

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

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Abstract

Assessment plays a critical role in the learning process of students and learning is considered to be directed by the way students perceive their assessment practices. This paper reports the results of a study of the students' perceptions of the current assessment practices. By employing a survey research design gender and year level difference in the perceptions of the students were also explored. Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) having five scales: congruence with planned learning, authenticity, student consultation, transparency, and diversity, consisting of 24 items was used as an instrument for data collection from a sample of 120 students.. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation etc.) and independent sample t-test were used for data analysis. The results of the study revealed that students were satisfied with their current assessment and there were no significant gender and year level differences in their perceptions of assessment.

Keywords: Assessment Practices, Students' Perceptions

Introduction

Classroom assessment is an integral part of teaching learning process. It is defined as a process of gathering, analyzing and interpretation quantitative and qualitative information for making educational decisions (Linn & Gronlund, 2005). Learning is directed by the way students perceive their assessment practices (Segers, Gibels & Thurlings, 2008). It has also been reported that it is not the assessment technique but the way students' perceive their assessment that affect their learning. Research has shown that student achievement is effected by the way they perceive their assessment (Alkhurusi, 2011) and that assessment plays critical role in learning process of students.

Until the late 1960's research in classroom environment and students and teachers behavior gave importance only to the views of expert observers (Koul & Fisher, 2006). Dunkin and Beddy (1974, cited in Koul & Fisher, 2006) recommended the use of objective data to research teaching process. The study of classroom psychological environment recommended that research in classroom must used

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objective data. Despite the use of expert observers to code teacher and student behaviour was continued in practice. Since research in teaching process followed data collected from both teachers and students. Walberg (1976, cited in Koul & Fisher, 2006) also gave importance to this methodological approach in which students' perceptions played as mediators to assess learning process. Walberg (1976, , cited in Koul & Fisher, 2006) recommend the use of students' perceptions data to measure environment because students considered to be able to perceive and gave importance to stimuli and gave their valid judgments about environment of their classes

Like other aspects of school and teaching learning process students are also consider to hold clear views about their assessment practices. They are concerned with the importance of their assessment practices, fairness of assessment practices and its quality to fulfil the learning goals (Dorman & Knightley, 2006, Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani & Alkalbani, 2013). Students' perceptions of assessment practices came into being due to teachers' assessment practices and influenced students' learning outcomes (Alkharusi, 2011)..This study aims to explored students' perceptions of assessment practices at Institute of Education and Research.

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Assessment

Research in the area of students' perceptions of assessment has established the fact that students were different in their perceptions of assessment on the basis of different background variables such as, gender, year of study, ethnicity and age (Kniveton, 1996, Devi & Challa, 2013). Dhindsa, Omer and Waldrip, (2007) conducted a study to measure students' perceptions of assessment practices. It also investigated gender based, race based and grade based differences in perceptions of assessment. It reported that students' perceptions s were similar across gender and different grads, but their perceptions of assessment was statistically different on the basis of ethnic group. Koul & Fisher (2006) directed a study to develop and validate assessment questionnaire in which results informed no significant gender differences in students' perceptions of assessment. But they found significant year level difference in perceptions of assessment.

An investigation carried out by Devi & Challa (2013) to measure students' course assessment views, in which gender differences,

differences in area of specialization and year level differences were investigated. They found significant gender difference in perceptions of consultation of students and year level differences in perceptions of congruence and authenticity of course assessment, while the students were not different in their perceptions with respect to their areas of study.

Cakan (2011) aimed to examine and validate "Assessment Task Inventory" developed by Dorman & Knightly (2006) on Turkish students. It measured students' perceptions on the basis of gender and program and year of study. The results demonstrated that male students had more positive perceptions about assessment as compared to females. Result of post hoc test showed that students from different programs revealed similar perceptions of assessment, except student of music, computer education and educational technology. Whereas there were no statistical differences on the basis of year level (from 1st to 4th year). These researches showed contradictory and inconsistent results to determine differences in students' perceptions of assessment due to different background variables. Therefore, more investigation is needed to determine the extent of differences in students' perceptions due to different background variables (Devi & Challa, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of assessment practices at Department of Research and Assessment, Institute of Education and Research (IER). This study also investigated the gender and year level differences in students' perceptions of assessment practices.

Research Questions

This study has following research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of assessment at Department of Research and Evaluation?
2. Are there any differences in perceptions of males and females?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions of students enrolled in first year (2nd semester) and final year (4th semester) of study year?

Assessment System at the Institute of Education and Research

The Institute of Education and Research was established in 1960 in collaboration with the School of Education, Indiana University, U. S. A. It is located at the Quaid-e-Azam Campus of University of the Punjab in

Lahore. It is the pioneer Institute in Pakistan for promoting studies in the field of Education. The Institute follows semester system. Number of courses for two years Master Degree Programs are 22-25 with a total of 66-75 credit hours. Students are offered five of six courses in each semester, with total of 32 credit hours in each semester. Each semester is of eighteen weeks with sixteen weeks for teaching and one to two weeks for examinations. In addition to coursework students are also required to take a six credit hours research project (dissertation)/project report/ internship/or a special paper, entailing 9.09% percent of the study load for the four semesters. The teacher is responsible for the evaluation of the work/ performance of the students of his/ her class and for the award of grades to them on the basis of such evaluation. The number and nature of tests and assignments depends on the nature of the course. However, in the case of taught courses there is at least one home assignment, two tests (mid semester and final examination) in each course with the following weighting:

- Assignments 25%
- Mid Semester Examination 35%
- Final Examination 40 %

To pass a course, the student must obtain at least a 'D' grade, represented by 50% cumulative score in mid and final semester examinations and 50% separately in the assignment out of the assigned marks. A mid semester examination is conducted eight weeks after the commencement of the semester and the final examination is held at the end of the semester ([University of the Punjab, 2008](#))

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to measure students' perceptions of assessment practices at the Institute of Education and Research. Further this study explored the gender differences, year level differences and differences with respect to shift of study in students' perceptions s. Therefore descriptive survey research design was used to conduct current study

Participants and Procedure

Sample of the study comprised of 120 (115 females and 5 males) postgraduate students. enrolled at the Department of Research and Assessment. Fifty percent (n=60) of the sampled participants were in the

were in the 2nd semester and 50% (n=60) were in the 4th semester of their MA course.

Instrument

This study used Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) developed by Cavanagh, Waldrup, Romanoski, Dorman and Fisher (2005). The questionnaire had 24 items related to the five scales as follows:

Authenticity: The extent to which assessment tasks feature real life situations or those are relevant to the learner .

Congruence with planned learning: The extent to which assessment tasks organize with the goals, objectives and activities of the learning program.

Diversity: The extent to which all students have an equal opportunity to complete assessment tasks.

Student consultation: The extent to which students are consulted and informed about the forms of assessment tasks being used .

Transparency: The extent to which the purposes and kinds of assessment tasks are well-defined and clear to the students.

The items on the SPAQ scales required students to indicate their relative agreement to the quality of their assessment on a five point scale as follows: 5=strongly agree, 4= agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree. Data for the study was collected immediately after the final exams for the semester. The research has documented the qualities of validity and reliability ($\alpha=.86$) of SPAQ. The questionnaire was administered in English because the medium of instruction at postgraduate level of study is English.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data was conducted in two stages. First descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, SD, skewness and kurtosis) of students' responses on five scales of SPAQ (i.e. congruence with planned learning, authenticity, student consultation, transparency and diversity) were calculated for measuring students' perceptions of assessment practices. (congruence with planned learning and authenticity). This analysis provided information about the nature of students' perceptions of the assessment. Second independent sample t-tests were conducting to explore gender differences, year level differences in perceptions of students (Pallant, 2007).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics for five scales of the SPAQ. The mean score for all scales were well above the scale mid-points and varied between $M=3.56$ and $M=3.65$ (participants scored between 1 and 5), indicating that students generally had positive perceptions of about all aspects of their assessment.

Table-1: Students' Perceptions of Assessment Practices

Scales	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Congruence with planned learning	3.63	2.68	8	23	-.82	1.06
Authenticity	3.65	2.95	5.00	24.00	-1.07	2.61
Student consultation	3.56	2.91	10.00	24.00	-.51	-.06
Transparency	3.58	2.90	9.00	24.00	-.68	.57
Diversity	3.64	2.30	5.00	19.00	-1.21	2.47
Total	3.63	10.79	48.00	111.00	-.64	.96

Gender Differences in Students' Perceptions of Assessment Practices

Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference ($t= -1.004$, $df= 118$ and $p > .005$) in perceptions of males ($M= 82.00$, $SD= 5.43$) and females ($M= 86.94$, $SD=10.93$) indicating that males and females have similar perceptions of assessment practices.

Table-2: Gender Differences

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Gender	Male	5	82.00	-1.00	118	.32
	Female	115	86.94			

Table 3 illustrates gender differences in subscales of SPAQ. The results showed that there were no significant differences in perceptions of male and female on any scale of SPAQ. For example there was no significant difference ($t= -1.02$, $df= 118$ and $p > .05$) between female ($M= 17.00$, $SD= 1$) and male ($M=18.24$, $SD=2.72$) about congruence of assessment. The result showed that males and females had the similar perceptions of assessment practices done at IER.

Table-3: Gender Differences on Scales of SPAQ

Scales	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Congruence	Female	5	17.00	1.00	-1.02	118	.31
	Male	115	18.24	2.72			
Authenticity	Female	5	17.40	2.19	-.66	118	.50
	Male	115	18.30	2.99			
Student consultation	Female	5	16.40	2.88	-1.11	118	.27
	Male	115	17.86	2.90			

Transparency	Female	5	16.60	1.95	-1.04	118	.30
	Male	115	17.97	2.93			
Diversity	Female	5	14.60	1.67	.03	118	.97
	Male	115	14.56	2.33			

Year Level Differences in Students' Perceptions of Assessment Practices

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare perceptions of students enrolled in first and final year of study. As shown in table 4 There were no significant difference ($t= 1.23$, $df= 118$ and $p > .05$) in perceptions of students enrolled in first year ($M= 87.95$, $SD= 10.22$) and final year ($M= 85.53$, $SD= 11.28$) of study.

Table-4: Year Level Differences

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Year of Study	First Year	60	87.95	10.23	1.23	118	.22
	Final Year	60	85.53	11.28			

Table 5 shows year level differences in students' perceptions on five subscales of SPAQ. The results showed that there was no year level; difference in students' perceptions of assessment except on student consultation scale. For example, there were no significant year level difference ($t= .37$, $df= 118$ and $p > .05$) between first year students ($M= 18.28$, $SD= 2.68$), and final year students ($M= 18.10$, $SD= 2.70$) about congruence of assessment. But there was a significant difference ($t= 2.00$, $df= 118$ and $p < .05$) first year students ($M= 18.33$, $SD= 2.48$) and final year students ($M= 17.90$, $SD= 3.34$) about student consultation of assessment practices.

Table-5: Year Level Differences on Sub-scales of SPAQ

Scales	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Congruence	First Year	60	18.28	2.68	.37	118	.71
	Final Year	60	18.10	2.70			
Authenticity	First Year	60	18.62	2.47	1.33	118	.18
	Final Year	60	17.90	3.34			
Student consultation	First Year	60	18.33	2.48	2.00	118	.047
	Final Year	60	17.28	3.20			
Transparency	First Year	60	17.97	2.99	.19	118	.85
	Final Year	60	17.87	2.84			
Diversity	First Year	60	14.75	2.43	.87	118	.38
	Final Year	60	14.38	2.16			

Discussion

This study was designed to explore students' perceptions of assessment practices at IER using a developed instrument SPAQ.

Gender, and year level differences in the students' perceptions were also investigated..

Results of the study revealed that students' had positive perceptions of assessment practices done at the Institute of Education and Research. This result was consistent with the results of studies by Mussawy, (2009), and Gao, (2012). These studies showed that students' hold positive perceptions of their assessment practices. But the result of the current study were in contrast to the studies by Devi & Challa, (2013) and Dhindsha, Omer & Waldrip, (2007), which showed that students' hold negative views of their assessment practiced.

The mean scores on all sub-scales of SPAQ showed that students possess positive perceptions in all scales of SPAQ. These results stand in contrast to some previous researches where congruence with planned learning was not positively perceived by the students (Dhindsha, Omer & Waldrip, 2007, Devi & Challa, (2013). While students were also contain negative perceptions about authenticity of assessment (Elkhader, 2008, Devi & Challa, 2013). In this study mean scores of student consultation showed positive perceptions of students. While this result was contradict with the results of Gao, (2012) and Dhindsha, Omer & Waldrip, (2007). Students' perceptions of transparency in the assessment was also positively perceived by students; the results of Mussawy, (2009) and Gao, (2012) confirmed this. Diversity in assessment was also positively perceived by the students', results of Mussawy, (2009) confirmed it. But students' perceptions of diversity in assessment are negatively perceived the study conducted Gao, (2012). Students' perceptions about transparency and diversity were negative in the studies conducted by Dhindsha, Omer & Waldrip, (2007), Devi & Challa, (2013) and Elkhader, (2008). The positive students' perceptions in all sub scales of assessment at IER showed that students were satisfied with their assessment practices and also with different aspects of assessment.

The results of current study revealed that there were no significant differences in the perceptions of male and female students. These results support the results of the previous research by Koul & Fisher, (2006), but stand in contrast to the results of the the study by Dhindsha, Omer & Waldrip, (2007) where significant gender differences were reported. perceptions of male and female students' in all scales of SPAQ, while in previous In contrast to results of the current study previous

research has also reported significant gender difference on sub scales of scales of SPAQ for example Devi & Challa, (2013) found significant gender differences on student consultation scale and Gao, (2012) found significant gender difference in perceptions about authenticity and transparency of assessment..

The results of current study showed that overall there was no significant year level difference in students' perceptions of assessment. However, significant year level difference was revealed on student consultation scale This result stands in contrast to the results of the study by Koul & Fisher, (2006), Elkhader, (2008) and Dhindsha, Omer & Waldrup, (2007), who found a significant year level differences in students' perceptions of assessment. Similarly research by Devi & Challa, (2013) showed significant year level difference in the perceptions about 'congruence with learning outcomes' and d authenticity scale of SPAQ.

Implications of the Current Research

This study aimed to explored students' perceptions of assessment practices at IER The current study was a significant endeavor to find out students' satisfaction with their assessment practices. The results of the study provided a small picture to depict students' perceptions of assessment. It helped teachers to understand not only different aspects of assessment but also students' perceptions of these aspects of assessment and provided basis to improve their assessment practices. Significant difference in the perceptions of first year and final year students about "student consultation" scale suggests that teachers should try to inform students about the forms of assessment tasks being used and should have more consultation with their students.

Recommendations for the Future Research

Following recommendations are re made to conduct future research in this area:

1. Similar research should be conducted at a larger scale by including participants from different faculties and departments of the University of the Punjab, Lahore.
2. Departmental difference students' perceptions of assessment must be explored
3. Teachers' perceptions about assessment practices should also be explored and compared with the perceptions of students.

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