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Inclusive Language Testing for Migrant and Global Learners: Theory Meets Practice in English-Mediated Instruction

Kaizhi Chen [1], Ya Gao [1], Jing Zhou [1], Na Chen [1], Fatemeh Amiri [2], Ali Khodi [2,3] , Nodira Rakhimova [3]*

[1] *Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur 56000, Malaysia*

[2] *Institute of Languages, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur 56000, Malaysia*

[3] *Department of English Linguistics, Navoi State University, Navoi 210100, Uzbekistan*

ABSTRACT

The growing diversity in higher education necessitates evaluation methods that authentically reflect the abilities of all learners fairly including international and migrant students. This study aims to elucidate the existing gap between the theoretical ideals of standard evaluations—henceforth known as inclusive language testing and assessment (ILTA)—and their practical applications through a mixed-methods approach. The participants of this study were 50 international students who were randomly selected, with the number determined through power analysis. Data collection was accomplished using a researcher-designed survey employing a Likert scale, which was validated through a pilot study. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather further insights. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Findings of the present study reveal several critical issues: students express a strong need for assessments that provide flexible formats (e.g., oral, written, or project-based), with 90% of respondents agreeing that varied formats reduce anxiety and better capture their abilities. However, 68% report feeling unsupported in voicing assessment concerns, reflecting a lack of communication between educators and students. Additionally, only 10% of participants feel that their cultural backgrounds are considered in current assessments, highlighting the need for culturally relevant assessment content. Another issue highlighted in the findings is access to resources. Approximately 60% of students reported challenges, like limited digital access, which makes it difficult for them to participate effectively. The

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Ali Khodi, Institute of Languages, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur 56000, Malaysia; Department of English Linguistics, Navoi State University, Navoi 210100, Uzbekistan; Email: alikhodi92@gmail.com

findings underscore a pressing need for inclusive assessment advocating for sustainable assessments that enhance fairness, provide clear criteria, and foster a sense of belonging for diverse learners.

Keywords: EMI; Equality; Inclusive Language Testing and assessment (ILTA); Migrant Learner; Quality Education; Sustainability

1. Introduction

Communication in today's interconnected world is fueled by rapid advancements in technology; it is transcending geographical boundaries and experiencing fundamental transformation[1]. People, through communication, amplify their voice and further the sharing of cultural viewpoints as well as cross-cultural comprehension and empathy. A case of this cross-cultural and cross-national exchange of ideas happens in higher education institutes, which involves having international and migrant students who receive their instruction in English; generally, this is known as English-mediated instruction (EMI), which focuses only on the transfer of content to the learners, regardless of their diverse cultural backgrounds, race, ethnicity, and gender[2]. This approach underscores the critical role of effective communication tools and channels, emphasizing the need for students to enhance their ability to interact at higher levels. Given the rising global migration and educational mobility, higher education institutions require effective language and communication assessment tools and tests. While standardized tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, and PTE are known to be valid and reliable, there remain concerns about whether they embed implicit biases that disadvantage certain groups based on cultural background, native dialect, or socio-economic status within this international context of higher education[3]. Research conducted on the experiences of migrant learners shows that these biases can be particularly acute, while such studies are very rare regarding the experiences of migrant and immigrant students. Further research is needed to amplify their voices and perspectives. This gap in understanding is significant, as the standardization and cultural specificity of traditional assessments may fail to account for the complex realities these learners face, making it harder for them to fully demonstrate their language competence. Addressing these issues is crucial for developing fair and inclusive evaluation methods.

In light of these challenges, it is essential to explore innovative solutions that can better support diverse learners.

Thus, inclusive language testing and Assessment (ILTA) has emerged and aims at addressing systemic inequities and ensuring fairness[4, 5]. Inclusive language testing in this study aims to propose the creation of testing environments where individuals from all linguistic and cultural backgrounds (hereafter known as migrant, international learners) are given an equal chance of success. It merits attention that it goes beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and considers the diverse needs and experiences of learners, particularly those from migrant communities. This inclusivity is vital, as many challenges stem from Western norms and language practices that may not reflect the language forms or communicative strategies used by these individuals in their daily lives[6]. Migrant students, in particular, may encounter difficulties due to limited formal education or interruptions in their schooling, further exacerbating the inequalities they face in traditional assessment environments.

Recognizing these challenges emphasizes the importance of developing assessments that are not only equitable but also culturally relevant. The need for inclusive language testing goes beyond the mere technical aspects of assessment design; it reflects a broader commitment to educational equity, cultural responsiveness, and social justice. For international and migrant learners, English language assessments are not only a tool for evaluating language proficiency but also a gateway to broader opportunities in education, employment, and societal participation[7]. When assessments are designed without taking into account the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of these learners, they risk alienating and marginalizing learners. By contrast, ILTA seeks to recognize and celebrate linguistic diversity, validating the multiple language practices that international and migrant learners bring to the discussion[8]. It challenges the notion that proficiency in a standardized form of English is the sole indicator of language ability, promoting instead a more holistic understanding of language use that reflects real-world, functional communication skills.

In the context of English language testing, inclusivity

involves designing assessments that are both culturally and linguistically sensitive. This means creating test content that is free from cultural bias and reflects a range of real-life situations relevant to learners from diverse backgrounds[9]. For migrant learners, the integration of practical, everyday language tasks—such as filling out forms, understanding workplace instructions, or engaging in community activities—can make assessments more relevant and meaningful[10]. Additionally, flexibility in the format of assessments is critical for inclusivity. For example, offering options for oral, written, or project-based assessments allows learners to demonstrate their language proficiency in ways that align with their abilities, especially for those who may struggle with formal literacy skills due to interrupted education or linguistic histories. Equally important is the recognition that technology and access to resources play a significant role in language assessment[11]. Many migrant and international learners may face limited access to the technological infrastructure needed to take digital tests, particularly in remote or underserved locations. Inclusive language testing therefore involves addressing these barriers and providing multiple pathways for test-taking, such as paper-based alternatives or offering extra support in navigating online platforms[12].

Furthermore, ILTA must strive to provide transparency and fairness in the evaluation process[13]. International and migrant learners often come from educational systems with different assessment norms and may be unfamiliar with how their language skills will be evaluated. Clear communication of the test's structure, purpose, and evaluation criteria is essential to ensure that these learners understand what is expected of them and can perform to their full potential[14].

ILTA also prioritize providing detailed, constructive feedback that helps learners understand their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering their confidence and motivation to continue developing their language skills[15].

At its core, ILTA not only contributes to the enhancement of the validity and reliability of assessments but also fosters an environment of empowerment and belonging at the same time. For migrant and international students, language testing often serves as a critical step in gaining access to education, work, and social inclusion in a new country[16]. By adopting inclusive testing practices, educators and assessment developers can ensure that these learners are not unfairly judged based on narrow, prescriptive norms but are instead evaluated in a way that honors and reflects their unique linguistic journeys[17]. ILTA plays a transformative role in promoting social justice and equity, particularly for migrant and international learners navigating the complexities of English language acquisition[18]. This approach not only benefits learners but also enriches the educational environment. By embracing flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and fairness in assessment design, language tests can evolve from being gatekeepers of opportunity to enablers of success for individuals from all walks of life[19]. As global migration continues to shape the educational landscape, the need for assessments that account for linguistic diversity and ensure equitable access to opportunities has never been more urgent. Through inclusive practices, language assessment can become a tool for empowerment, fostering meaningful participation and success for all learners, regardless of their background[20].

The increasing presence of migrant and global learners indicates the need to address challenges in traditional language testing[21, 22]. These learners encounter various language and cultural challenges when relocating to new countries, which makes it essential to enhance their assessment methods. They frequently use multiple languages and blend different communication styles (i.e., translanguaging) to meet their needs[23]. However, when evaluating their performance in standard tests, they are required to demonstrate their ability in only one language to avoid penalties for helpful practices like switching between languages[24]. At the same time, many of these assessments include content that does not reflect the diverse backgrounds of learners, which can disadvantage international and migrant students[25]. This is especially important for learners looking for jobs or trying to fit into new communities, as the tests often don't reflect their real experiences and skills. These assessments can create barriers to employment and social integration, as they fail to account for the rich linguistic and cultural skills learners possess. Ignoring their skills and the challenges of moving can make multilingualism seem like a problem rather than a strength. To be fair, we need to change testing methods to be more culturally aware and aligned with the diverse experiences of global learners. This shift promotes equity and recognizes the value of multilingualism in today's interconnected world. Thus, this paper aims to address these concerns by proposing inclusive language testing and exploring the

following research questions:

1.1. Research Questions

1. How do the perceptions and experiences of migrant and international students in English-mediated instruction settings shape their understanding and utilization of inclusive language testing practices?
a. What challenges do these students face in traditional language assessments, and how do these challenges influence their perceptions of inclusive testing?
b. How do their linguistic and cultural backgrounds affect their expectations of fair and inclusive language testing?
c. To what extent do their prior educational experiences shape their trust in alternative assessment methods?
2. What are the preferences of migrant and international students regarding inclusive language testing practices, and how do these preferences impact their engagement and performance?
a. What specific features (e.g., translanguaging allowances, culturally relevant content) do students prioritize in inclusive assessments?
b. How does the inclusion of multilingual or multicultural elements in testing affect their confidence and performance?
c. What barriers (e.g., institutional policies, test design) hinder the adoption of their preferred assessment methods?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Dual Role of Assessment in International Education

As the internationalization of education expands and institutions increasingly serve both migrant and international students (while acknowledging the slight differences between these terms, we will use them interchangeably in this paper), education is increasingly conceptualized as a dual-faceted phenomenon. One side represents instruction and its quality, while the other side signifies evaluation as a crucial component of the educational process[26]. Assessment in higher education can play various roles, often more significant than instruction itself. Assessment is utilized at two levels: to admit individuals into programs and to assess their performance once they are enrolled[27]. Thus, assessment is a vital feature;

however, it sometimes fails to meet standard requirements because it is designed for a specific demographic.

Those taking these tests and participating in these assessments often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, different countries, and varying ages and genders. Nowadays, we are facing concerns that administering a uniform version of a test to all learners does not work the same for every candidate. Additionally, the concept of the internationalization of education, encompassing international students and migrants, adds further complexity to this issue. This arises from diversity and variety in demographic factors such as race, gender, and culture, which are critical in determining the quality of test performance[28]. Regardless of whether the test is for admissions, final evaluations, or formative assessment, these factors are always influential and present. Such disparities can lead to significant differences in outcomes. In classrooms, we often encounter similar challenges. Students from linguistically diverse backgrounds may struggle not only with the learning process but also when it comes time to demonstrate what they've learned on final exams[29]. This can be elucidated by the fact that while classroom assessments tend to be more straightforward, final assessments can become quite complicated. One proposed solution to overcome these challenges is adopting inclusive assessment, which complements inclusive education[30]. Inclusive Learning and Teaching Assessment (ILTA) is defined as a fair and just way of evaluating and examining learning that not only achieves the objectives of measurement but also meets the desired outcomes of a course program. It aims to provide grades that accurately represent students' understanding by recognizing the diversity in learning types, formats, and levels of comprehension as well as varied demographic profiles. Therefore, inclusive education encourages the use of different evaluation methods to assess student achievement based on their strengths while mitigating the impact of construct-irrelevant factors, which include the background and demographic characteristics of test takers, within internal education systems and contexts[31]. This approach provides students with equal and fair opportunities, irrespective of their backgrounds, cultural values, and other factors. In small classroom settings, educators can more easily implement tailored assessments. They can easily consider the linguistic backgrounds and cultural values of the participants[32]. However, with large-scale assessments and

standardized testing, the issue becomes more complex. In this instance, it is fervently advised that norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests should be differentiated in terms of their inclusiveness[33]. For instance, in classroom settings, techniques such as meaningful and authentic assessment can provide a comprehensive view of students' skills while valuing their differences and highlighting their capacities; in contrast, large-scale standardized assessments like TOEFL or IELTS, which specifically assess the language abilities of learners from diverse backgrounds, present challenges regarding the implementation of this inclusiveness[34].

2.2. Challenges of Inclusive Assessment: Classroom vs. Standardized Testing

With regard to the fact that standardized testing is based on comparing students' performance with that of their classmates on the same test, there should be a clear framework for its development and construction procedures. It is important to highlight that the performance of an individual on the test may be affected by personal characteristics such as identity, background, language, or race. This is emphasized in the research and is crucial because it not only provides insight into the learning processes of students but also affects the validity of the test. Standardized testing serves as a useful instrument to assess the effectiveness of instruction and the relevance of the test itself in English-mediated classrooms[35], where students seek to improve their achievements related to classroom content. In these norm-referenced tests, students are compared to others, and when this comparison occurs, any factors affecting performance can have serious consequences; for instance, bias in the assessment procedure may result in students losing valuable opportunities[36].

Addressing these biases is essential for fair evaluation. This bias is easier to manage in classroom assessments but is more pronounced in standardized testing[37]. Therefore, inclusive assessment strategies are more relevant here, providing teachers with tools to address these issues. It is essential to highlight the need for inclusivity in standardized testing as well to eliminate biases that may exist in criterion-referenced assessment procedures. Several factors need to be incorporated into this inclusive approach to achieve the highest levels of generalizability, validity, and reliability in standardized assessment[38]. For example, as students grow accustomed to the test format and conditions over time, they can reap the benefits of a supportive assessment environment[39]. Contrary to standardized norm-referenced testing, performance assessment offers a greater chance for inclusivity and is easier to design in an inclusive manner. This shift can enhance student engagement and outcomes.[40]. In this method, the assessment is open, allowing for simulations and iterations of performance. This approach provides more opportunities for students to incorporate their prior knowledge, preferences, backgrounds, and skills in various ways into the test and their performance. In fact, this type of assessment places the responsibility for learning on students and provides them with opportunities to engage in activities that embrace diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences[41]. In this process, students are involved in their learning, and sometimes this assessment occurs concurrently with the learning activities. Moreover, the assessment is linked to the knowledge and preferences of the students.

For students from cultural or language minority backgrounds, some disadvantages can be neutralized because the interconnectivity between students' backgrounds and the assessment can be controlled and adjusted by the teacher[42]. This allows for easier management and improvement in the assessment process. One of the advantages of inclusive assessment approaches is their flexibility in promoting equitable learning experiences. Several studies have shown that offering students options in topics, formats, or languages can enhance their sense of belonging and respect for their diverse backgrounds. For example, offering a choice of language made South African students feel that their linguistic diversity was valued in the assessment of content courses, though this impact was limited to certain subjects in EMI and did not extend to English tests. Nevertheless, fostering inclusivity remains essential despite these challenges. However, despite the consideration of diversity being an advantage, challenges still exist. Students often struggle to obtain accommodations or encounter rigid assessment structures in content and language integrated instruction and assessment settings[43].

2.3. Toward a Framework for Inclusive Language Testing and Assessment

For ILTA, there have been a number of advantages, including socio-emotional benefits such as improved self-esteem and reduced anxiety for linguistically diverse students[44]. However, some concerns persist about the need to

disclose disabilities to access accommodations. It is believed that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles should be applied to assessment design, regardless of the student population, with co-design of assessments fostering a sense of belonging and motivation[45]. These qualities are required and could be met in assessments. Additionally, ongoing monitoring of adjustments and staff education on supporting diverse students are essential. Policies should reduce the need for constant self-disclosure of conditions and better support innovative assessment practices. This emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive approach to inclusive assessment design, moving beyond simply providing assessment choices, not only in EMI instruction and CLIL but also for language tests[46]. This aspect is often overlooked in the existing literature; those studies that have addressed it focused more on content instruction and inclusive assessment, taking into account the preferences and priorities of instructors and test developers while not offering choices that can enhance student s' experiences and preferences. Thus, in terms of the definition of inclusive language assessment in general and inclusive language assessments in particular, there is no consensus. It must be aligned with learning outcomes and teaching activities through techniques like clear exemplars and detailed rubrics, following the principles of constructive alignment[47]. Based on that, this study aims to investigate and present students' understandings, viewpoints, preferences, and concerns about inclusive language assessment. The importance of considering the social and individual impacts of assessment (consequential validity) highlights the need for further research into the long-term effects of inclusive assessment strategies. The limited evidence base suggests a need for more systematic implementation and exploration of inclusive assessment, particularly through intersectional lenses that account for the diverse backgrounds of equity group students. Thus, this study aims to address these concerns and present illustrations. Ultimately, this concept remains a matter of discussion and needs further exploration. To the knowledge of the researcher, there is a lack of sufficient studies to fill this gap.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This is a mixed-methods study that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The quali-

tative part of the study includes short interviews with migrant students in higher education, studying both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. For the quantitative phase, a survey was distributed among the migrant students to investigate their concepts, preferences, attitudes, beliefs, and challenges regarding inclusive assessment. The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach is that it provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either method alone. The survey was shared online with participants through social media. Those who were willing filled out the survey at their convenience, with no time limitations imposed. Surveys that were incomplete (i.e., with less than 50% of items answered) were not considered for analysis. Once participants completed the survey and submitted their responses, they had the opportunity to express their interest in participating in an interview. From those who expressed interest, a purposive selection was made for follow-up interviews. This combination of methods allows for a comprehensive analysis of the students' experiences.

This study uses an exploratory sequential design, represented in **Figure 1**, which is especially useful in educational research when exploring complex topics like inclusive assessment. This design allows researchers to first gather detailed insights from participants before creating and testing surveys[48]. This ensures that the survey tools are suitable for different cultures and contexts. For migrant students, whose experiences with language testing can differ greatly, this approach helps capture a range of perspectives before applying the findings to a larger group. By mixing in-depth qualitative data with broader quantitative data, this design enhances the study's validity and increases its usefulness in real educational settings. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach provides a richer understanding of the challenges faced by students.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the present study were undergraduate and postgraduate international or migrant students studying in Malaysia. A total of 50 students from different nationalities participated in this study, pursuing degrees in Education, Language Education, TESOL, TEFL, or Linguistics at the B.A., Master's, or Ph.D. level. The nationalities of the students included Chinese, Arab, and African students, with ages ranging from 18 to 30 years. The first language was not

a matter of interest since all participants communicated in English. The criterion for selection was having at least one year of relevant experience. This number was determined based on the results of power analysis, which considered the number of variables, the universe of generalization, and the desired level of confidence in the findings. Efforts were made to optimize the number of participants to the highest possible level, taking into account existing conditions and limitations. The students were recruited online. The participants for the interview comprised of 5 students that is 10% of the total number of participants. Once they completed the survey, they could express their interest, willingness, and consent to participate in an online interview. From among those who expressed interest, 5 participants were selected randomly for the interview phase.
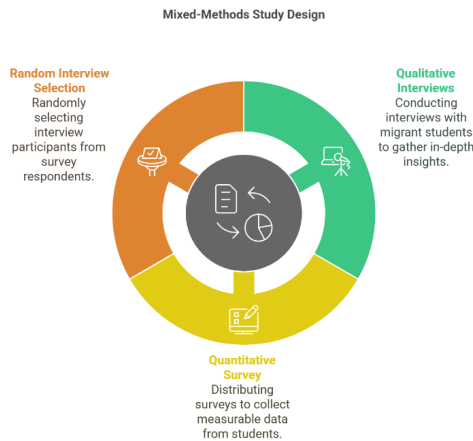

Figure 1. Mixed Method Study Desing.

The sample for this study was intentionally diverse to represent the wider group of migrant students in English-speaking higher education. Participants came from several Asian countries: Malaysia (10%), China (40%), India (35%), Vietnam (10%), and Indonesia (5%). Most were from China and India. We believe this mix matches global trends in higher education, where students from these countries are common in English-speaking schools. Although the participants spoke different native languages, all were proficient in English at a pre-intermediate (B1) level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This ensured they had enough language skills to understand the survey and interview questions. This level of English was important to keep responses consistent while still highlighting the challenges faced by learners who are not fully fluent. By

including students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds—with similar English skills—the findings provide insights into both shared and unique experiences of migrant learners, making the study relevant to similar educational settings. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of their diverse challenges.

3.3. Instruments

The following instruments have been used for this study, including a survey and interview protocols, which were designed to gather comprehensive data on participants' experiences and perceptions regarding inclusive assessment practices.

3.3.1. Survey

The survey was designed by the researchers and a group of three experts and lecturers who have at least five years of experience teaching and working in international higher education institutions, specifically with migrant and international students in the humanities and social sciences. It used a Likert scale (1 to 5) and consisted of 11 themes with a total of 20 items, along with additional Likert scales, to measure attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and challenges related to ILTA. Demographic questions were included to capture relevant background information (e.g., age, gender, nationality, and level of study). The survey was validated, and reliability was checked in a pilot study involving 10 migrant students of both genders, with an interrater reliability of 0.85 calculated for the survey. To ensure the reliability and validity of the survey, a generalizability and associated dependability analysis were conducted. The G-coefficient was 0.81, and during optimization, the number of items was adjusted to achieve the highest possible reliability index in the construction and development process of the survey. An open-access software package, known as the EduG software package (https://edug-e.software.informer.com/), was used for further analysis of reliability.

The survey items were developed systematically through a multi-stage process which allows us to ensure construct validity of the items. First, a preliminary set of questions was drafted based on a review of existing literature on ILTA[49]. These items were then refined through iterative discussions with a panel of three experts in international higher education, each with over five years of expe-

rience teaching migrant students. To ground the survey in learner perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five international students, and their feedback informed adjustments to wording, scope, and cultural appropriateness. The revised survey was piloted with the same 10 migrant students (balanced for gender and region), and inter-rater reliability (0.85) was calculated to ensure consistency. Further refinements were made to eliminate ambiguities, and a generalizability analysis (G-coefficient = 0.81) was conducted using the EduG software package to optimize item count and reliability. This rigorous process—combining expert input, literature grounding, learner feedback, and statistical validation—aligns with best practices in instrument development[50].

3.3.2. Interview

This study included semi-structured interviews with guidelines specifying that each question would receive a maximum of five minutes. The questions were open-ended, focusing on participants' personal experiences with testing, the challenges they faced, their needs, and their preferences. A total of 15 questions were initially proposed by the research committee; however, ultimately, 8 questions were included for the study. These 8 questions were polished and revised by the committee to ensure they met the content and construct validity requirements. Participants had the flexibility to mix their answers to **two specific questions.** At the beginning of the session, a list of questions was provided to them, and they were given 5 minutes to think about their responses.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed through a systematic four-stage validation process. First, the research team conducted a comprehensive literature review on language assessment challenges for migrant learners, identifying key thematic areas (testing fairness, cultural bias, and accommodation needs). Based on these findings, the team drafted 15 open-ended questions covering these domains. These questions then underwent expert review by a panel of three applied linguists specializing in language assessment (each with 10+ years' experience in EMI contexts), who evaluated them for content validity using a 4-point relevance scale (1=irrelevant to 4=essential). Questions scoring below 3.5 were eliminated or reformulated. The remaining 10 questions were piloted in cognitive interviews with 5 international students (representing the study's target demographics), with researchers recording comprehension difficulties and response patterns. Final revisions produced 8 optimized questions that maintained conceptual coverage while improving clarity, as confirmed by a second expert review achieving 92% inter-rater agreement on question appropriateness. This rigorous development process ensured the protocol effectively elicited meaningful data within the constrained interview timeframe.

4. Findings

To explore participants' attitudes, preferences, problems, and barriers related to assessment methods in education, the survey was administered. The results in **Table 1** present these aspects based on data collected from 50 participants, highlighting their perceptions of inclusivity, effectiveness, and support in evaluation practices.

Table 1. Questionnaire Results.

Theme	*NO*	*Item*	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Completely Agree
Attitudes	1	I feel that assessment methods should accommodate diverse learning styles and backgrounds.	0	10	40	30	20
	2	I believe that assessments designed with flexibility can help reduce anxiety during evaluations.	0	0	22	30	48
	3	I believe that assessment practices should promote fairness and equal opportunities for all students.	0	0	2	38	60
	4	I understand the importance of adapting assessments to meet the varied needs of all learners.	0	20	24	30	26

Table 1. *Cont.*

Theme	NO	Item	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Completely Agree
	5	I believe that assessments should reflect and value diverse perspectives and experiences.	0	0	18	22	60
Preferences	6	I prefer assessments that allow for various formats (e.g., written, oral, project-based).	6	18	30	28	18
	7	I prefer assessments that reflect real-world scenarios relevant to my experiences.	30	20	16	14	20
	8	I believe that flexibility in assessment formats can lead to better performance.	24	22	8	18	28
	9	I feel supported by my instructors in expressing my concerns about assessments.	38	30	10	12	10
	10	I believe that more training for instructors on effective assessment practices would benefit students.	0	0	8	12	80
Problems	11	I have experienced challenges in understanding assessment criteria used in my courses.	0	8	44	10	38
	12	I often face language barriers that affect my performance in assessments.	0	28	24	18	30
	13	I find traditional assessments (e.g., multiple-choice tests) limit my ability to demonstrate my knowledge.	30	10	6	16	38
	14	I feel that feedback from assessments is constructive and helps me improve.	0	4	16	24	56
	15	I have experienced challenges in understanding assessment criteria used in my courses.	0	0	0	18	82
Barriers	16	I find it difficult to access necessary resources (e.g., technology, materials) for completing assessments.	0	2	10	28	60
	17	I believe that my cultural background is considered in the assessment process.	50	28	12	0	10
	18	I am comfortable expressing my preferences regarding assessment methods to my instructors.	56	28	16	0	0
	19	I believe that my peers' diverse backgrounds enhance the assessment process.	0	28	38	34	0
	20	I feel that my unique learning needs are addressed in current assessment practices.	40	30	22	8	0

The findings indicate a strong inclination toward assessment practices that accommodate diverse learning styles, with 90% of respondents partially or fully agreeing that such methods are essential. Additionally, about 78% of test takers strongly believe that flexibility in assessments can reduce anxiety, and there is consensus among them calling for flexible assessment types. Interestingly, 98% of participants emphasized the need for fairness and equal opportunities in tests and assessments, which is crucial and demonstrates a significant need for modification in this area. However, challenges remain, particularly in understanding assessment criteria, with 52% reporting difficulties. This suggests there may be miscommunication or misunderstanding between test developers and test takers regarding the criteria, which may

stem from cultural differences, knowledge levels, or backgrounds and needs to be addressed seriously. Furthermore, a significant number of students (60%) find it hard to access necessary resources, highlighting the need for improved support and communication from instructors. It is evident that in some cultures, students tend to be more independent, while in others, they are more dependent on instructors for support and information, which may lead to difficulties.

Despite recognizing the value of diverse perspectives in assessments, 68% of respondents feel unsupported in voicing their concerns, indicating a communication gap with educators. While 80% advocate for more training for instructors on effective assessment practices, only 10% believe their cultural backgrounds are considered in the assessment process. Overall, the data reveal a clear demand for assessments that are flexible, fair, and sensitive to the unique needs of all learners. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more equitable and supportive educational environment. About 30% of test takers experienced language barriers that hindered their performance; traditional methods, such as multiple-choice tests, were seen as limiting by 66% of respondents, suggesting a preference for diverse formats. However, 80% felt that feedback from assessments was constructive, underscoring the importance of quality feedback in the learning process.

Notably, students face significant barriers in assessments. About 60% reported difficulties accessing necessary resources, such as technology and materials, which hinder their ability to complete assessments effectively. Additionally, 50% expressed concerns that their cultural backgrounds are not adequately considered in the assessment items, highlighting the need for more inclusive practices. Furthermore, 84% felt uneasy about expressing their views to instructors regarding assessment questions, indicating a lack of comfort in communicating their preferences. While 72% acknowledged respecting the diverse backgrounds of their peers, they noted that differences between themselves and instructors may affect performance, as assessors feel more connected to classmates from similar backgrounds. Only 30% felt their unique learning needs were addressed in assessments, revealing a gap in understanding between educators' perceptions and those of the students, which may stem from cultural differences. These findings underscore the necessity for educational institutions to enhance resource accessibility and

foster an inclusive environment that values diversity and individual learning requirements. Finally, the analytical analyses of the data obtained from the surveys show that the reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha was 0.841, indicating good reliability, as the items consistently measure an underlying construct. Most items exhibit moderate positive correlations with the overall survey score (0.3 to 0.4), suggesting meaningful contributions. Items 15 and 17 have lower correlations (<0.3), indicating they may be less aligned with the survey's objectives. The Pearson correlation matrix reveals moderate correlations among several items, with no extreme correlations (>0.7), ensuring no redundancy; notable correlations include Items 4 & 5 (0.42) and Items 12 & 16 (0.45). Cluster analysis identified three student segments: Cluster 1 (23 students) rated items moderately to highly (mostly 3–4), Cluster 2 (18 students) skipped items and provided lower ratings (mostly 2), and Cluster 3 (15 students) exhibited mixed responses (both 4–5 and 1–2), highlighting varying engagement levels. Overall, the data reveals a strong belief among students that assessment practices should accommodate diverse learning styles. To validate these findings, interviews were conducted with students, revealing key themes related to their experiences. These themes were analyzed and summarized in **Table 2**.

The theme analysis shows a clear discrepancy in students' experiences and perceptions of ILTA practices. One significant challenge identified was the difficulty in understanding assessment criteria, with many students expressing confusion about expectations set by instructors. This aligns with survey findings, where 38% of respondents reported similar struggles. To mitigate this issue, students suggested clearer communication and thorough explanations of assessment criteria during class. Language barriers emerged as another critical challenge impacting students' assessment experiences. One student articulated frustration with the teacher's accent, stating, "Oh my God, the accent that the teacher has is terrible, so I cannot understand what he's telling us." This sentiment reflects a broader concern among students who feel isolated when they cannot comprehend classroom discussions or assignments, especially when peers share cultural contexts they do not. Additionally, students mentioned difficulties when instructors provided resources that were not culturally relevant, which exacerbated their feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

Table 2. Interview Themes.

Theme	NO	Item
Challenges in Assessment	1	What challenges have you faced in assessments, and how do you think these challenges could be addressed?
Language Barriers	2	How have language barriers impacted your assessment experience, and what suggestions do you have for improving this situation?
Support from Instructors	3	In what ways do you feel supported by your instructors regarding assessment methods? What additional support would you find helpful?
Assessment Formats	4	What types of assessment formats do you prefer, and why do you think they are more effective for your learning?
Cultural Considerations	5	How do you feel your cultural background is considered in the assessment process? What improvements could be made?
Feedback on Assessments	6	How constructive do you find the feedback you receive on your assessments, and how could it be improved to better support your learning?
Access to Resources	7	What difficulties have you encountered in accessing resources necessary for completing assessments, and how could this be improved?
Real-World Relevance	8	How important is it for assessments to reflect real-world scenarios, and can you provide an example where this was beneficial or lacking?

Many students desiring additional guidance regarding assessment methods that is known here as "support from instructors; while some praised instructors for contextual and cultural examples, others felt unsupported when expressing their assessment preferences. One student noted they appreciated instructors who explained concepts multiple times and used relatable examples, while others felt alienated when assessments relied on culturally specific knowledge. A strong preference for diverse assessment formats, such as project-based or oral assessments was found among the learns, believing these allow for a more comprehensive demonstration of their knowledge. This preference also correlates with survey results indicating that 66% of students found traditional assessment methods limiting. Approximately 80% of respondents found feedback on assessments constructive,

interviews revealed a desire for more personalized and actionable insights.

Cultural considerations were also crucial, as students shared their feelings about how their backgrounds are recognized in the assessment. Access to necessary resources was another challenge, with participants highlighting difficulties and suggesting ways to improve resource availability. Overall, these findings underscore the need for educational institutions to enhance communication, provide better access to resources, and develop assessments that reflect real-world scenarios, ultimately fostering a more equitable learning environment for all students. To achieve this, institutions must prioritize inclusivity in their assessment protocols. In the following section, the number of respondents' sample answers to the questions is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Sample Interview Responses.

Theme	Sample Response
Challenges	*One of the things that I always think about is whether the question that I have been asked is fair to me or not. The question that was asked of my classmate was totally different, and he also knows something about it because he lives here, while I don't know anything. So, it's not fair to me.*
	The teacher shows pictures, such as astronauts, in the classroom to explain concepts. However, when I don't know what the picture is or who it represents, I struggle to explain it. My classmate understands because he shares the context with their future, but I feel lost in that situation,
	He asks us to go and search the net but the database is that he gives are in Chinese how can Ido this Google translate is always wrong about these things and I really feel this spread when it comes to this situation because I cannot read I cannot understand and we can do the sign oh my god I have lost the mark for this
Language barrier	*Oh my god, the accent that the teacher has is terrible, so I cannot understand what he's telling us. There are some people in the class who stand out because they are from the same country as the teacher, but I'm a foreigner and have difficulty understanding. I feel like I'll be seen as the bad guy or the weakest student because of this.*
	Can communicate with a teacher and the classroom very difficultly because whatever I say will be misunderstood by him he doesn't understand what they say and he says that I have given the wrong answer I don't know what is he doing what language is speaking in quite bad experience

Table 3. *Cont.*

Theme	Sample Response
Cultural consideration	*I especially struggle with the examples that the teacher gives, which are often quite popular in Malaysia. Since I'm not familiar with them, I don't understand the context. Sometimes, I see the other students laughing, but to me, it's not funny—I just feel neutral. It seems like they know something that I don't, and that makes me feel left out.*
	I feel very lucky to have Mr. X in the classroom teaching us. Whatever he says feels quite familiar to me. I don't understand why others complain that he isn't a good teacher; perhaps they don't understand him. But I really appreciate the way he teaches, and I find his style effective.
Assessment Format	*What a great difference we have here! When I was in my country, I never faced such interactive questions. This is quite new to me, and I cannot communicate with them. This is the first time I'm experiencing this. Oh my god, if I answer one question, I'm afraid I will answer all the questions wrongly. It's quite stressful!*
	It's really frustrating that some questions are only worth two marks, especially when they give a lot of marks to questions that are quite typical. If they continue to assign this amount of marks to easier questions, all the students will end up getting full marks. They need to think about this and revise it because it's not fair to give a lot of marks to easy questions.
Support From Instructor	*We all should thank Mr J because when we ask we have not understood the point he will try to explain to us again and again giving examples before quite familiar to us he uses internet very well is quite supportive teacher for providing contextual and cultural example that we can easily understand tell us students ask him he will give a different answer and different examples this is perfect.*

Table 3 highlighted the challenges students face in their educational experiences, particularly concerns about fairness in assessments and significant language barriers that hinder understanding. Students emphasized the need for more culturally sensitive and adaptable assessment practices, while also valuing supportive instructors who foster an inclusive environment.

5. Discussion

The findings highlight several critical aspects of inclusive assessment, which are particularly relevant in contexts involving migrant and international learners. These aspects underscore the importance of creating fair, accessible, and culturally sensitive assessments to ensure equal opportunities for all students. One key issue is the need for fairness, which calls for removing cultural bias from test content[48]. This concern is especially significant in English-Mediated Instruction (EMI) contexts, where non-native speakers of English may struggle with tests designed for native English speakers. For example, many students in the survey pointed out that assessment tasks often favor those familiar with local knowledge, while migrant students face disadvantages due to unfamiliarity with specific cultural or social norms. This reflects broader issues in EMI settings, where the use of English as the medium of instruction can unintentionally exclude students who may not have had the same cultural or linguistic exposure as their peers[51].

The need for flexibility in assessments, as revealed by the survey results, is another critical theme. A significant proportion of students (78%) believed that flexible assessment formats could reduce anxiety and improve performance. This flexibility is essential in EMI contexts, where language barriers and cultural differences can intensify test anxiety. In these cases, offering diverse assessment formats—such as oral exams, project-based assessments, or real-world tasks—can give students more options to demonstrate their abilities. Traditional assessments, particularly those relying heavily on reading and writing in English, may not always be appropriate for migrant students who are still developing their proficiency in the language. In fact, 66% of respondents found multiple-choice tests limiting, emphasizing the need for alternative formats that allow for more dynamic expressions of knowledge, especially in EMI settings where language proficiency might influence test outcomes.

Another significant finding is the students' perception of instructor support, especially in understanding assessment criteria. Over half of the respondents (52%) reported difficulties in comprehending how they were being evaluated. In EMI environments, this challenge can be exacerbated by the language used to explain the assessment criteria, where both linguistic and cultural gaps may widen the miscommunication between teachers and students. It is essential that instructors in EMI settings not only use clear and simple language but also provide examples that resonate with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the concept of validity and reliability in tests becomes crucial, particularly in EMI, where assessments must fairly evaluate the

skills and knowledge of learners across varying educational and linguistic levels. Clear communication about assessment criteria is critical to ensuring that migrant learners do not feel disadvantaged by misunderstandings or by the assumption that they share the same educational background as native students[52]. Accessibility and equity for multilingual learners are other pivotal areas for discussion. In line with inclusive assessment principles, it is essential that EMI assessments offer multilingual support where feasible. Survey respondents overwhelmingly favoured glossaries or translated instructions to help mitigate language barriers, a request echoed in the interviews where students mentioned struggling with test instructions. EMI contexts can create significant challenges for students whose first language is not English, and incorporating multilingual resources or offering assessments in both digital and paper-based formats can help bridge these gaps. By accommodating a wider range of linguistic backgrounds, EMI can be made more inclusive and accessible.

Cultural sensitivity is another essential factor in creating inclusive assessments[53], especially in EMI. The findings showed that only 10% of students believed their cultural backgrounds were considered in assessment processes. This underscores the need for assessments to reflect a global perspective rather than favoring local cultural references that may alienate migrant learners. In EMI settings, ensuring that test content is culturally neutral or globally relevant is key to preventing students from being disadvantaged by unfamiliar cultural contexts.

Moreover, the concept of English-Mediated Instruction (EMI) intersects with real-world relevance in assessments, especially for migrant students[54]. The survey findings showed that students prefer tasks that mirror real-life scenarios. In EMI environments, tests that assess language use in authentic contexts—such as navigating public services, workplace communication, or participating in community activities—can be more effective than abstract language exercises. This approach not only enhances the practical application of language skills but also helps migrant learners integrate better into their new societies[55]. The findings provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and needs of students in diverse, EMI-driven classrooms, particularly those with multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. ILTA practices must address fairness, accessibility, flexibility, and

cultural sensitivity, ensuring that tests are free from bias and reflective of a broad range of experiences. In EMI contexts, special attention should be paid to providing support for non-native English speakers, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged by language or cultural barriers. Incorporating diverse assessment formats, clear communication about criteria, and multilingual resources are essential for fostering an equitable learning environment. By addressing these issues, educational institutions can create assessments that not only measure student knowledge and skills accurately but also promote inclusivity and fairness in increasingly globalized and multicultural academic settings.

Figure 2 illustrates the analytical techniques employed for the survey analysis results. The findings from the survey reveal diverse perspectives on assessment practices among participants, as illustrated in the frequency table (**Table 2**). Notably, Item 1, which addresses the need for assessment methods to accommodate diverse learning styles, received a substantial response with 33.90% of participants selecting Option 2 (agree), indicating a strong belief in the importance of inclusivity in assessments. Conversely, Items 2 and 5, which focus on flexibility in assessments and valuing diverse perspectives, garnered lower percentages for the highest agreement options, suggesting that while there is acknowledgment of their importance, there may be room for improvement in implementation. The skewness and kurtosis values for most items indicate relatively normal distributions, with slight tendencies towards positive or negative skewness, reflecting the varied opinions of respondents.
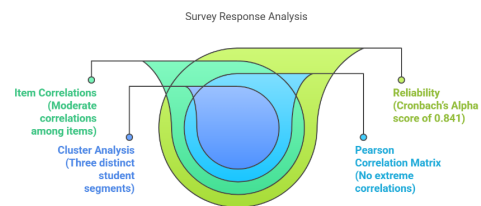

Figure 2. Survey Response Analysis.

Additionally, items related to challenges and barriers in assessment reveal significant insights. For instance, 30.40% of respondents indicated they sometimes face language barriers (Item 12), while 10.70% reported challenges in understanding assessment criteria (Item 11), highlighting critical areas where students feel support is lacking. The responses to

Items 9 and 14 indicate a mixed sentiment regarding instructor support and feedback, with 33.90% feeling somewhat supported but also expressing a desire for more constructive feedback. Overall, these findings suggest a need for educational institutions to enhance assessment practices by considering the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, thereby fostering a more equitable and supportive learning environment.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need for transformative change in language testing practices within English-Mediated Instruction (EMI) contexts to ensure inclusivity and equity for migrant and global learners. The current assessment landscape is marred by significant challenges, including cultural biases, rigid formats, language barriers, and a lack of consideration for diverse learning needs. These issues not only hinder the accurate assessment of students' abilities but also contribute to feelings of alienation and marginalization among non-native speakers. The study highlights the critical importance of developing assessments that are flexible, culturally sensitive, and reflective of real-world scenarios. By incorporating multilingual support, providing clear and transparent criteria, and offering a variety of assessment formats, educational institutions can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment[56]. This shift is essential not only for promoting fairness and access but also for fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among all learners, regardless of their linguistic or cultural backgrounds. As global migration continues to shape the educational landscape, the adoption of inclusive language testing practices is no longer a choice but a necessity for achieving educational equity and social justice in the 21st century.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, and supervision were conducted by A.K. Writing and visualization were carried out by K.C., Y.G., J.Z., and N.C. Project administration was managed by N.R. The investigation was performed by F.A. All authors contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of UCSI University (protocol code UCSI-IEC-2024-FOSSLA-0225 (A) and 9th December 2024).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Access to the data will be granted to qualified researchers for non-commercial purposes.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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