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# The Role of Student Assessment by Combined Assignments in Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Learners' satisfaction in using educational services is a broad topic and greatly interests many people. In this study, the author discusses higher education and how to evaluate students through combined assignments. The author surveyed, synthesized, and analyzed these combined assignments' roles for six reasons. They are (1) Combined Assignments save time, (2) Combined Assignments help to classify students more accurately, (3) Combined Assignments help students deepen their understanding of the subject, (4) Combined Assignments make assignments more interesting, (5) Combined Assignments help students remember lessons longer, and (6) Combined Assignments help better assess lecturers' pedagogical capacity. This result was obtained after the author surveyed and got valid answers from 300 students. The SPSS 26 software and descriptive statistics method were also used in the study. From there, it shows a very high level of student satisfaction with this method of incorporating exercises into teaching and learning at university. Along with that are several suggestions that the author has made to contribute to the above method being applied more widely and effectively, thereby improving the quality of higher education in general and higher education in Vietnam in particular.

*Keywords: Combined Assignments; Higher Education; Student Assessment*

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## 1. Introduction

Higher education and how students are assessed are familiar but never old issues. In Vietnam, colleges and universities are under the leadership and orientation of ministries and agencies, governing agencies such as the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, Finance, etc. However, each academic unit is proactive in implementing training programs and assessing students (Vu, 2016). Each student who wants to graduate from school needs to meet the general requirements of the Ministries and Sectors, on the number of subjects to complete, the number of credits, other provisions related to physical training, community activities, etc. (Nguyen & Craig, 2002). However, these are only general requirements; at each school, the decision-making will usually belong to the Faculty, Department, and even each teacher of a particular subject. This fact shows that diversity in student assessment is inevitable, and changes, if any, will be easier to make. The last problem is how to make that assessment suitable for students, promote the correct role of the evaluation, and not go wrong with the school's orientation in training.

In this article, the author has studied the assessment of students at several schools in Ho Chi Minh City. From that, to draw general judgments in assessing current students, limitations, and advantages, primarily through combined assignments. The author will carefully analyze the role of these combined assignments from the perspective of both experts and the assessment of the groups of students mentioned above, thereby contributing to increasing efficiency in education and training at the higher education level.

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## 2. Literature Reviews

There have been several studies on combined assignments in higher education and training, such as that of Alvarez et al. (2012). They believe that combining online learning methods with writing skills will help students achieve higher results and especially be able to remember lessons longer. Thus, this combined assessment always has excellent advantages for learners, although there are also difficulties for teachers.

In another study, Muchlas (2020) analyzed the role of the combination with e-portfolio assignments for vocational education master students during a pandemic. With the recent COVID-19 pandemic's remarkable effects, this method has maximized its role in accurately assessing learners' capabilities.

In Vietnam, Do (2018) also researched the role of building fast-paced music combination exercises for non-university majors. This study clearly showed that this combination significantly increased student performance. On the other hand, the student assessment is likely to be more comprehensive and more accurate.

Thus, we have not had any research focusing on analyzing combined exercises' critical role in Vietnam's higher education. This study will focus on exploring this role. In addition, some suggestions will also be recommended to improve the assessment methods further.

### 3. Methodology

The study was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The author has surveyed students in several universities and colleges in Ho Chi Minh City, such as Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, FPT University, FPT Polytechnic, Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City, etc. Then, the author has gotten all 300 valid answers. Since then, the author has used SPSS 26 software to perform the Paired-Samples T-Test. The author conducted the survey using a monthly questionnaire through different channels such as Messenger, Zalo, and Gmail.

Besides, the author also uses the descriptive statistics method. It is used to summarize or describe the essential characteristics of a set of data collected through empirical research, represented as a number or a visual graph (Sternstein, 2017). The most commonly used numerical tools in descriptive statistics are the mean and the standard deviation. In addition, other common indicators such as absolute numbers, relative numbers, and time series are also used to represent the magnitude of a phenomenon and its variability or to analyze relationships between variables and phenomena. In this study, the descriptive statistical method described the reasons students appreciated, thereby having a high level of satisfaction with the exercises performed in the combined form.

### 4. Research Results and Discussion

#### 4.1. Student satisfaction as assessed by combined assignments

This survey aims to check students' satisfaction when studying subjects in which teachers have combined assessment exercises. Parallel to that is the comparison with issues where the tests are still performed individually. To compare students' satisfaction when combined exercises and single exercises, we hypothesize  $H_0$ : *The average value of student satisfaction when assessed by combined assignments equals student satisfaction as assessed by individual assignments.* After collecting survey forms, coding, and entering data, the results are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Combined Assignments - Single Assignments	.967	.857	.049	.869	1.064	19.534	299	.000

The table above shows the test results, specifically, Sig. The t-test is equal to  $0.000 < 0.05$ , rejecting the hypothesis  $H_0$ ; that is, there is a statistically significant difference between the two variables, Combined Assignments, and Single Assignments. Student satisfaction levels when assessed by combined assignments and single assignments were different. The mean value is 0.967, i.e., positive; this means that the mean value of Combined Assignments is higher than Single Assignments; in other words, students have a higher level of satisfaction when assessed by combined assignments.

**Table 2.** Paired Samples Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics						
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Pair 1	Combined Assignments	5.47	300	1.352	.078	
	Single Assignments	4.50	300	1.482	.086	

Next, the Paired Samples Statistics (Table 2) provides information about the mean and standard deviation of the two variables, Combined Assignments, and Single Assignments. The column "Mean" represents the average rating of the two survey columns. It can be seen that, for Combined Assignments, student satisfaction has a higher value - 5.47, while for Single Assignments, it is only 4.50. Thus, it is clear that students are more satisfied with the assessment method through combined exercises.

**Table 3.** Paired Samples Correlations

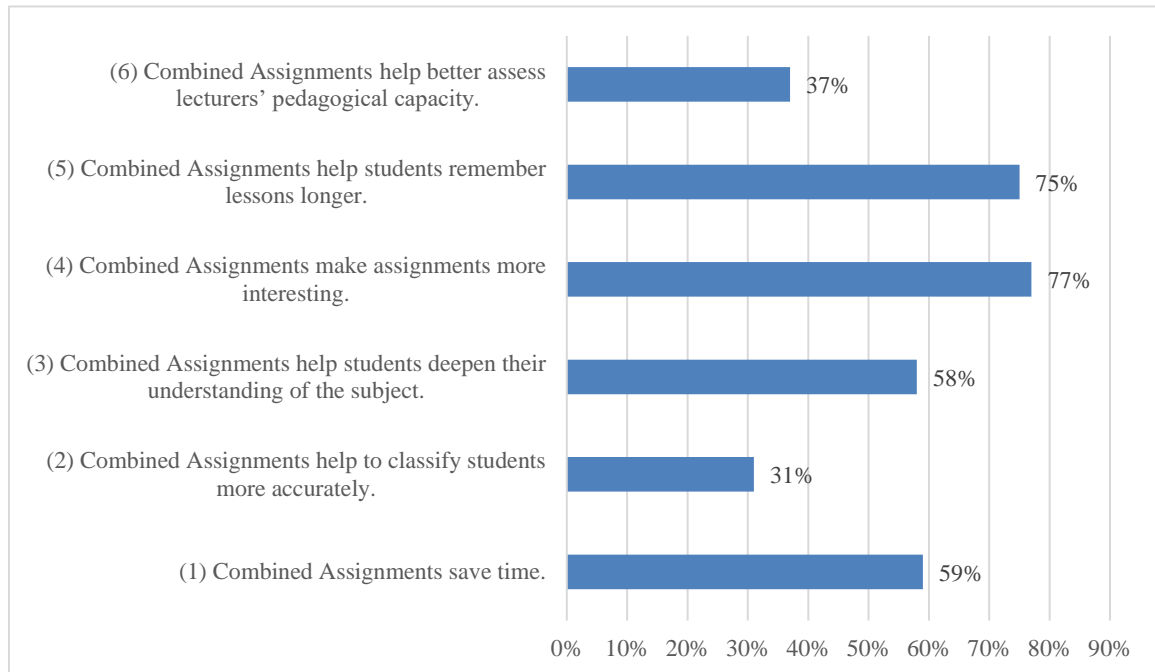
Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	CombinedAssignments & SingleAssignments	300	.821	.000

The Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations indicates a correlation in the data between two survey columns. And as we know, the correlation or non-correlation of the data has a causal relationship with the results of the Paired Sample T-Test. Sig value. Smaller than 0.05 means there is a correlation, conversely, if Sig. > 0.05, there is no correlation with each other. Specifically, in this case, Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05, so, the data of two variables Combined Assignments – Single Assignments is correlated with each other (Field, 2013).

#### 4.2. The role of combined assignments

So, why do students have high satisfaction with such combined exercises? The following are the top reasons.

**Figure 1.** Top reasons for satisfaction on Combined Assignments.



The above results show that more than 70% of students give reasons (4) and (5) because the combined exercises made them think more, discuss more (if they were group work), read more, compare and contrast more, and from there, they will surely remember the lesson longer. And, of course, during that process, they won't feel as tedious as if they were single exercises on a particular topic.

The time factor was also mentioned, with a relatively high number of picks of 59% (reason 1). For example, in teaching Business Communication, students will have an assignment on writing emails and an exercise on how to convey a negative message. Thus, a problem like "Do you often write an email to reject a partner's proposal about..." will be a compound exercise where students can save time for two different writing assignments. Reason (3) accompanies it, with a rate of 58%. Many students find that through such exercises. Students gain a deeper understanding of the topics studied for the straightforward reason that if they don't have deep knowledge, they won't be able to apply quite different theories on their own to various topics in the same exercise. For example, one group exercise was to write a Business Proposal. Thus, in this requirement, students must apply what they have learned in Business Writing, Design Thinking, Critical Thinking, etc.

The remaining three reasons (6) and (2) reached 37% and 31%, respectively, also showed quite an insight of contemporary students. From the student's perspective, they more or less understand what it means to be a teacher with experience in teaching or having a passion for the profession, and here, specifically, how to give appropriate exercises. Then, it isn't easy to be a teacher who is genuinely passionate about the work and aims to bring real value to students if he only gives all the individual exercises towards a particular topic. For example, to test your understanding of Vietnam's tourism geography, the test is just a test with 50 multiple-choice questions. Instead, we can combine a trial in which there are not only multiple-choice questions but also purely theoretical open-ended questions combined with questions expressing students' thinking and views. Then this will make the assessment and grading of the lecturers will need more time.

So, it is clear that schools need to have clear policies to recognize and encourage the efforts and investment of teachers in such cases. From there, they have more motivation and conditions to get good exercise, helping to evaluate students more accurately.

Besides, if considering and recognizing the importance of such combined exercises, faculties and departments need to develop specific assessment methods for lecturers to practice in each subject syllabus as a way for educators to check, detect, and maintain the effectiveness of student assessment.

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## 5. Conclusions

Combined assignments and their tremendous benefits in undergraduate assessment, as described above, are undeniable. This method is not all, but it will be a significant way to contribute to effective education. However, along with that importance, implementation has limitations, especially in the thinking of educational administrators, teachers, and learners. These backlogs most likely come from the management policies; the academic perspectives of the training units are somewhat outdated, afraid of new, and conservative. Therefore, as a reliable source, the article aims to bring new perspectives, progress, and outstanding efficiency to higher education worldwide and Vietnam in particular.

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