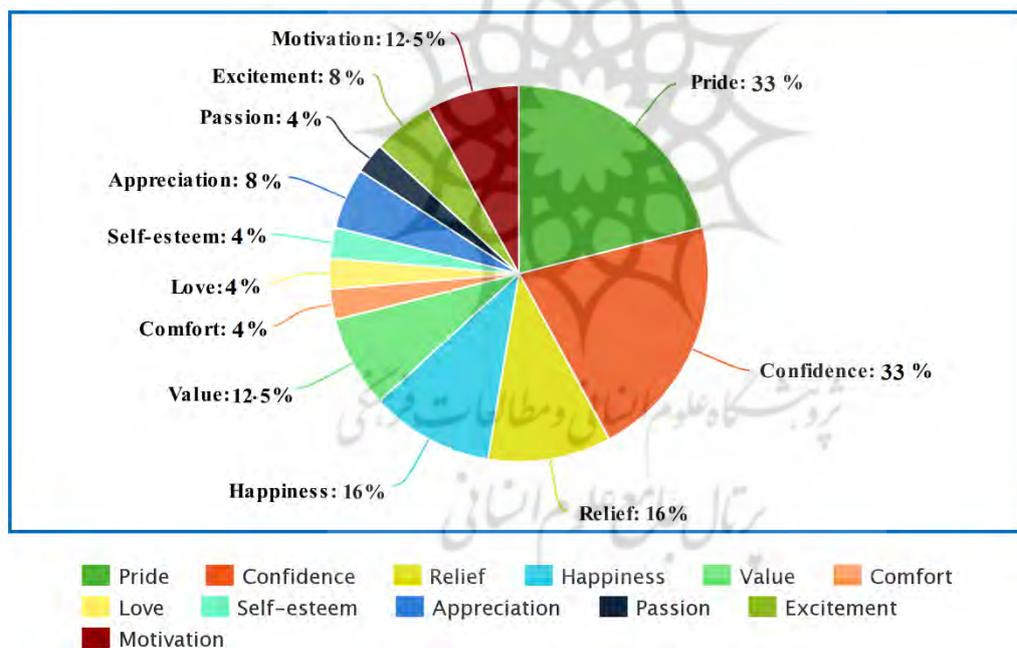
When they were asked to state the situations of such emotions, most of the students (66%) maintained that they had experienced positive emotions "during an exam/assessment". However, others perceived positive feelings in the following circumstances; "after an exam/assessment" (8%), "exam preparation" (8%), "teacher assessment practice" (4%), "classroom task completion" (4%), "classroom engagement by the teacher" (4%), and "discussing assessment problems with teacher" (4%). In sum, positive emotions were felt mostly before, during, and after an exam/assessment. The following statements represent the extracted themes from the frame, starting with *one of the situations that I as a student experienced positive emotions in assessment was:*

During an exam. I knew all the answers to <u>the literature test</u> *and I finished the test in less than half the time permitted. This experience was very significant because* <u>it made me feel proud of myself</u> *(Narrative Frame, S 9).*

<u>When I was able to answer the teachers' questions</u>*, when no one else did. This experience was very significant because* <u>it made me feel confident, happy, and appreciated</u> *(Narrative Frame, S 20).*

<u>After a final exam</u>*. I left all the questions blank, except for one for which I perfectly provided supporting details and examples. It took two pages to complete. I felt I was going to fail the course but the professor gave me the score I needed for passing the exam. This experience was very significant because* <u>it made me feel valued</u> *after feeling worthless (Narrative Frame, S 16).*

Regarding negative emotions, the results of narratives illustrated that "anxiety", "frustration", and "anger" were the most frequent damaging emotions among students, 25.6%, 20.5%, and 17.9%, respectively (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Students' Perceived Negative Emotions
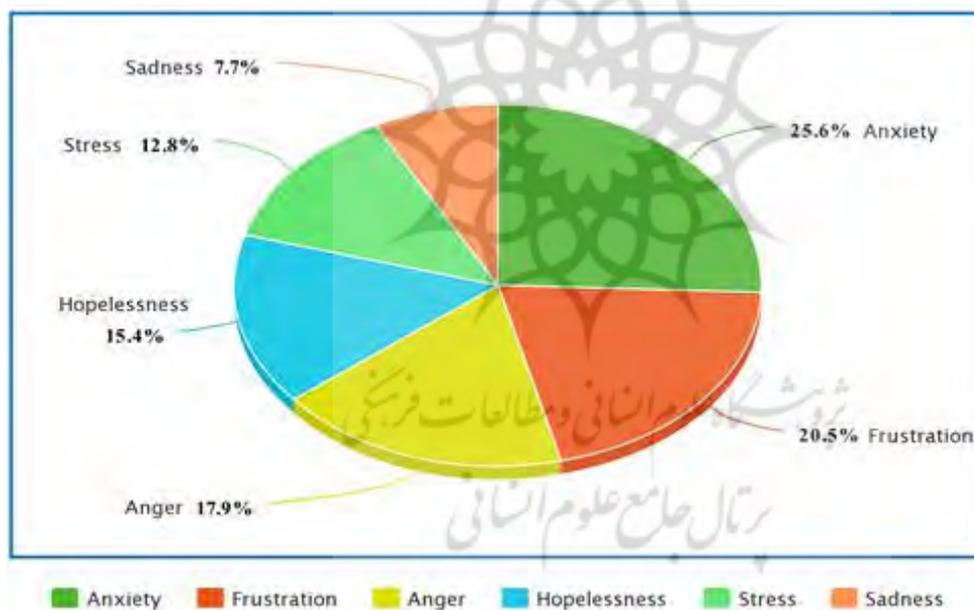
Similar to positive emotions, the venue of negative emotions had mostly been "during an exam/assessment (58%), "after an exam/assessment" (21%), and before an exam or "exam preparation" (13%). The remaining 8% attributed their negative feelings to "teacher assessment practices" in the class.

Below are some sample responses from the narrative frame indicating the situations where they experienced negative emotions. The samples start with *one of the situations was when*:

…<u>we were taking a midterm exam</u> *for our Basic English Grammar Course which had some challenging questions. This experience was very significant because* <u>it</u>

made me feel frustrated because the challenge felt unnecessary which gave me no reason why I must do well or rather why I am supposed to do it at all when it is of no benefit, just stress and frustration (Narrative Frame, S 14).

...my professor gave me a low grade after my final exam without any specified assessment basis. This experience was very significant because it made me feel extremely angry and frustrated (Narrative Frame, S 6).

...I was getting ready for a challenging exam on language testing for which we had studied 4 books. This experience was very significant because it made me feel anxious, stressed out, and hopeless given the shortage of time for the exam day (Narrative Frame, S 19).

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of interviews and the narrative frame revealed that undergraduate EFL students had experienced both positive and negative emotions during their assessment at university. In the interviews, excitement (8), motivation (8), joy (7), and happiness (7) were the most frequently mentioned positive emotions, while stress (12), anxiety (10), and frustration (7) were frequent negative emotions. Moreover, in their narratives, 66% of the participants claimed that they had experienced a sense of "pride" (33%) and "confidence" (33%) in university assessments. On the other hand, "anxiety" (25.6%), "frustration" (20.5%), and "anger" (17.9%) were the most frequent negative emotions stated in the participants' narrative frame. Moreover, both positive and negative families of emotions in assessment were found to emerge "before", "during", and "after" an examination or assessment practice.

4.2. Antecedents and Outcomes of Emotions in Assessment

This research question delved into the antecedents and outcomes of students' perceived emotions in assessment. The results of thematic analysis of interview questions (Q2, Q3) demonstrated that the most common causes of students' perceived emotions in assessment had been "teacher" (33%), "tasks" (27%), "textbook" (16%), and "self-effort" (12%). Additionally, "test scores" and "environmental factors" were also considered as the triggers of emotions in assessment (8% and 4%, respectively). The following interview responses represent the extracted themes/codes:

I think the main causes are teacher's knowledge of assessment and the textbook of the course. If the book is vague and non-engaging, it would be a pain in the neck to study it. Also, if the teacher does not know how to form a truly useful assessment, it would also become frustrating (Interview, S 4).

Well, I believe that students' emotions are the results of teachers' assessment-related practices in the class as well as test tasks that are supposed to be done by students (Interview, S 13).

Regarding the outcomes or consequences of students' emotions, the results of the fourth interview question and the last part of the narrative frame revealed that depending on the typology of the perceived emotions different outcomes emerge. In the case of negative emotions, the most frequent outcomes were "burnout" (5), "frustration" (4), "demotivation" (3), "stress" (3), "self-doubt" (3), "hatred" (2), "boredom" (2), "anger" (1), and "sadness" (1).

On the contrary, "motivation" (4), "learning" (3), "pride" (3), "excitement" (3), "engagement" (2), "happiness" (2), "comfort" (2), "confidence" (2), "joy" (1), "enthusiasm" (1), and "passions" (1) were the perceived outcomes of students' emotions in assessment, as represented in the following sample interviews and narratives:

> *Generally, the influence of assessment on our education <u>depends on the type of emotion</u>. If it is a positive emotion, it will lead to <u>happiness, excitement, and self-confidence</u> in the class. This would make <u>learning</u> better. On the other hand, if I experience a negative feeling, I get overwhelmed with <u>sadness</u> and <u>anger</u> that make me <u>hate</u> that lesson* (Interview, S 17).

> *I have experienced <u>stress, burnout, and frustration</u> due to the boring test tasks that we were bombarded with this semester. Sometimes, I felt <u>self-doubt</u> about my abilities because of my <u>poor test scores</u> on vague exams* (Interview, S 23).

> *This emotional experience influenced my education by causing positive feeling of <u>confidence and excitement,</u> and of course, it did <u>help me learn</u> all those pieces of information* (Narrative Frame, S 22).

> *This emotional experience influenced my education by causing me to <u>lose my learning motivation</u> and get totally <u>frustrated</u> and <u>burned out</u>* (Narrative Frame, S 11).

In sum, the results of this research question indicated that "teacher", "tasks", and "textbook" were the most frequent causes or antecedents of undergraduate EFL students' perceived emotions in assessment. Considering the outcomes of assessment-induced emotions, it was found that depending on the type of perceived emotions, various outcomes would appear in students' academic life. In case the students experience negative emotions, they frequently lead to "burnout", "frustration", "demotivation", "stress", and "self-doubt" among students. Nevertheless, if the emotions were positive, undergraduates contended to experience "motivation", "learning", "pride", and "excitement" more frequently.

5. Discussion

The present qualitative study intended to unpack the types, causes, and consequences of EFL undergraduate students' perceived emotions in assessment. The results of the thematic analysis of interviews and narrative frames revealed that undergraduate EFL students experienced both positive and negative emotions during their assessment at the university. The most frequently experienced positive emotions were "excitement", "motivation", "joy", "happiness", "pride", and "confidence". On the other hand, "stress", "anxiety", "frustration", and "anger" were the most frequent negative emotions. The findings are in tune with Hill et al. (2021), who found that participants experienced "joy", "happiness", "excitement", "relief", and "pride" as positive emotions most frequently. Likewise, the participants claimed to experience negative emotional responses such as "stress", "frustration", "disappointment", "sadness', and "anger", as well. Furthermore, the findings are compatible with those of Christie and Morris (2021) who found "joy", "engagement", "pride", "excitement", and "enthusiasm" as the most frequent positive emotions. In addition, "anxiety" and "discomfort", as negative emotions, were experienced during assessment practices at the university.

The findings are attributable to the assessment landscape of Iranian universities that incurs different emotional responses in students. There is still damaging accountability pressure on undergraduate students in Iranian universities to pass traditional examinations. In many cases, the task structures and test formats run counter to scientific findings and students' expectations of a course. This claim echoes the socio-structural nature of emotions that change in relation to one's degree of familiarity and safety with a particular assessment strategy (Barbalet, 2002). Undergraduates may feel positive in relation to familiar test types rather than innovative assessment practices. Another justification can be the washback effect of classroom assessments in higher education. The assessment practices and methods that Iranian EFL teachers use in the class may produce negative and positive emotional responses in students. The emotional spectrum found in this study might be due to teachers' assessment knowledge, skills, and practices, too. Teachers are the key players in education and their assessment expertise and practice could be the reason behind students' perceived emotions in assessment.

Moreover, this study demonstrated that both positive and negative families of emotions in assessment emerged "before", "during", and "after" assessment practices. This implies that the whole assessment process is an emotional undertaking (Christie & Morris, 2021). Again, this finding can be ascribed to the assessment structure/culture of Iranian universities, which is emotion-inducing for stakeholders at the outset, in the middle, and at the end of assessment practices. It seems the emotional pressure involved in L2 assessment is overwhelming at undergraduate levels in Iranian universities. This study also identified that "teacher", "tasks", and "textbook" were the most frequent causes or antecedents of undergraduate EFL students' perceived emotions in assessment. The finding is consistent with previous research (Christie & Morris, 2021; Harland et al., 2015) that endorsed the role of teachers, tasks, and course materials in provoking assessment-related emotions in university students. This finding also reflects the collective, relational, mutual, and situated nature of assessment that generates various consequences for stakeholders as pinpointed by Boud et al. (2018). It also advocates a socio-material theorization of assessment that considers assessment as a purposeful, interactional, context-specific, and collective practice involving different individuals and material artifacts (Boud et al. (2018). The reason behind this finding can be the weak assessment literacy of EFL teachers in Iran that led to emotional dissatisfaction in students. Their weakness in choosing or developing proper test tasks and materials for the class might cause negative emotions in their pupils.

Another finding in this study was that depending on the type of perceived emotions, various outcomes appeared in students' academic life. Positive emotions were claimed to produce "motivation", "learning", "pride", and "excitement", while negative emotions led to "burnout", "frustration", "demotivation", "stress", and "self-doubt" in students. The findings support the CVT in that undergraduate students' perceived emotions are the outcome of their appraisal of assessment practices/contexts. Hence, their understanding and evaluation of achievement emotions and their outcomes might underpin these feelings and consequences. Empirically, the findings concur with those of Hill et al. (2021), who found that undergraduate students' emotions in assessment led to a sense of value, pride, appreciation, and confidence thanks to positive emotional experiences. However, the participants of their study argued that negative emotional experiences in assessment had caused demotivation and frustration and

lowered their self-confidence and self-esteem. The justifications for these multifarious consequences can be the assessment objectives and culture of higher education in Iran and teachers' assessment literacies. Additionally, undergraduate students' knowledge and awareness of the psychology of L2 assessment might cause the findings. All these possible factors required further investigations to be proved.

6. Conclusion and Implications

In view of the findings, it can be concluded that undergraduate students may experience different emotions in L2 assessment. Hence, it is tenable to contend that assessment is not a unilateral practice with teachers and test designers being the only players. Instead, students' emotions, voices, and engagement must be taken into consideration to reach success in academic assessment. This goal is achievable only through the assessment literacy development of EFL teachers in higher education. They need to hone their skills pertaining to the emotional side of L2 assessment. Moreover, it can be asserted that students' perceived emotions in assessment are the upshots of different triggers (e.g., teachers, peers, and test tasks). Depending on these antecedents, assessment-related emotions can lead to positive and negative outcomes for students and their learning processes, which signifies the fact that assessment is a socio-relational phenomenon that provokes various emotions.

The findings of this study can be significant for research and practice in educational psychology and assessment in higher education. First, the study enlightens prior theories related to emotions in L2 education, especially positive psychology and the CVT in that it extends their scope to assessment domains in higher education. Moreover, it enriches the literature by going beyond emotional dichotomies and unpacking the antecedents and outcomes of perceived emotions. Second, EFL teachers at universities can increase their capacities to detect students' emotions and adjust their assessment approaches to provoke positive emotions in students. They can realize that assessment is a process applied with students rather than to students. Hence, their use of non-judgmental, formative assessment tasks and practices can enhance students' emotional readiness and resilience. EFL teachers can also harness their skills to convert negative emotions to positive emotions via proper emotion-regulation strategies. The findings would be particularly momentous for undergraduate students in that they can understand their active role in assessment and learning processes. They can also identify effective self-regulation strategies to control their feelings by having classroom interactions and collaborative works. They can form a positive classroom rapport with their teachers and peers that facilitate positive emotions like belongingness, value, and respect and construct learner identities, which can omit power asymmetry in the class.

Third, universities might benefit from this research in that they can support their staff, faculty members, and instructors to improve their understanding of the psycho-emotional nature of assessment and students' affective dispositions. Educational programs can highlight how emotional sensitivity can lead to professionalism and sustainable assessment practices. By doing so, assessment policies and practices shift toward the emotional side of education in higher education. Fourth, the findings may contribute to the international knowledge base regarding emotions involved in L2 assessment. The current trends in this area are confined to

assessment methods and their influences on L2 students without considering their perceived emotions in such methods.

Fifth, L2 researchers can use this study as a guide to run further studies on the interface of emotions and assessment. They can investigate the emotional dynamics of L2 assessment in different disciplines, contexts, and cultures to identify variations. There is little scientific work on the mediating role of teacher-related variables (cognition, empowerment, reasoning, pedagogical content knowledge, digital assessment literacy, etc.) in students' perceived emotions in assessment. The impact of EFL teachers' assessment identity status on students' emotions is also an interesting line of inquiry (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2021a, 2022). The contribution of teacher professional development courses and interventions in improving university teachers' knowledge and practice of positive psychology in relation to assessment can also be explored in the future. Finally, future research is recommended to use mixed-methods designs to examine undergraduate students' emotion-regulation strategies in assessment.

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Appendix

Consent Form

I hereby declare that I voluntarily take part in this research project. I allow the researchers to use my answers as long as my privacy is respected and my identity remains anonymous. The researchers assured that the data will be used only in this study and remain confidential.

1. **Agree** to participate in this study ☐

2. **Disagree** to participate in this study ☐

Dear respondents, please complete the items using another color to type.

A) Interview Questions
Background Information
1. Age:
2. Gender
3. Major

Students' Perceptions of Emotions in Assessment

1. In light of the classroom assessments that you went through, what types of emotions (positive, negative) did you experience?
2. What are the causes of your emotional responses (positive, negative) that you experienced during classroom assessments?
3. In what ways do your perceived emotions in assessment influence your learning? Could you explain the consequences of such emotions?
4. Some emotions are temporary, while others remain for a long time. If you agree, which assessment emotions are stronger or long lasting? Why?

B) Narrative Frame

Regarding the emotions that you experienced during assessment practices, please kindly share two **real experiences** with us:

1) Positive Emotions

One of the situations that I as a student experienced positive emotions in assessment was when...

This experience was very significant because it made me feel .... This emotional experience influenced my education by causing ....

2) Negative Emotions

One of the situations that I as a student experienced negative emotions in assessment was when...

This experience was very significant because it made me feel .... This emotional experience influenced my education by causing ....