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University of Massachusetts
School of Education

**Assessment Practices: Student's and Teachers' Perceptions of
Classroom Assessment**

Master's Thesis Presented to Graduate School, Center for International Education (CIE)
Department of Education, Policy, Research, and Administration (EPRA), School of Education,

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Academic Advisor: Professor Rossman

December 20, 2009

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST COMPASSIONATE AND THE MOST MERCIFUL

Contents

Acknowledgments	V
List of Tables and Figures	VI

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction	1
Problem Statement	4

CHAPTER TWO

Concepts and Forms of Classroom Assessment	6
Assessment	6
Summative Assessment and the New Paradigm (Formative)	10
Feedback—Key Characteristics of Alternative Assessment	14
Forms of Alternative Assessment	17
Diagnostic Assessment	17
Portfolios	18
Self-Assessment and Peer-Assessment	19
Performance-Based Assessment	20
Questioning	21
Interview-Based Assessment	21
Play-Based Assessment	22
Cooperative Group Assessment	22
Dialogue Journals and Scaffolded Essays	23
Scoring Formative Assessment	23

CHPATER THREE

Literature Review	26
Assessment and Learning: Development and Application of Assessment Questionnaire	26
Attitudes towards Assessment Forms	29
Peer-Assessment	32
Performance-Based Assessment	33

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology	36
Context of the Study	36
Method, Instrument, Procedure, and Analysis	38
Qualitative Section	39
Research Population	39
Quantitative Section	44
Sample	44
Instrument	44
Design and Procedure	46
Validity	47
Data Analysis	48

CHAPTER FIVE

Results and Findings	50
Quantitative Section	51
Descriptive Analysis	51

Students' Perceptions of Assessment	53
Comparison of Perceptions of Students from Three Departments	54
Comparison of the Overall Perceptions of Students	54
Qualitative Section—Results	56
What and Why of Assessment	56
Current Practices of Assessment	60
Students' Experiences and Stories about Assessment	66
Forms (Methods) of Classroom Assessment	69
Consultation about Assessment	76
Meaning and Distribution of Scores	79
Indicator of Good Assessment	85
Ethics of Assessment	88
Impacts of Assessment in Learning	91
 CHAPTER SIX	
<hr/>	
Conclusion	94
Limitation	97
Recommendations	98
References	99
Appendixes	
Appendix A	102
Appendix B	103
Appendix C	105
Annex	108

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List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 2.1	<i>Framework Relating Strategies of Formative Assessment to Instructional Processes</i>	9-10
Table 4.2	<i>Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire</i>	45
Table 5.1	<i>Average scale-item mean, average item standard deviation and standard error results for department differences in SPAQ overall scale scores</i>	54
Table 5.2	<i>Average scale-item mean differences, Standard Error, ANOVA results for department differences in SPAQ overall scale scores</i>	55

Figures

Figure 2.1	<i>Formative Assessment Cycle</i>	12
Figure 4.1	<i>Data Collection Procedure</i>	39
Figure 5.1	<i>Gender Differences</i>	51
Figure 5.2	<i>Average Mean Scores of Overall Students' Responses on Five Scales Assessment Questionnaire</i>	52
Figure 5.3	<i>Means Plot</i>	56

CHAPTER ONE

Assessment Practices: Student's and Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Assessment

Sayed Ahmad Javid Mussawy

Assessment, defined as “a systematic process for gathering data about student achievement,” is an essential component of teaching (Dhindsa, Omar, & Waldrip, 2007, p. 1261). As Struyven, Dochy, and Janssens (2005) argue, the impact of assessment is significantly observable on students' performance. The way students approach learning determines the way they think about classroom assignments and tests (Struyven et al., 2005). Recent studies advocate for including students in the process of developing assessment tools because, as Falchikove (2004) states, student involvement in peer assessment adds more value to the learning process. Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007) note that examining students' perceptions of assessment, stimulates students to develop an authentic and realistic assessment approach that “rewards genuine effort and in depth learning rather than measuring luck” (p. 1262). Thus, in order to support this concept, studies suggest that students should be held responsible for their learning, for the sake of this study, including their perceptions of assessment seems to hold promise.

Assessment in education is the product of the 20th century. Michael Scriven (1967) proposes the use of “formative and summative” assessment in order to make the distinction between the roles of evaluation. Hence, assessment is perceived to serve two different purposes: 1) informative, to improve instruction, and, 2) summative to measure students' achievement (Scriven, 1967, p. 41). The use of assessment to classify, predict, and sort has also changed to advance the process of teaching and learning in addition to accountability purposes (Gordon,

2008). Aligning with other authors, Pellegrino and Goldman (2008), and Shepard (2000) suggest ways that classroom assessment can be improved in order to increase learning, such as the content and the characteristics of assessment, utilization of assessment results, and integration of assessment as a course in teacher education programs.

Because assessment significantly affects students' approach to learning, assessment paradigms have shifted from "testing learning of students to assessing for students learning" (Birenbaum & Feidman, 1998, p. 92). Recent assessment approaches are attempting to increase the correspondence between what students need to learn and what is expected for them to know once they finish their studies (Gulikers et al., 2006). The question remains whether students are taught so that they can excel on a test or whether they are taught to construct meaning that will sustain in the long term. As Dhindsa et al. (2007) summarize, teachers "sacrifice learning for drilling students in the things that they will be held accountable" (p. 1262). This claim needs to be treated carefully because the accountability of teachers for the long-term and short-term may vary. Thus, this study sheds light on the extent to which the daily lessons and assessment approaches help students apply the concepts outside the walls of the university rather than the idea to teach students to the test.

According to Cavangah, Waldrip, Romanoski, and Dorman (2005), although teachers and administrators typically select assessment forms and tasks, the purpose of assessment varies among various stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, schools, and policy makers. Goodrum, Hackling, and Rennie (2001) assert that "an assessment is a key component of teaching and learning process" (p. 2). This means that teachers use "a very narrow range of assessment strategies and in practice; however, little evidence exist that teachers actually use formative assessment to inform planning and teaching" (Goodrum et al., 2005, p. 2). Hence,

including students' and teachers' perceptions in designing assessment tools would be considered reasonable, given the fact that both students' preferences and teachers' rationale might influence the way students proceed with learning and the way it is tested.

Goodrum et al. (2005) state that, ideally, assessment “enhances learning, provides feedback about student progress, builds self-confidence and self-esteem, and develops skills in evaluation” (p. 2). In addition, they argue that effective learning occurs when correspondence exists between teaching, evaluation, and results. Therefore, due to its close relation with instruction and learning outcomes, assessment has a key role in learning.

These characteristics of assessment build the foundation for the current study involving student perceptions of classroom assessment. Educators can then analyze their assessment processes and draw on the extent students, as learners, know about assessment in their classrooms. Although little evidence exists that students should be involved in decision making about assessment tasks, earlier studies encouraged this argument: for example, Fisher, Waldrup and Dorman (2005) recommend an investigation of student involvement in classroom assessment.

There is no empirical investigation on student involvement in classroom assessment process that demonstrates its advantages or disadvantages. Given the paucity of such research, Cavanagh et al. (2005) suggest that two strategies can instead be applied: 1) examine the research on assessment forms/approaches that teachers use; 2) inquire into students' perceptions about assessment. Looking at students' and teachers' perceptions about the role of assessment in the classroom and students' approach to learning will enrich this study. First, because students' perceptions of assessment will affect their learning approach (as argued in the literature) which

will affect in turn the extent to which students are successful in their classrooms. Second, integrating teachers' perceptions will build a foundation and rationale for the assessment practice they use in their classrooms, through which one can learn to what extent and in what ways students' perceptions of classroom assessment impacts their learning.

Problem Statement

The primary aim of this study is to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment. A secondary purpose is to explore the faculty members' perceptions of classroom assessment and their expectations of students' learning. This study examines what assessment approaches are being used in Baghlan Higher Education Institution, School of Education. In addition, the investigator was interested in learning the extent to which assessment results were used to improve students' learning and classroom instruction. The research questions are:

- *What are the perceptions of teachers and students about classroom assessment in Baghlan Higher Education Institution?*
- *What are the main methods that teachers assess students learning?*
 - Do teachers use tests to improve instruction or to report?
 - Do students know what they are tested about?
- *To what extent are current classroom assessment results being used to improve students learning and classroom instruction?*

Since limited literature exists about students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, this study contributes to the area of classroom assessment, particularly, in the context of Afghanistan. The investigator used a comparative analysis of students' and teachers' perceptions about classroom assessment. The study also contributes to the area of teaching and assessment, exploring various approaches of assessment in relation to students' learning; raising awareness

about different paradigms of classroom assessment, in particular introducing a shift from conventional approaches to the alternative methods; and advocating for students' involvement in the process of developing assessment tools/instrument. In addition, the study examines the extent to which classroom assessment practices correlate with pre-service teachers' perceptions towards their learning. Exploring teachers' expectations of what students need to learn and the assessment approaches they used to measure students' learning are an important contribution to the literature. The ultimate goal of this study is to lay the foundation for later embedding classroom assessment in the curricula of education faculties in four-year higher education institutions and two-year teacher training colleges in Afghanistan.

The investigator was interested in exploring how instructors use assessment results in the School of Education at Baghlan Higher Education Institution (BHEI) to enhance students' learning. The study opted to shed light on how the faculty members in BHEI define the assessment and formats that they use to assess undergraduate students. In addition, the researcher was interested in exploring some other dynamics which, in addition to classroom assessment, had an impact on students' learning. The assumption is the way teachers define assessment impacts the approaches they use in their classrooms.

The study sought to understand the meaningfulness of classroom assessment through students' lenses, as well. In addition, the investigator was interested in learning the extent to which assessment practices affected student's approaches towards their learning, given their experiences. Furthermore, he wanted to explore whether students viewed classroom assessment as a tool to improve their performances or as a means of control, meaning that teachers use assessment to punish or praise students in the current context of BHEI.

CHAPTER 2

Concepts and Forms of Classroom Assessment

Assessment

Assessment labeled as the outcome of the 20th century, has been defined variously in the literature. Among the many, Linn and Miller (2005) define assessment of student learning as a systematic process of collecting information about student progress towards the learning goals. Similarly, Dhindsa et al. (2007) characterize assessment as a key component of teaching and learning, “a systematic process of data gathering” about students’ progress (p. 1261). They maintain that students’ performance can be measured in various ways, including “traditional paper and pencil tests, extended responses (essays), performance of authentic task, teacher observation, and student self report” (Linn & Miller, 2005, p. 26). In addition, the authors distinguish between two other terms aligned with assessment: 1) test “an instrument for measuring a sample of behavior” and 2) measurement, “the process of obtaining a numerical description of the degree to which an individual possesses a particular characteristic” (Linn & Miller, 2005, p. 26).

In the Western countries at present, students are encouraged to fully participate in classroom activities. According to Herrera, Murry and Cabral (2007), students are now being asked to use their “cognitive development, academic knowledge, and language skills to read, comprehend, synthesize, analyze, compare, contrast, relate, articulate, write, evaluate and more” (p. 23). This encouragement builds the foundation for alternative forms (formative) of assessment to be used in the classrooms so that the instructors can “measure incremental gains” (Herrera, Murry & Cabral 2007, p. 22).

Although various definitions are given about alternative assessment in the literature,

Crawford and Impara (2001), Cooper (1999), Diaz-Rico and Weed (2006), Linn and Miller (2005) and Hancock (1994) maintain that alternative assessments:

- Are generally developed directly from classroom instruction, group work, and related classroom activities and provide an alternative to traditional assessment.
- Can be considered valid and reliable in that they genuinely and consistently assess a student's classroom performance.
- Facilitate the student's participation in the evaluation process.
- Include measurements and evaluations relevant to both the teacher and the student.
- Emphasize real-world problems, tasks, or applications that are relevant to the student and his/her community (cited in Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007, p. 23).

William and Thompson (2008) introduce a shift from traditional assessment forms to a newer paradigm, alternative assessment. Particularly, the emergence of formative and summative assessment as two different formats has attracted educators' attention in the current literature (William & Thompson, 2008). The authors argue that the use of assessment for student learning is the main feature of formative assessment. According to William and Thompson (2008), Scriven (1967) and Bloom (1969) proposed the terminology "formative" and "summative" assessment, given the reason to differentiate the role of evaluation. Formative assessment is introduced as an ongoing process of evaluating students' learning, providing feedback to adjust instruction and learning, improving the curriculum (2008). Summative assessment, on the other hand, is bound to administrative decisions and assigning grades to the tests.

Bloom (1969) asserts that when assessment is aligned with the process of teaching and learning, it will have "a positive effect on students' learning and their motivation" (cited in William, 2008, p. 58). Assessment in general accounts for "supporting learning (formative), certifying the achievement or potential of individuals (summative), and evaluating the quality of educational institutions or programs (evaluative)" (William, 2008, p. 59). Black and William (2004) put more emphasis on the use of assessment to support learning; however, they also

acknowledge the importance of using assessment for certification and evaluation. In addition, there is a rising consensus among educators that assessment should be used to diagnose students' achievement, measure their performance, sort students, etc. However, others argue for the use of assessment to enhance student learning and performance (Delandshere, 2002).

Current literature on assessment and instruction view assessment as a longitudinal process that occurs during instruction and supports lifelong learning. According to Dochy (1997), the concept of lifelong learning arose from the business and industry sector, when people began arguing that the labor force needed to be adaptable to "new technology and acquire new skills throughout their working lives" (p. 3). Birenbaum (1996) makes a distinction between testing and assessment, in which testing measures achievements, mainly cognitive skills such as memorizing factual-information, and is considered separate from instruction. However, the new paradigm of assessment offers an alternative for testing culture which is "characterized by so called objective, such as standardized tests that focused on atomized bits of knowledge at the expense of more complex, higher-order knowledge and skills", assessment an integrated part of instruction (Gulikers, Bastiaens, Kirshner & Kester, 2006, p. 382; Dochy, 1997).

Although interpretations of formative assessment vary widely, according to Wiliam and Thompson (2008), "formative assessment is used to provide information on the likely performance of students" and "to describe and feedback given to students... telling them which items they got correct" (p. 60). This oppose the way selected responses measure students' achievement, given students' scores instead of feedback. Formative assessment, according to Wiggins and McTighe (2007), occurs during instruction, as part of instruction rather than a separate activity. It has both formal and informal formats including ungraded quizzes, oral questioning, self-reflection, peer feedback, think-aloud, etc. A distinction is made between

assessments for learning which describes the process, assessment as a support for learning, compared to assessment of learning that describes the nature of assessment or the product (Wiliam & Black 1998; Wiliam & Thompson, 2008). Similarly, other researchers agree that the core features that characterize formative assessment are that it impacts the quality of teaching and learning, and it engages students in self-directed learning environment (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004).

The literature on assessment and teaching expounds on the importance of formative assessment and its implications for instruction and its ultimate goal, that "assessment... feed into actions in the classroom in order to affect learning" (Wiliam & Thompson, p. 63). Similarly, Wiggins and McTighe (2007) argued that by embedding formative assessment in "curriculum documents, and advice on how to use their results to adjust curriculum, a school...signals that such practices support effective teaching" (p. 103).

Along with this theory, the term "big idea" is introduced as a key component of formative assessment, which goes along with the strategies that describes the role of instructor, learner, and peer as in *Figure.1* (Wiliam & Thompson, 2008; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007). Although a variety of definitions are presented for the term big idea, among them some authors see *it* in terms of its implications on assessment. *Big idea* is "evidence about student learning used to adjust instruction to better meet student needs", in other words "that teaching is adaptive to the student's learning needs" (Wiliam 2008, p. 64).

Moreover, Black and Wiliam (1998) raise the "scrutiny issue" of developing tests to collect relevant evidence of student progress: "good questions are hard to generate and teachers should collaborate, and draw—critically—on outside sources, to collect such questions" (p. 8).

Framework Relating Strategies of Formative Assessment to Instructional Processes

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is right now	How to get there
Teacher	Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	Engineering effective classroom discussions and tasks that elicit evidence of learning	Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer	Understanding and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	Enabling students as instructional resources for one another	
Learner	Understanding learning intentions and criteria for success	Activating students as the owners of their own learning	

Table.1 (Adapted from William & Thompson, 2008, p. 63)

William and Thompson (2008) presented this matrix describing the role of student and teacher in an ongoing classroom assessment model. Given the above criteria, formative assessment has facilitated a change in the practices of some instructors who are encouraged to develop their own assessment formats or to adapt the forms of assessment that help them gather helpful information about their students' progress. The reason that alternative assessments are considered more authentic compared to the traditional forms is that they hold approaches to "measure students' learning that embeds both quantitative and qualitative features" (Herrera et al. 2007, p. 25).

Although the term "assessment for learning" is used interchangeably with "formative assessment" among many writers, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2003) make a clear distinction between the two. They argue, "assessment for learning is any assessment for which the priority in its design is to serve the purpose of promoting pupil's learning, compared to an assessment design that serves... to provide information to be used as feedback, by the teachers and pupils, in assessing themselves... to modify the teaching" (Black et al. 2003, p. 8). Wiliam and Thompson (2008) observe, "an assessment is formative to the extent that information from

the assessment is fed back within the system and actually used to improve the performance of the system in some way" (p. 61).

Summative Assessment and the New Paradigm (Formative)

Assessment in the context of education has been used primarily “in deciding, collecting and making judgments about evidence relating to the goals of the learning being assessed”, which makes no reference to how the information being collected and could be used (Harlen, 2006, p. 103). Assessment of learning, identified as summative assessment in the current literature, is deeply rooted in education and what has emerged along with it is the new paradigm, assessment for learning (formative assessment). In addition, Harlen (2006) justifies changes in assessment practices, to be used in four purposes: diagnostic, formative, summative, and evaluative.

The transformation of assessment practices, according to Herrera et al. (2007), is that “assessment of achievement has become increasingly standardized, norm referenced and institutionalized” (p. 13). Another change that emerged is regarding assessment of achievement (summative assessment) and its negative effect on teaching and classroom climate and assessment (Firestone & Mayrowetz, 2000). Herrera et al. (2007) state that while they have many uses, standardized tests nevertheless:

- Limit and negatively affect the quality of content-area instruction;
- Prompt teachers to narrow the curriculum taught in classrooms;
- Encourage “teaching to the test”;
- Push students out of the system;
- Divert classroom instruction to an emphasis on low-level content and basic skills;
- Increase the redundancy of instruction (Herrera, Murry & Cabral 2007, p. 13).

The new form (alternative assessment) provides more opportunities for the instructor to regularly observe students’ skills and capabilities and to adapt the lesson based on their needs. According to Harlen (2006), the formative assessment functions as a cycle of events, which

identifies the learner's position and his or her targeted goal (see *Figure. 2*). Students are viewed as active members of the class as opposed to the old version of assessment in which students were simply receivers of information. Chappuis and Stiggins (2004) agree that students are perceived to be passive actors in the traditional form of assessment rather than active learners in the new forms (formative assessment) who acquire the ownership of their learning. This means that students are given the chance to have a stake in their own progress, assess their own work and that of their peers, and collaborate with their instructor in developing criteria and norms for their work.

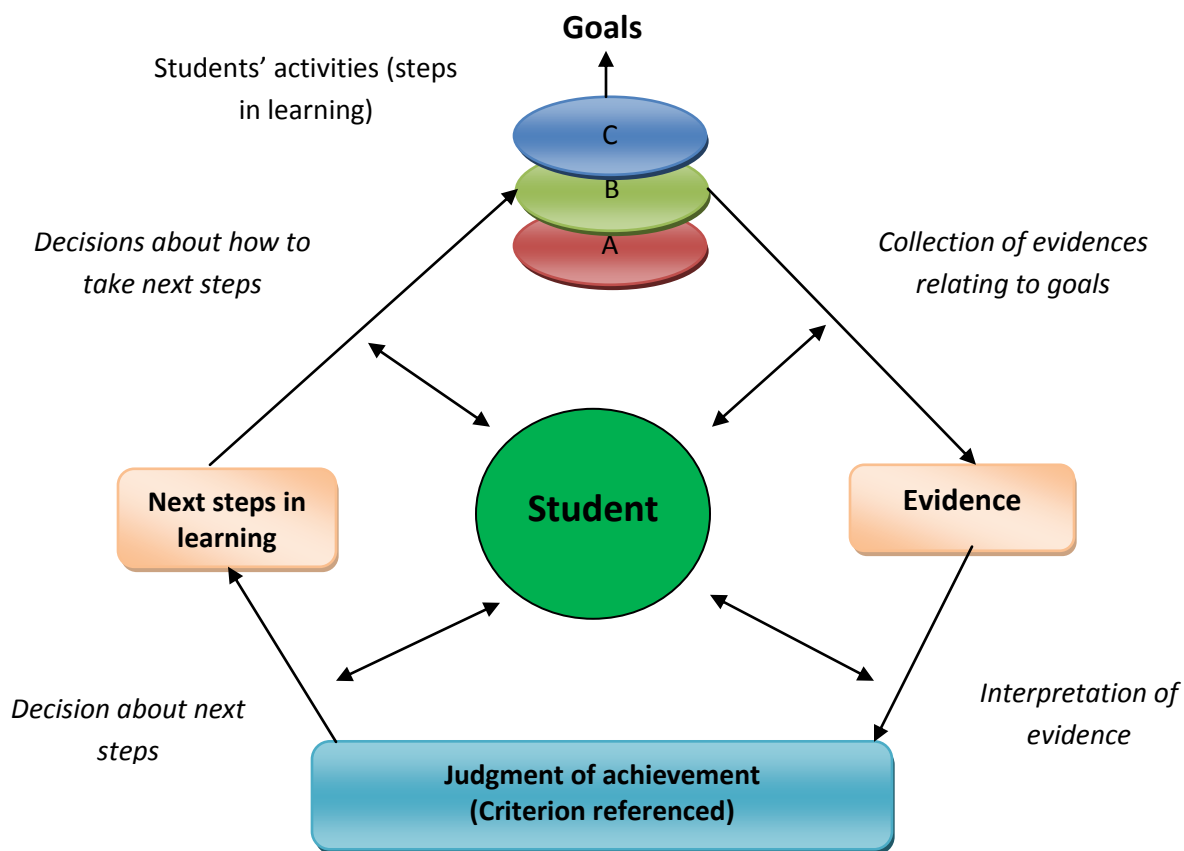


Figure 2 .1: Formative assessment cycle (Adapted from Harlen, 2006)

Another issue that undermines the purpose of using assessment is the prediction made by the instructor that some "students will fail in the state-mandated test" (William & Thompson, 2008, p. 61). Black and William note the negative aspect of grade marking, considering that if a

student gets lower scores in one or two terms, it creates a shared belief between the student and the teacher that she or he lacks high learning skills or is not intelligent enough. In addition, a consensus exists among educators that, if tests occur only at the end of cohort or term, the result can hardly be used to adapt instruction and to improve learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007).

Wiliam and Thompson (2008) distinguish between different terms used along with the term “formative assessment”:

Another way of thinking about the distinction being made here is the terms of monitoring assessment, diagnostic assessment, and formative assessment. An assessment monitors learning to the extent that it provides information about whether the student, class, school or system is learning or not; it is diagnostic to the extent that it provides information about what is going wrong; and it is formative to the extent that it provides information about what to do about it (p. 62).

The literature on assessment and evaluation put emphasis on the formation of assessment tools and activities corresponding to the instruction that displays effectiveness, as opposed to poor assessment format which reduces “students’ motivation for learning, inadequately linked to instruction, and incorrect evaluation of effectiveness of instruction” (Dochy, 1997, p. 5). Dochy (1997) and De Corte (1991) also suggest that “powerful learning environments (PLEs),” an alternative to the old approach of learning, entails creating a balance between “personal exploration and systematic instruction” (Dochy, 1997, p. 5). This means that within a student centered classroom, students are perceived as thinkers and active members, opposed to traditional approaches that see students as receivers of information and blank slats (Brooks and Brooks, 1999).

One main feature of *high* order assessment is *high* level instruction, making instruction and assessment complement of each other. Authors argue that alternative assessment (the new paradigm) has a different “flavor associated” with test-driven instruction (Birenbaum & Dochy

1996, p. 12). This means that the alternative assessment is instruction-driven, given the assumption that it will have a positive impact on instruction, making the instruction real and authentic.

Along with other authors, Herrera et al. (2007) argue that the traditional forms of assessment, such as standardized tests, teacher-made tests, multiple choice, fill in the blanks tests, etc., dominated schools and colleges through which the instructors could barely use the information provided by these tests to improve instruction. However, these authors recognize that the old forms of tests are useful in comparing students, programs, and schools through quantitative representation.

As Birenbaum (1996) asserts, the role of the instructor in the modern form of assessment corresponds to the constructivist approach to education, viewing the instructor as a facilitator and mentor who provides opportunities for students to construct their own meaning (Dochy, 1997; Brooks & Brooks, 1999). In the constructive approach, learning is considered to be a process; that students (learners) create their own meaning of a lesson or concept, primarily, they rely on their prior knowledge, skills, and ability to critically analyze a context and resolve problems (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

Feedback—Key Characteristic of Alternative Assessment

The literature raises the issue of formative feedback by closely examining teachers' responses to student's work. For example, if the teacher asks students to provide more details about a written work, the practice is characterized as formative; however, a concern arises as to whether the student know what the instructor meant when he or she asks for elaboration and more details (Wiliam & Thompson, 2008). Formative feedback contradicts the traditional

evaluative comments teachers frequently use, such as *well done*, *good*, or *great work* and more. Chappuis and Stiggins (2004) argue that judgmental feedback not only holds less for value for improvement and student learning, but it also discourages students from learning. Black and Wiliam (1998) assert that formative feedback illuminates students' strengths and weaknesses, provides some suggestion for improvement, and avoids comparing one student with his or her peers.

There are various definitions presented about feedback in the literature; among the authors, Ramaprasad (1983) describes feedback as a tool that provides information that has an impact on the performance, stating, "feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way" (p. 4). In addition, Black and Wiliam (1998) point out the importance of oral feedback provided by the teacher, enabling students to reflect on their learning. They write, "the dialogue between pupils and a teacher should be thoughtful reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding... so that all pupils have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas" (p. 8). Given the definitions and characteristics of formative feedback, it is an important component of instruction that occurs while the instruction occurs and enables the instructor to adjust instruction based on students' suppositions respectively.

In addition, the literature advocates for appropriate use of assessment aiming to improve learning and enhance the instruction (Dochy, 1997; Nitko 1989, Birenbaum, 1996). In educational assessment approach, called formative assessment, the instructor provides descriptive feedback for the student—indicating progress and guidance for future performance or remedial form, detailed so that students could improve their older work (Black & Wiliam 1998, Birenbaum & Dochy 1996).

Student involvement in the process of assessment has been discussed as an influential tool in augmenting student learning. Wiliam and Thompson (2008) indicate that, contrary to the traditional forms, learners and their peers play a considerable role in assessment process in formative assessment. Chappuis and Stiggins (2004) reinforce the above point, stating, “classroom assessment that involves students in the process and focuses on increasing learning can motivate rather than merely measure students” (p. 40). However, a concern remains as to whether the students have acquired sufficient skills and a clear picture of the targets of their learning. Assessment for learning, when accompanied by students’ involvement in the process of development and implementation, appear more similar to teaching than to measurement (Davis, 2000).

Along with other authors, Chappuis and Stiggins (2004) emphasize the importance of student involvement in assessment, helping them to project their future plans and learning goals. They explain, “Student involved assessment means that students learn to use assessment information to manage their own learning” (p. 41). Furthermore, Dochy (1997), Black and Wiliam (1998), and Birenbaum (1996) observe that involving students in the process of assessment not only reduces the burden of work for the instructor, but also assures students that they are viewed as active members who are responsible for their own progress.

Validity and reliability of assessment are two important issues in the field of education. They are perceived as core principles that modify assessment forms and practices. The concept of validity in formative assessment according to Herrera et al. (2007), “refers to the ability of an assessment, process, or product to measure the knowledge or skills it is intended to measure”. However, validity in summative forms of assessment is defined as the appropriate interpretation of assessment result, which deals with quantitative data (Linn & Miller, 2005). The term

reliability in assessment, according to Herrera et al.(2007), “is understood as the power of an assessment to gather consistent evidence of skills, regardless of the examiner, time, place or other variables related to its administration” (p. 25). Linn and Miller (2005) define reliability as consistent assessment results that yield from a test. In addition, the literature refers to the main characteristic of reliability of authentic assessment, as well-defined criteria and detailed training for teachers and students in how to rate students’ work based on criteria (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Herrera et al., 2007).

Formative Assessment (Alternative): Different Forms

Most of the current literature uses the terms formative, alternative, and authentic assessment interchangeably; however, some disagreements still exist. Some authors use the term “authentic assessment” as a part of formative assessment that happens during the learning process whereas summative assessment is considered to occur at the end. However, Herrera et al. (2007), include formative and summative assessment along with other types of authentic assessment, such as performance-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment and peer-assessment, interview-based assessment, play based assessment, cooperative groups assessment, dialogue, journal, and scaffold essays. Considering the many different forms of formative assessment, an illustration of each may allow the reader to distinguish more easily among them. In addition, it should be noted that the following classification of different forms of assessment is primarily based on the work of Herrera et al. (2007).

Diagnostic Assessment

Although some authors view diagnostic assessment separately from formative assessment, the intention is that diagnostic assessments are used for formative purposes. Diagnostic assessment or pre-assessment is used to collect information for planning instruction

and acknowledging learners' needs. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) assert that pre-assessments "include checks of prior knowledge and skill levels and surveys of interests or learning-style preferences" (p. 101). The authors maintain that, given the literature, a great number of students come to school with a misconception that they are not talented enough to perform a certain task, such as drawing a picture or writing an analytic memo (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Given this scenario, a teacher is responsible for recognizing these misconceptions and finding ways to confront them.

Portfolios

Portfolio development is not a new concept in the history of education. According to Wiliam and Thompson (2008), gathering purposeful examples of students' work that demonstrate their effort, progress, and level of understanding over a period to time, compose the main features of portfolio. However, what has changed through the course of time is the format and content, making portfolios meaningful and purposeful. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) maintain that unlike the traditional forms of assessment that take a "snapshot" of students at one point in time, portfolios "function like a photo album containing a variety of photos taken at different times and different contexts" (p. 85). Similarly, Herrera et al. (2007) assert that the content of portfolios, which incorporate a collection of student work, "some indications that how student rated him/herself on the process and product included and the evidences of how those products met the established criteria" (p. 29).

Investigators emphasize the importance of considering the intended purposes for developing portfolios. By establishing the targets for a portfolio, an instructor can decide what kind of student work to incorporate, who should manage it, how often to review it, and more (Wiggins and McTighe, 2007). The instructors regularly assign students to include writing

samples, reflections, drawings, reading logs, student self-evaluation, and progress notes, visuals and audio clips, among the many. According to Herrera et al. (2007), the common forms of portfolios contain best examples of students' work that illustrate their learning and progress.

In addition, portfolios are considered a good alternative to traditional forms of assessment because they incorporate the perspective of students and teachers about learning and assessment. Another significance of a portfolio is that unlike the traditional synoptic evaluations, such as the final exam or any standardized test that happens once, portfolios provide a longitudinal observation of student progress as they show incremental gains in knowledge, skills, and proficiencies (Herrera et al., 2007). Portfolios are also authentic because they are driven by classroom activities; in most cases, they reflect "in-process adaptations to instructional methods and assessment", and they assess learning which motivates students (Herrera et al., 2007, p. 32).

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is a valuable tool for learning and measurement. For example, when students' are engaged in assessing their own work, they try to learn the criteria for high-quality performance, and they experience a willingness to apply those criteria (Herrera et al., 2007). However, Black and Wiliam (1998) remain concerned about student readiness to self-assess or evaluate peers. They propose that once students acquire a clear picture of the outcome or purpose, "they become more committed and more effective as learners: their own assessment become an object discussion with their teachers and with one another" (p. 7).

However, agreements exist among educators, in which they recognize the value of self and peer-assessment which helps students exert control over their learning (Chappuis and Stiggins 2004). Initially, some teachers provide rubrics for student so that they can assess their progress. The rubrics incorporate the criteria that provide the opportunity for students to reflect

on the extent to which they have made progress. Atkin, Black, and Coffey (2001) illustrate a feature of alternative assessment that asks learners to ask three questions as they assess themselves: “where am I trying to go?; where am I now; and how do I close the gap” (cited in Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004, p.43).

Peer-Assessment

Similar to self-assessment, educators consider peer-assessment advantageous, as it furthers opportunities for students to identify targeted learning goals (Herrera et al., 2007; & Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004). In peer-assessment, students often assess other students’ work compared to the criteria developed by the instructor, or both students and the class instructor. An important aspect of peer assessment is that it engages students in dialogue with their classmates, commenting on each others’ work rather than a one-way feedback system from instructor to student.

To enrich peer-assessment and use it productively, Black and Wiliam (1998) propose that students be trained to assess their peers purposefully, with the goal of improving learning. As students comment on their peers’ work, they use informal language which is understandable to them. In addition, according to Herrera et al. (2007), given the concept of peer-assessment, students compare other students’ work to the accepted criteria, which “enables them to discern outstanding elements of both their own and their classmate’s performances and products” (p. 34).

Performance-Based Assessments

Linn and Miller (2005) explain performance-based assessment as “snapshots of students learning in time, which provide a longer exposure with panoramic lens, or real-time video” (p. 7). The idea that knowledge is constructed during the learning process and that a student discovers knowledge for him/herself, rather than receiving knowledge, inspires the notion of

performance-based assessment. This approach facilitates both the way students take information and the way they store and apply this information to deal with novel situations (Herrera et al., 2007). This means that, in addition to eliciting constructed responses, performance based assessment incorporates authentic tasks that need higher level of thinking and application of skills. Herrera et al. (2007) interpret performance-based assessment as an opportunity that “tap[s] into the depth and breadth of students’ learning” (p. 28).

Questioning

The concept of questioning has a long history in the area of classroom assessment; however, what has changed over the course of time is a shift from close-ended questions to more informative, open-ended formats. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2003) encourage teachers not only to develop more effective questions but also to facilitate an environment where students must think analytically and provide their own answers to their questions. The change that these authors introduce is as, “*‘some people describe friction as the opposite of slipperiness. Do you agree or disagree?’ was quickly changed to ‘some people describe friction as the opposite of slipperiness. What do you think?’*” (Black et al., 2003, p. 34).

In addition, Black et al. (2003) argue that formative questions challenge “common misconceptions, to create some conflict that requires discussion” which encourages students to think of a response or an idea from different angles (p. 39). To develop more formative questions, Black et al. (2003) encourage classroom teachers to organize their questions considering three themes: “frame questions” around the big idea that are worth asking; increasing the “wait time” so that students can think and express their responses; and facilitating “follow-up” questions or activities to ensure students understand (p. 42).

Interview-Based Assessment

Interview-based assessment is another form of alternative assessment the teachers use to gather data about students' experiences, interests, background, thoughts, beliefs, activities etc. Teacher-student interviews vary from highly structured to informal conversations. Herrera et al. (2007) agree that unstructured detailed interviews with students help teachers to adapt the lesson based on the information gathered from students. These authors note that, through a teacher's interview held with a student, the instructor realized that "linguistic differences can interfere with the development of deeper connections with students" (Herrera et al., 2007, p. 36).

Play-Based Assessment

Play-based assessment is a valuable assessment form that teachers can use at different grade levels. Examples include pre-school children who are learning the names of objects, language learners who can just barely explain things in the new language, and upper grade levels who role play or dramatize concepts from the literature, history, concurrent life situations, and politics (Herrera et al., 2007).

In addition, Herrera et al. (2007) indicate that assessment can take place in any manner but it does not mean that authentic assessment merely happens in nontraditional ways. Goodwin (2000) agrees "authentic assessment begins with teachers making it their business to purposefully watch, listen to, talk with, and think about the children in their classrooms" (p. 6). Some teachers reflect on who these children are, the extent of what they know, and the way they learn, based on the evidence that they observe in the role-play (Herrera et al., 2007).

Co-operative Group Assessment

The concept of group work or team work varies, depending on the context. In the West, particularly in the United States, an individual's success attracts more attention than the

accomplishments of team work, such as in sports, (Herrera et al., 2007). However, recent recognition of collaborative or team work is increasing among educators, realizing that strengths and skills of some students are well-defined when they are engaged in group activities such as cooperative learning or assessment. Herrera et al. (2007) observe that “collaborative or group activities often culminate in projects or experiments that may or may not require oral or written reporting” (p. 38).

Slavin (2006) argues that planning for group assessment requires educators to consider both group efforts and individual liability. Herrera et al. (2007) note the complexity of assessing a cooperative group activity, in particular distinguishing an individual student’s effort and the contribution he or she makes performing a group activity or project. Teachers often document the thought and action of individual students in the process of performing an activity as they learn from cooperative activities and the dialogue that occurs among the students.

Dialogue Journals and Scaffolded Essays

Accommodative or scaffolded authentic assessment may take various forms, including dialogue journals requiring students to write their thoughts about certain topics, or stories. Another form, scaffolded essays, allows the instructor to simplify a complex essay question by breaking it down into short answer questions. This is especially useful when assessing content information, because it reduces the stress of students who may assume that they will have to answer questions in an essay format (Berkowitz, Desmarais, Hogan, & Moorcroft, 2000).

Aligning the other forms of authentic assessment, teachers collect useful “information about student learning through accommodated and scaffolded assignments” (Herrera et al., 2007, p. 39). The literature characterizes one goal of authentic assessment as finding out what students are capable of doing. In this assets-based approach, less value is placed on the deficit-based view of what students are *not* capable of (Black & Wiliam, 2005; Herrera et al., 2007).

Scoring in Formative Assessment

The literature sheds light that one core reason teachers hesitate to use alternative assessment is because they provide little information in a numerical way. However, Herrera et al. (2007) assert that if teachers become aware of the many ways that formative assessment makes it possible to quantify or measure the information, this concern can be alleviated. Some ways to achieve this numerical representation are using rubrics, checklists, and questionnaires. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) define a rubric as a “criterion-based evaluation tool, consisting of a fixed measurement scale (such as four score points) and descriptions of the characteristics for each score point” (p. 87). Rubrics are used to engage students in the details of their own learning. Rubrics can be adapted based on grades of students, starting with picture style in pre-school and progressing to more structured forms in upper levels.

Herrera, Murry and Cabral (2007) emphasize involving students in the process of creating rubrics, which provides an opportunity for the students to focus on the targeted goal, criteria. Herrera et al. (2007) summarize key tips to follow in developing a rubric:

Determine the desired outcome, develop your current classroom practices as task that will create opportunities to students to demonstrate the targeted skill, determine what a good or high-quality performance on this task might look like, and complete the rubric by describing the requirements that must be met to attain each quantified level of performance” (p. 43).

In addition to these formats, there are other alternative assessments to measure student learning. Questionnaires and checklists are developed initially by identifying skills, knowledge, and competencies to perform a task. Given the indentified knowledge and skills, a series of questions or statements are developed to describe expected outcomes, taking into consideration the varying levels of students, as well. Herrera et al. (2007) believe that using questionnaires and checklists helps teachers to reduce repetitions, and they also provide information about students’ prior knowledge and what they bring into the classroom.

Although alternative authentic assessments can be developed and used in ways that demonstrate students' academic learning, Herrera et al. (2007) note that "such assessments are not immune to bias" (p. 46). This means that a teacher may provide more feedback to some students and less to some others, or the instructor may prioritize his/her perspective in assessing a performance, ignoring the fact that other voices and aspects should be considered accordingly. As can be summarized from the above discussion, increased student involvement in the process of assessment, can be used to reduce this concern (William & Thompson, 2008 & Herrera et al., 2007).

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

This section will discuss issues that are raised in *the literature* on assessment practices and perceptions about classroom assessment from students', as well as teachers', points of view. The main topics covered in this section are 1) assessment of student learning: development and application of assessment questionnaires; 2) attitudes towards assessment forms; 3) peer-assessment forms (conventional vs. alternative assessment); 4) performance based assessment. In addition, key concepts, such as authenticity of assessment, student involvement in the process of assessment development, and fairness of assessment will be touched upon. The majority of studies reviewed in this chapter are empirical and few of them are desk reviews.

Assessment and Learning: Development and Application of Assessment Questionnaire

Koul, Fisher and Earnest (1998) investigated the relationships among students' perceptions of their assessment task, classroom learning environment, academic self-efficacy, and attitude to science in years eight, nine and ten of school. This study provides a generic representation to many other studies as far as perceptions of students are concerned with assessment. The study took three years and the authors used "a six-scale instrument, Perceptions of Assessment Task (PAT), 48 items from a 55 items questionnaire developed by Schaffner, Burry, Cho, Boney and Hamilton (2000)" (cited in Koul, Fisher & Earnest, 1998, p. 2). Their sample was constituted of 470 students from grades eight, nine and ten in 20 science classrooms in three Western Australian schools. As part of their study, they developed a five-scale instrument, *Students Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ)*.

In the second phase, the authors administered SPAQ with an attitude scale and self-efficacy scales to nearly 1,000 students from 41 science classes in grades eight, nine, and ten,

(Koul, Fisher & Earnest, 1998). The collected data was analyzed using one-way ANOVA, differentiating between classrooms, with the Cronbach Alpha Reliability for internal consistency, Scale Mean and Standard Deviation. Correlation results show an association between the SPAQ and students' attitude to science classes.

In addition, the authors found that among the five scales of SPAQ, the scales of Congruence with Planned Learning, Authenticity, Transparency and Diversity were positively associated. This means that the instrument was able to differentiate between the perceptions of students in different classrooms based on the 5 scales on the questionnaire. In contrast, the scale of Student Consultation was negatively associated (Koul, Fisher, & Earnest, 1998). This means that students do not have a say in their classroom tasks. Similarly, the analysis shows an association between students' perceptions of assessment tasks, and their academic self-efficacy in science classes were positively significant. However, the study shows that *no statistically significant differences* were noticed in students' perceptions based on their gender. This means that male students in this study perceived themselves to be academically more efficient than their female counterpart.

Dhindsa, Omar and Waldrip (2007) performed a study to evaluate the validity of Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ), to evaluate student perceptions on assessment, and to evaluate gender-based, grade-based, and ethnicity-based differences in students' perceptions. These researchers found that SPAQ was a suitable instrument for assessing students' perceptions on five assessment dimensions: congruence with planned learning (CPL), assessment of applied learning (AAL), students' consultation on assessment (SCA) types, transparency in assessment (TA), and accommodation of students' diversity in assessment procedures.

The study constituted 1,028 upper secondary science students from four districts of Brunei including 42% males and 58% females. This sample consisted of 68.5% Malay, 44.5% Chinese, and 3.9% students from other races. These ethnic groups with different culture, language, and dialects are concentrated in the district call, Brunei Darussalam. Dhinda et al. (2007) used a stratified sampling technique for the selection of classes and schools, as among 43 science classes, they randomly selected 14. In addition, in order to triangulate the objectivity of the quantitative data they held interviews with teachers and observed their classes.

Dhindsa et al. (2007) used tests and assignments as their assessment instrument, but through classroom observation they analyzed test-papers, homework, and class-work. Their instrument, SPAQ, was administered in English, the medium of instruction, although English was the second or the third language for the participants. The researchers summarized that the average scale-item mean values for Congruence with Planed Learning (CPL) and Transparency in Assessment (TA) were higher, which suggest that students perceived that often the assessment covered what they learned in their classes and transparency existed in their assessment (Dhindsa et al., 2007). However, the scale-item values for Students Consultation on Assessment (SCA) were the lowest, meaning that students perceived a low-level of consultation.

In addition, the results on race-based differences in students' perception of assessment show that the average mean score of Chinese students was statistically lower than Malay students on all scales, as well as that of students of the other category. This suggests that Chinese students, as compared with the other two groups, perceived a weak link between what is taught and what is assessed; assessment is less transparent, does not account for student consultation, lacks testing applications in daily life, and caters very little towards students' diversity (Dhinda

et al., 2007). However, the average scale scores between Malay and other students were not statistically significant except in the Assessment of Applied Learning scale.

Cavanagh, Waldrip, Romanoski, Fisher and Droman (2005) conducted a study that “constructed a measure of how students view the assessment procedure applied in the science classroom” (p. 3). The study involved 320 students, grades eight, nine and ten from 16 classes of Queensland metropolitan and rural schools. Out of 30-items of Student Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire, six items were dropped because they were less relevant (Cavanagh et al., 2005). The data was analyzed using the Rasch Unidimensional Measurement Model (RUMM). The authors used the result of RUMM analysis to refine the instrument, called *post hoc* because the original data were analyzed earlier (Cavanagh et al., 2005). They gauged the difficulty students showed in affirming the items of the instrument. The result of their study showed that the students differed widely in their ability to state the elements of classroom assessment measured based on the Rasch analysis (Cavanagh et al., 2005).

Attitudes towards Assessment Forms

Birenbaum and Feldman (1998) examined the relationship between students’ *learning related characteristics* and their attitudes towards two assessment formats (constructed response and choice response). They found that “students’ attitudes towards each of the two assessments formats (construction vs. multiple choice) correlate with students’ learning-related processes of the cognitive and effective aspect” (p. 94). Although the effect of assessment format on students’ performance has been investigated in light of the effect of assessment on students as performers (often the victim), Bennett (1993), Birenbaum et al. (1992), and Traub and MacRury (1990) observe that it was surprising to witness “the paucity of research regarding students’ assessment attitudes and preferences” (cited in Birenbaum & Feldman, 1998, p. 91). The authors

hypothesized that a considerable interaction between students' personal characteristics and assessment formats exist.

In this study, Birenbaum and Feldman (1998) measured students' attitudes towards multiple choice exam format and open-ended exam type against gender, academic self-concept, reflective processing, agentic processing (strategies of learning), test anxiety (TA) worry, and TA emotionality. They found that sex, agentic processing, and methodical study significantly correlated with multiple-choice (MC) format (Birenbaum & Feldman, 1998). In addition, the study shows that male participants tend to have comparatively more positive attitudes toward MC format than females. Variables that correlate significantly with open-ended (OE) format are the two components of test anxiety and methodical study. Overall, students with low test anxiety tend to favor OE format more than high test-anxious students; in other words, participants with high scores on the methodical scale tend to favor this format more than those who scored lower.

Struyven, Dochy, and Janssens (2005) performed a study examining the relationship between assessment and students' approaches towards learning. This inquiry presented a comprehensive review of students' perceptions about assessment making a considerable contribution in understanding the impacts of assessment in higher education. The study was done through reviewing web and education databases, such as ERIC, the Web of Science and PsychoINFO from the years 1980 to 2002. The evidence shows that the cited studies were empirical in terms of both content and the findings that are drawn.

The study hypothesized that "assessment has an important influence on students' learning" (Struyven et al, 2005, p. 326). In addition, the researchers argued, "learner's experience of evaluation and assessment determines the way in which the students approach

(future) learning” by the same token, the way “a student thinks about learning, determines the way he tackles evaluation task” (Struyven et al, 2005, p. 326). Two pairs of variables are identified in this study: 1) students’ perception about assessment, the independent variable (IV) and their approaches to learning, dependent variable (DV); 2) assessment format and method (IV) and students’ approaches to learning (DV).

The authors encourage further stating, “as educators, we have an important influence on students’ approach to learning, but findings suggest that we do not succeed in providing sufficient guidance to students about optimum learning approach” (Struyven et al., 2005, p. 336). The authors used a desk review of earlier studies that include both quantitative and qualitative investigations to pursue this study. In terms of measurement, the study relies on the approaches earlier studies pursued, exploring students’ perceptions about two general types of methods (format) of assessment, conventional evaluation methods and alternative assessment methods.

The study concludes that students’ perceptions about assessment and their approaches to learning are strongly related. Given the findings, when assessment is perceived to be inappropriate that implies a surface approach to learning; however, a deeper approach to learning seems according the Stryven et al. (2005) yield through a complex and extensive assessment approach. Within conventional assessment practice students favor multiple-choice format of assessment more than essay items or constructed response. The study shows that students with more advanced learning abilities and with low test anxieties favor essay type exams, while students with poorer learning abilities and low test anxiety are less likely to favor essay-type exams. In addition, studies on gender differences indicate that female students favor essay type exams. The researchers argue that, unlike multiple-choice type, an essay type exam invokes deeper approaches to learning (Stryven et al., 2005).

Student perceptions about the appropriateness of evaluation and their preferences barely match. Although inappropriate assessments tend to encourage students to only take a surface approach to learning, students still demonstrated a clear preference for multiple-choice exams. Students view fairness as if “assessment: relates to authentic tests, represents reasonable demand, encourages students to apply knowledge to realistic contexts, emphasizes the need to develop a range of skills, and is perceived to have long-term impact” (Struyven et al, 2005, p. 337).

Peer-Assessment

Kwok (2008) performed a study investigating students’ perceptions of peer evaluation and teachers’ role in seminar discussion. He found that students viewed the experience of peer evaluation as enhancing their confidence and providing them the opportunity to exercise power of making judgments about their peers (Kwok, 2008). The study, which aimed to measure the impact of peer evaluation on seminar discussions in higher education, involved 19 undergraduates taking a course titled *English for Academic Purposes*. The author used both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study and focused on students’ responses from two perspectives: students as evaluators and students as evaluatees.

The author found that the majority of students participating as evaluatees “considered the comments and feedback fair” (Kwok, 2008, p. 89). These respondents viewed the seminar as helpful in terms of the “importance of teamwork, self-awareness and confidence in responding to open-ended questions” (Kwok, 2008, p. 89). Similarly, students’ perceptions as evaluators indicated that students enjoyed their experience of observing, listening to other students, making decisions, giving comments, and marking (grading). However, the study shows that some students considered themselves unprepared to assess peers as compared to the teacher who has more experience and provides professional advice (Kwok, 2008).

Performance-based Assessment

Segers, et al (2006) studied two cohorts of second-year students attending a course titled “International Business Strategy” (p. 228). They used two instruction formats: first, an assignment-based format for the first cohort, which 406 students attended, and second, a problem-based learning format attended by 312 students in the following academic year. The authors found that there were significant differences in the learning strategies: “students in the assignment-based learning course adopted more deep-learning strategies and less surface-learning strategies than the students in the problem-based learning course” (Segers et al., 2006, p. 234).

Their findings suggest that, contrary to their expectation, students who intended to have deep learning strategies and deep assessment demands, had a weaker association, although the correlation between the actual deep-learning strategies and students’ deep perceptions of the assessment demand was significant. The authors confirm an earlier study by Scouller (1998) that a relationship exists between “students’ actual learning strategies and their perceptions of the assessment demands in the test and assignment condition” (Segers et al., 2006, p. 236).

Panizzon and Pegg (2007) engaged 25 teacher- volunteers to participate in a study representing six secondary rural schools from New South Wales, Australia. The researchers used the Structure of Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO), a cognitive structural model, which provided “a basis for both assessing students’ understandings and identifying ways of enhancing student learning” (Panizzon & Pegg, 2007, p. 420).

Three two-day workshops were conducted at the university for these teachers, focusing “around the SOLO model, assessment tasks and pedagogical practices” (Panizzon & Pegg, 2007, p. 423). The authors primarily used two sources of data: “student scripts coded using the SOLO

model” and interviews with teacher, inquiring their experiences with the new approach to “teaching and assessment practices to enhance students learning” (Panizzon & Pegg, 2007, p. 423).

The authors found that all teachers who participated in this project represented a change in their practices, embedding different kinds of questions to gauge students’ understandings in their classrooms. According to Panizzon and Pegg (2007), the project helped teachers recognize that “restricting the type and style of questioning in their teaching and assessment provided limited scope for students to demonstrate their conceptual understanding” (p. 431). Overall, the authors asserted that teachers reported a shift in their perceptions of learning demonstrated in their teaching and assessment practices, which was noticed by students and their colleagues as well (Panizzon & Pegg, 2007).

Gulikers, Bastiaens, Kirschner, and Kester (2006) investigated the relations between student perceptions of assessment authenticity, study approaches and learning outcome with 118 senior students studying social work at a vocational education and training institute in Netherland. The authors used qualitative and quantitative methods collecting the data. The participants filled out a questionnaire regarding perceptions of assessment, using a five-dimensional framework adopted from an earlier study conducted by (Gulikers et al., 2006). Their perceptions of alignment were measured by a 5-item questionnaire, and their study approach was measured with *Revised Study Process Questionnaire 2 Factors*, a 20-item questionnaire (Gulikers et al., 2006). The perceptions of assessment questionnaire examined whether students perceived the authenticity of the task, the physical context, the social context, the form, and the criteria.

The authors used correlation analyses to examine the relationships between the various variables. Among the 118 participants, only 77 had final grades; thus, students' grades were not included in analysis. As the study hypothesized that relations exist between perceptions of authenticity and alignment on a Deep Study Approach (DSA) and development of generic skills, Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the hypothesis. The finding suggests that a positive relationship exists between perceptions, deep studying approach and the learning outcome (Gulikers et al., 2006).

However, the study shows an unexpected contradictory “positive correlation between Generic Skill Development and Surface Study Approach, meaning that more surface study activities improved the development of generic study skills” (Gulikers et al., 2006, p. 391). In addition, according to Gulikers et al. (2006) “a significant relationship exists between perceptions of *criterion* authenticity and a deep study approach, ($\beta=-.44$)”, which indicates, “the more assessment criteria were perceived, the less deep the students reported having studied” (p. 393).

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Context of the Study

Baghlan Higher Education Institution (BHEI) was established in 2002, and consists of two faculties (schools), School of Education and School of Agriculture. BHEI is located in Baghlan, a northern province of Afghanistan, 224 kilometers from the capital city, Kabul. It serves around 1,300 students and is approximately 80 percent male and 20 percent female. BHEI provides bachelor degrees in the areas of education and agriculture. For the sake of this study, the focus is on the education faculty that includes English, Dari, Pashtu, Arabic, Chemistry and Biology, Math and Physics, and Theology Departments. The curriculum that is implemented in BHEI is provided by the Ministry of Higher Education and was developed in Kabul Education University, which functions as the mother institution for all the education faculties in Afghanistan.

The faculty members serving in BHEI are primarily the graduates of central universities such as Kabul Education University, Kabul University and recently, BHEI. The faculty members typically hold only bachelor degrees, and their work experience varies from one to eight years. There are 48 faculty members in this institution; among these, only 5 are women. During the current study, only three of the female faculty members were present; the other two were enrolled in master's programs in Kabul Education University. The student population is primarily from the region and some neighboring provinces in the area. Although students represent the majority of the neighboring provinces, the female students are only from Baghlan. Female representation is low because BHEI does not have any accommodation for female students who can come from the neighboring provinces.

BHEI did not have its own building for five years since its establishment. It used to operate in rented buildings in Pol-e-Khumri City. However, since 2006, BHEI has moved to its own building, 20 kilometers outside of the city. Since this change, the number of female students has dropped from 40 percent to 20 percent. The reason is that the university is currently situated in an isolated area. Transportation is problematic and very few other buildings neighbor the University. In addition, the current political atmosphere, combined with threats from the Taliban regime have had a considerable impact on all students' interest in studying at BHEI, but particularly on the interest of female students.

Baghlan Higher Education Institution was purposefully sampled for this study because the investigator formerly taught in one of the education departments in this institution. In addition, the investigator preferred BHEI due to greater accessibility to people and facilities. Investigator's past experience could have influenced BHEI students and faculty members' responses to the interview and questionnaire. To reduce this risk, the investigator spent more time having informal conversations with students and faculty members. He emphasized creating a comfortable, normal atmosphere rather than suddenly appearing in the institution like a stranger who just wanted to perform the study and leave.

Assessment and evaluation methods practiced in provincial higher education institutions in Afghanistan represent each individual teacher's approach. Currently, there is no national or standard approach to assessment in education faculties. Additionally, assessment approaches are barely taught to either faculty members or student-teachers during training period. Therefore, each faculty member develops an individual assessment approach based on how he or she was assessed as a student, or based on any books he or she has read.

Method, Instrument, Procedure, and Analysis

To answer the research questions: students' and teachers' perceptions of assessment, main methods of assessment used in Baghlan Higher Education Institution, and the extent assessment results used to improve instruction, two types of data (quantitative and qualitative) were collected in this study. In terms of the qualitative section, the researcher opted for a phenomenological approach to explore students' experiences and their perceptions of classroom assessment. The investigator chose this approach, because he was interested in learning the meaning of assessment formats from students' perspectives.

In addition, faculty members were asked about their rationale behind the type of classroom assessment method they use in their classroom; this provided some measure of triangulation for the study. Schram (2005) agrees that a researcher can draw upon what a phenomenon or experience means to a particular person through a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach was selected for the study because the researcher was interested in investigating the lived experience of individuals (Schram, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) in relation to assessment practices in junior and senior classes at Baghlan Higher Education Institution.

The researcher conducted 19 interviews, 13 individually and 6 in pairs, 3 focus group (two focus groups of students and one focus group of teachers from different disciplines), and 16 hours of classroom observation. Table 4.1 shows the number of interview and focus group participants. All interviews were held in Baghlan Higher Education Institution; these varied from 30 to 70 minutes. . Rossman and Rallis (2003) assert that as researchers engage in a prolonged study interpreting the meaningfulness of individuals' experiences in relation to a topic, the uniqueness of a phenomenological approach lies in its intensive and in-depth interviews in

qualitative inquiry. Besides the depth of the interview, the researcher was also interested in the breadth of study, including as many participants as possible so that he could base his interpretation on richer data.

The interview questions were initially structured to inquire about classroom assessment approaches used by the instructors and the meaningfulness of those assessment approaches from the students' points of view. Maxwell (2006) argues that, along with other generic approaches, using a phenomenological approach in qualitative study is important in “understanding *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences” (p. 8).

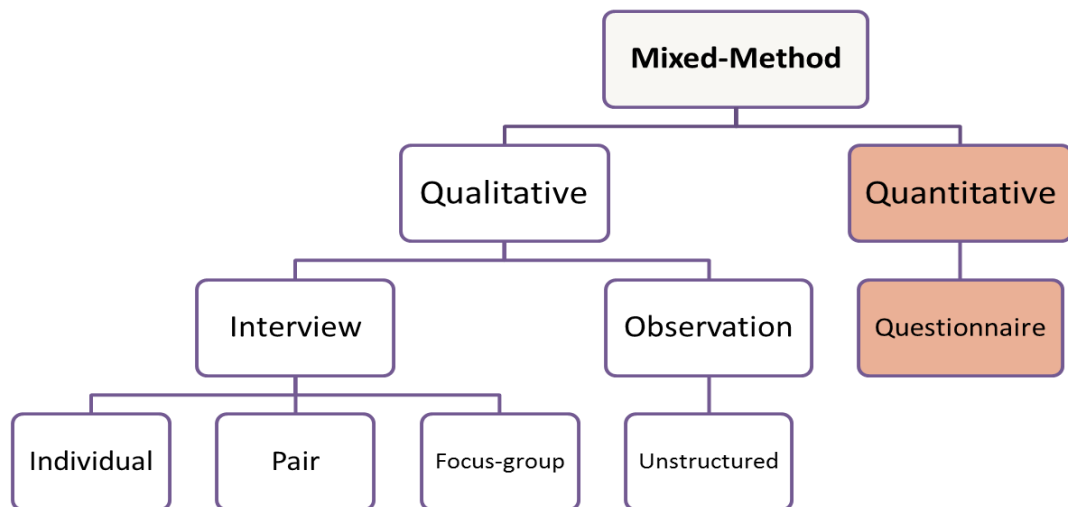


Figure 4.1 Data Collection Procedure

Qualitative Section

Research Population

The investigator selected participants from three main departments: social science, natural science, and language & literature studies. The investigator presented his topic to individual teachers or to a group of faculty members during lunch or tea time. They were

encouraged to volunteer, and the investigator was cautious to keep a balance among the departments as well. Among 44 faculty members, 13 faculty members volunteered to participate in the interview. The faculty members represented all departments as listed above. The researcher held eight individual faculty interviews and one focus group with five faculty members. Among the faculty interviewees, two of them were females who participated in individual interviews and the remaining 11 were males. The investigator observed 6 classes of the faculty members varying from 2 to 3 hours each.

The researcher contacted the faculty members individually and presented the purpose of his study and asked them if they were interested to participate in the study. Once the faculty members agreed, the researcher purposefully selected classes for observation of those faculty members who agreed to participate. The investigator first observed their classrooms for two to three sessions, recording insights, and noting impressions from individual faculty member's classes. Once the class observation was complete, the investigator arranged an interview with the class teacher. The criteria for class observation were to represent all three main departments from the faculty of education, language, social science, and natural science. However, those faculty members whose classes were not selected for observation were interviewed according to their availability.

In terms of observations, the investigator performed unstructured observations, noting the way instructors responded to students' questions, the type of language instructors used (encouraging or discouraging), and their tone of voice they used when correcting students. In addition, the researcher was interested in seeing the extent to which the faculty members provided oral and written feedback for the students, willingness and ability of students to pose questions, and the characteristics of feedback given to students. Finally, the investigator aimed to

explore the extent that students communicate in the classroom, such as being comfortable to make comments about their peers' presentations or ask questions of others or their teacher.

To select student participants for the interview, the investigator approached all third and fourth year students and introduced the topic of the study. Students were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. However, some classes were revisited or individual students were invited to take part. The investigator maintained a relative balance between female and male participants (12 males and 16 females), but the majority volunteers were third year students. Only five fourth year students offered to participate (*see Table 4.1* for details on the interview and focus group participants). Part of the reason for their reticence is that fourth year students have to go for practicum two days a week; therefore their schedule was more demanding than that of the third year. The investigator chose to involve only students from the third and fourth years because they have more experience and have witnessed a wider range of assessment practices in their classrooms.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview approach focusing on four main themes of classroom assessment (methods of assessment, authenticity of assessment, use of assessment result, and transparency of assessment). Based on the research questions, two interview question protocols were developed: one for the faculty members and one for students. To ensure that the interview questions were aligned with the research questions, the researcher conferred with his academic advisor before entering in the field. In addition, the interview questions were presented to two other experienced faculty members in the field. They reviewed the questions, checking for language use and correspondence to the level of student understanding. The faculty members suggested some changes in the use of assessment jargon, such as authenticity of assessment, formative and summative nature of assessment.

Interview Participants

	Faculty	Students	
		3 rd Year	4 th Year
Male	11	10	2
Female	2	13	3
Sub-Total	13	23	5
Total	41		

Table 4.1

All interviews were held in Baghlan Higher Education Institution, in an office provided by the institution to be used for the study. This office was preferred because interruptions during the interviews were limited, and female participants felt more comfortable being interviewed within the structure of the institution. To encourage the participants and show appreciation for their participation in the study, they were offered some incentive such as an invitation for lunch or the provision of some refreshment. In some cases they were provided some stationary, including books, notebook, pen, etc. After the interviews participants were thanked orally, and told how much the researcher appreciated their willingness to participate in the study.

When the students agreed to participate, some of them requested to see some examples of questions in the interview; thus the investigator handed them a copy of the questions he developed. However, students were informed that additional questions would be asked during the interview. The researcher informed those students so that they were prepared to be asked follow-up questions and would treat the questions on the handout as guiding questions.

Although the researcher had introduced the topic of research, the goal, and the outcome of the study in each class when asking for volunteers, before each interview he re-informed the participants about the purpose of the study and the participants' rights. The investigator avoided using written informed consent forms, given the fact that signing the consent form might have

negative interpretations in the community. This was confirmed through consultations with some faculty members in Kabul Education University and BHEI. All participants were informed that their voices would be recorded by a digital recorder, and, once the data was transcribed, participants were assured that the audio data would be destroyed. Given this assurance, no participant refused to be recorded.

In total, 28 students participated in the qualitative research. They were grouped into three categories: individual interviews, pair interviews, and focus group. Seven students were interviewed individually: five males and two females. Eight students, mostly female, were interviewed in pairs. The remaining students participated in one of two focus groups: four female students in one group and eight male students in another. The primary reason the female students preferred pair-interview and focus group is because they wanted to be respectful of the culture of the region that do not usually permit an adult male to be alone in a room with an unmarried woman. Although two female students were interviewed individually, they had a partner accompany them during the interview.

Among the 28 students interviewed, ten were from the language department, four from the social science department, and fourteen from the natural science department. As there was a higher number of students from the natural science department interested in participating in the study, the researcher invited them to be part of the focus groups. The investigator made this decision firstly to avoid losing volunteers; given the limited time, interviewing each individual participant would not have been feasible. Secondly the researcher wanted to explore the extent to which participants agreed or disagreed when they were in a group.

Before each interview, the researcher checked his recorder to make sure it worked properly. During the interview, he took notes about the key points the participants mentioned in

case the recorder malfunctioned. As soon as the investigator had access to the computer he transferred all the data so that he had an extra copy in case one was later damaged.

The information provided by students, along with the class observations, helped the researcher frame new questions more relevant to the actual context of BHEI. Similarly, student interview questions were adapted after the first few interviews were held in an effort to focus more strongly on what mattered most to students and teachers. The interviews were conducted earlier than the initial proposed timeline due to the fact that students had to take their final exams. The researcher made this decision after the students mentioned the issue in informal conversations they had with the investigator.

During the interviews, participants were assured that the collected data would be stored in a locked file in the computer. Codes were used instead of participants' names to make sure their identities were protected. Once the investigator completed the transcription, he destroyed the audio data both from the computer and the digital recorder.

Quantitative Section

Sample

Seven classes were purposefully selected representing the three main departments: the natural science, social science, and language departments for the quantitative data. Among the seven classes, two classes were fourth year students and five third year students, and the number of participants who returned the questionnaires was 209; however, six of them were not marked.

Instrument

The investigator selected The Student Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ), which was developed by Fisher, Waldrup and Dorman (2005). He adapted and used this instrument to inquire about students' perceptions in five dimensions (scales). (*See table 4.2*)

Descriptions and Examples of Items for Each Scale of the Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ)

Scale (SPAQ)	Description	Item
Congruence with Planned Learning	Extent to which assessment tasks align with the goals, objectives and activities of the learning program.	My assignments/tests are about what I have done in class.
Authenticity of Assessment	The extent to which assessment tasks feature real life situations those are relevant to the learner.	I find my assessment tasks relevant to what I do outside of school.
Students' Consultation about Assessment	The extent to which students are consulted and informed about the forms of assessment tasks being employed.	I have a say in how I will be assessed in science.
Transparency of Assessment	The extent to which the purposes and forms of assessment tasks are well-defined and clear to the learner.	I am clear about what my teacher wants in my assessment tasks.
Students' Capabilities	The extent to which all student have an equal chance at completing assessment tasks.	I am given a choice of assessment task.

Table 4.2

Students were provided a clear explanation on how to rate the questions in the instrument ranging scaling from 1—5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). SPAQ was adapted based on the research questions particularly on the first scale (congruence with planned learning) and was then translated into Dari/Farsi. Three faculty members were consulted to review the instrument (Dari version) and, based on their feedback, the instrument was adapted. The feedback of the faculty members focused mainly on word choice, and they made suggestions how to improve it. The investigator revisited the instrument several times so that the items would correspond to the research questions and measure what was intended.

To validate the instrument, a group of ten students (5 third year and 5 fourth year students) were asked to fill the questionnaire as a pilot test. As they completed the questionnaire, they were asked some questions, making sure they understood the items. The responses of the pilot test group seemed that they understood the questions, and they had no difficulty in interpreting each item. In addition, the follow up questions confirmed that the instrument was understandable for third and fourth year students.

This instrument was selected because several other prior studies had confirmed its validity in various ways. Koul Fisher, and Earnest (2005) developed and applied the five-scale instrument Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) to a sample consisting 1,000 participants from 40 science classes (grade eight, nine and ten). Validity and reliability of the SPAQ were confirmed statistically through their study. Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007) administered SPAQ with 1,028 upper secondary science students in Bruneian upper secondary and found that SPAQ was suitable for assessing students' perceptions on five assessment dimensions, noted above. Their study showed that based on the information produced from the factor analysis the instrument was valid. Overall validity and reliability of SPAQ was confirmed in assessing Bruneian upper secondary students' perception of assessment.

Design and Procedure

Data from Baghlan University were collected within five weeks that included both quantitative and qualitative data: June 15, 2009 to July 20, 2009. However, the investigator spent another three weeks in informal observation of the institution and holding informal conversations with the faculty and students. Baghlan Higher Education authorities were consulted and asked for cooperation. The institution contributed greatly in terms of permitting the study to be held in this institution and provided facilities, such as a room for the interview. In addition, institutional permission was given to administer the questionnaire during instruction hours. For example, third and fourth year students were informed 1-2 days before the instrument was administered so that those who were interested were aware and willing to participate.

In addition, the investigator trained instructors about the questionnaire for those in whose classes the questionnaire was to be administered. Their engagement was because they were assisting the investigator administering the questionnaire and having some background

information about the topic and its purpose could help answer some students' questions; students had an equal opportunity to rate the questionnaire, too. Anonymity of the students was confirmed by the investigator so that they felt no threat from their teachers. See Appendix A for more information about the questionnaire.

Validity

To enhance the validity of the study, the investigator triangulated the data by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches: within the qualitative section, he conducted interviews and observations, and in quantitative section, he administered a survey questionnaire. In addition, he collected the data from a diverse range of individuals who were involved in the study, such as the instructors and students from diverse disciplines. The reason he included all disciplines was because he wanted to draw his findings based on a rich source of data. Maxwell (2005) and Rossman and Rallis (2003) support the idea that by triangulation a researcher can reduce the risk of any chance combined the data or covering only one aspect of the phenomenon which results in using a specific method. Triangulation allows "a better assessment of generality of explanations that one develops" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 32).

Following methodologists' suggestions about being involved in the site for a long period, (see Schram, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; and Rossman & Rallis, 2003), the researcher spent more than two months in the site holding formal and informal conversation with students and instructors in the field and was able to ask them informally about what they felt about classroom assessment and its impact on learning. In addition, as the investigator used to teach in this institution, he was deeply familiar with the site. This augmented the investigator's understanding of the site, although the timeline of the actual study (interviews, observations, and questionnaire administration) was only five weeks. During the interviews, participants were often asked to elaborate on a point they made, and he shared back with them his understanding of their words.

In addition, to reduce personal bias and misinterpretation, the investigator shared transcriptions with some participants, checking whether they were satisfied with their interviews. Sharing the transcriptions with participants helped the investigator build more trust and confidence among the participants, which is also admired among research practitioners (see Rossman & Rallis, 2003; and Maxwell, 2005).

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately given different nature of the data; however, after analysis the data were integrated to support themes and various points. The quantitative data Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) items were analyzed using the SPSS program. A sum of 209 respondents from the three departments (social science, natural science & language) filled the *Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire*. However, six respondents' responses were dropped from the study for two reasons: first, they filled less than half of the items in the questionnaire; second, the items that they filled were not the major topics that could have an impact on the study. Therefore, a total of 203 students' responses were analyzed for the sake of this study.

Overall item mean values were averaged over the respondents to compute an average overall item mean value. The content of the instrument was validated by three faculty members from Baghlan Higher Education Institution. They reviewed the translated version of the SPAQ items for the language of the content and construct. The faculty members attested that the instrument was valid for assessing the perceptions of third and fourth year students at BHEI. The interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using a generic process.

Initially, the data were organized by doing some minor editing, cleaning up the field notes, marking the dates and time in case missing. Then the investigator read through the data

several times familiarizing with the data, making notes, referring back to the research questions, making decisions whether to focus on individual responses or on topics. After reviewing the data, the data were sorted to find connections by generating themes and patterns, combining themes and sub-categories together. The data were then coded in order to bring meaning, putting them into categories. Lastly, the data were interpreted to articulate meaning, making decisions whether to use direct quotes or the summary of respondents' words, and reporting the data considering the interest of various audiences. The major aim of collecting qualitative data was to evaluate overall mean data for students' responses on SPAQ in light of observed classroom practices.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results and Findings

This chapter focuses on the respondents' answers in terms of assessment practices in Baghlan Higher Education Institution (BHEI). Generally, two main sections are included under this chapter, *Quantitative Results* and *Qualitative Results*. The quantitative section mainly shows an overall perception of students about assessment at BHEI including both descriptive and ANOVA analyses. The qualitative section addresses the themes that emerged from respondents' responses that relate to the research questions and the assumptions that were made at the beginning of the study. Themes vary from what and why of assessment, to current practices of assessment, students' experiences and stories, assessment methods, consultation about assessment, meaningfulness and distribution of scores, indicator of good assessment, ethics of assessment, and the impacts of assessment on students' current leaning habits. These themes emerged as they are addressing the research questions and also issues specific to the faculty members and students. For the sake of analysis, both students' and the faculty members' responses are integrated in relation to specific topics. The research questions are:

- What are the perceptions of teachers and students about classroom assessment in Baghlan Higher Education Institution?
- What are the main methods that teachers assess students learning?
 - Do teachers use test to improve instruction or to report?
 - Do students know what they are tested about?
- To what extent are current classroom assessment results are used to improve students learning and classroom instruction?

Quantitative Section—Results

The reliability of the SPAQ was evaluated by subjecting the data to the internal consistency/reliability (Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient) for all variables. The data show that, SPAQ has high reliability 0.89 in the 24-item.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.890	24

Descriptive Analysis

Initially, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to demonstrate an overall perception of students to the five scale (24 items) assessment questionnaire. The analysis shows that female respondents represent only a quarter of the overall sample (See figure 5. 1).

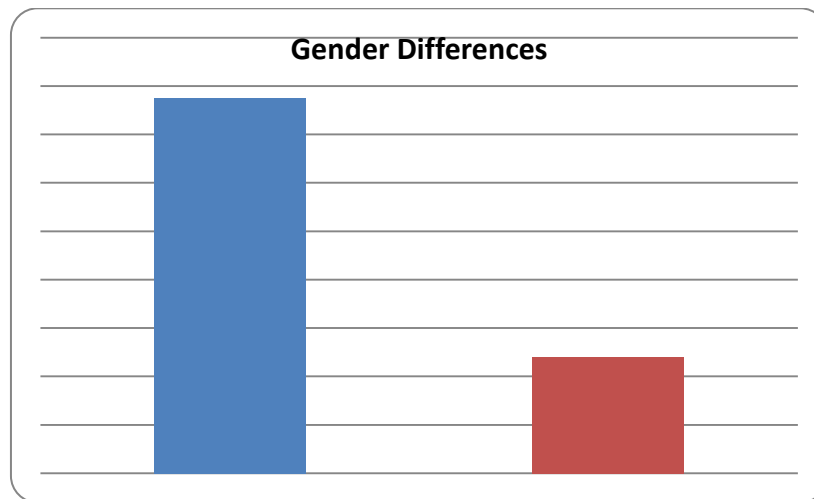


Figure 5.1

The five scales include: congruence with planned learning (CPL), assessment authenticity (AA), students' consultation about assessment (SCA), transparency of assessment (TA), and students' capabilities (SC). Figure 5.2 shows the average mean score of all students' perceptions of assessment from the three departments (Social Science, Natural Science and Language departments) in relation to the five scales.

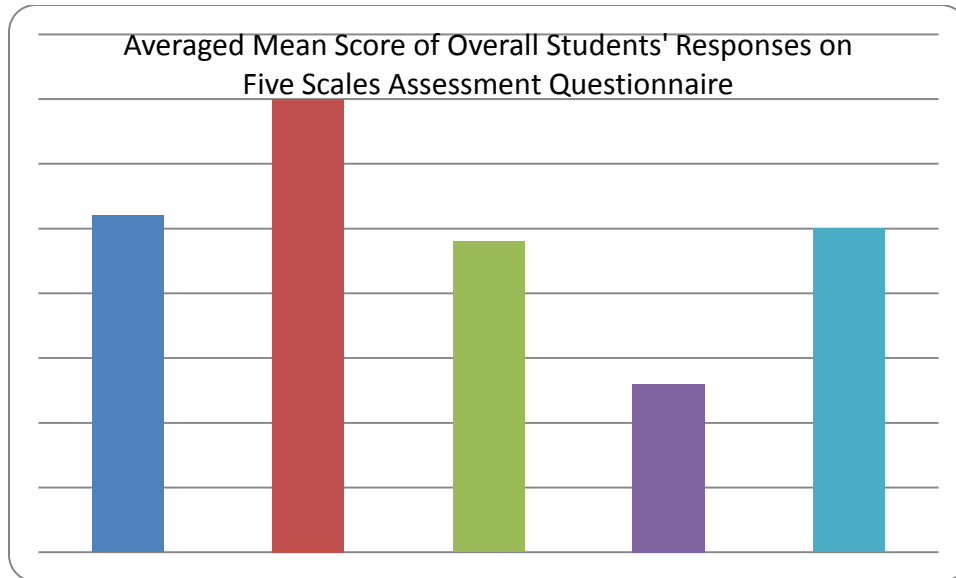


Figure 5.2

Drawing on the figure .2, the study shows that students perceived the authenticity of assessment higher ($M = 3.60$) than the other four scales. This suggests that students see a connection between their assessment in their class and their daily life activities. From the six items under this scale, the mean score of item #6 is the highest 4.1 and item #8 is the lowest 2.64. See Appendix A for further details about the instrument used.

In addition, based on the average means in figure .2, students have marked the transparency of assessment the lowest among the five scales $M = 3.38$. This suggests that students are as clearer about the requirements of an assessment task and the way their work is assessed compared to the other scales. In addition, the data reveals that in terms of transparency, two important issues are less clear compared to other items given the students' perceptions, the what and how of assessment. In other words, students are less aware what their assessment is based on and how teachers mark them.

The alignment of assessment with learning, congruence with planned learning, is comparatively perceived higher among the students $M = 3.51$. However, students' responses to

item #1 and item #2 shows that slight difference in terms of whether students perceived assessment as testing what they memorize or what they understand. For example, the value for item #1 that indicates assessment is used to test what students memorize is higher $M = 3.34$ compared to the item #2 which indicates that assessment measures what students understand $M = 3.03$. This implies that students perceive assessment as a measure of memorization and comparatively less as a measure of understanding.

In terms of consultation about the classroom assessment, responses from students show that students are fairly positive about the type of assessment being used in their class with an average mean of 3.49. This indicates that students can have a say in terms of the forms of assessment being used in their classes. In addition, based on students' responses, the average mean score shows that students received instruction about the use of various assessment forms in their classes.

In addition, the data shows that regarding the capabilities of students in performing an assessment task, students perceived their assessment task quite positive ($M = 3.5$). However, two items that indicate that students are given a choice or another way to answer a question in an assessment task has the lowest mean scores ($M = 2.59$) in item #24 and ($M = 2.63$) in item #22. This implies that students are less likely given the choice of an assessment format, and an alternative way to approach a question when they are confused.

Students' Perceptions of Assessment

This section illustrates Baghlan Higher Education Institution's third and fourth year students' perceptions of assessment and a comparison of perceptions of the students based on the three departments (social science, natural science and language). The mean values ranged from 2.57 to 4.1 in the 24 item assessment questionnaire.

Table .2 shows a descriptive comparison of average item means, standard deviation and stand error of students' perceptions of classroom assessment based on three departments.

Table 5.1 Average scale-item mean, average item standard deviation and standard error results for department differences in SPAQ overall scale scores

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
Departments	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Social Science	24	3.88	0.54	0.11	3.65	4.11
Natural Science	104	3.16	0.72	0.07	3.02	3.3
Language	75	3.63	0.62	0.07	3.48	3.78
Total	203	3.42	0.72	0.05	3.32	3.52

Comparison of Perceptions of Students from Three Departments

A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences in students' perceptions about classroom assessment across the three departments. Students' perceptions of classroom assessment differed significantly across the three departments, $F(2, 70.68) = 18.52, p = .000$. All comparisons were tested at $p = .05$.

Robust Tests of Equality of Means

	Statistic*	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	18.522	2.	70.685	.000*

* Significant at $p = .05$

Comparison of the Overall Perceptions' of Students

A comparison of perceptions of assessment data for students from the three departments is reported in Table 3. ANOVA was used to test for differences in students' perceptions about classroom assessment among the three departments. Students' perceptions of classroom assessment differed significantly across the three departments, $F(2, 70.68) = 18.52, p = .000$.

Fisher LSD post-hoc comparisons of the three departments indicate that the social science

department ($M = 3.88$, 95% CI [3.65, 4.11]) had significantly higher perceptions ratings than the natural science department ($M = 3.16$, 95% CI [3.02, 3.30]), $p = .000$. Comparisons between the language department ($M = 3.66$, 95% CI [3.48, 3.77]) and the social science department were not statistically significant at $p < .05$. Comparison between the natural science department and the language department were statistically significant at $p = .000$.

Table 5.2 Average scale-item mean differences, Standard Error, ANOVA results for department differences in SPAQ overall scale scores

				95% Confidence Interval	
Departments	Mean Differences	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Social Science vs. Natural Science	.71	.15	.000*	.41	1.07
Social Science vs. Language	.25	.15	.108	-.05	.56
Language vs. Natural Science	.46	0.1	.000	.26	.66

Note: The sample consisted of 203 students, 24 Social Science, 104 Natural Science, and 75 from the Language department. Significant at $p = .05$*

The analysis of data using ANOVA revealed that the scale mean representing of Social Science department and the Natural Science department students' perceptions were comparable on the overall factors. As is shown in table 5.2, it was found that the average scale-item mean score of Social Science department students and Natural Science department was statistically significant with ($p=.000$).

However, when compared to the Language department, the average mean score of the Social Science department was not statistically significant with $p=.108^*$. This is because all comparisons were tested at $p = .05$. Similarly, a comparison of the average scale-item mean score of the Natural Science department students' perceptions with the Language department showed statistically significant with ($p=.000$). Figure 5.3 shows a comparison of the mean average score of students' perceptions by departments in a graphic format.

Means Plot

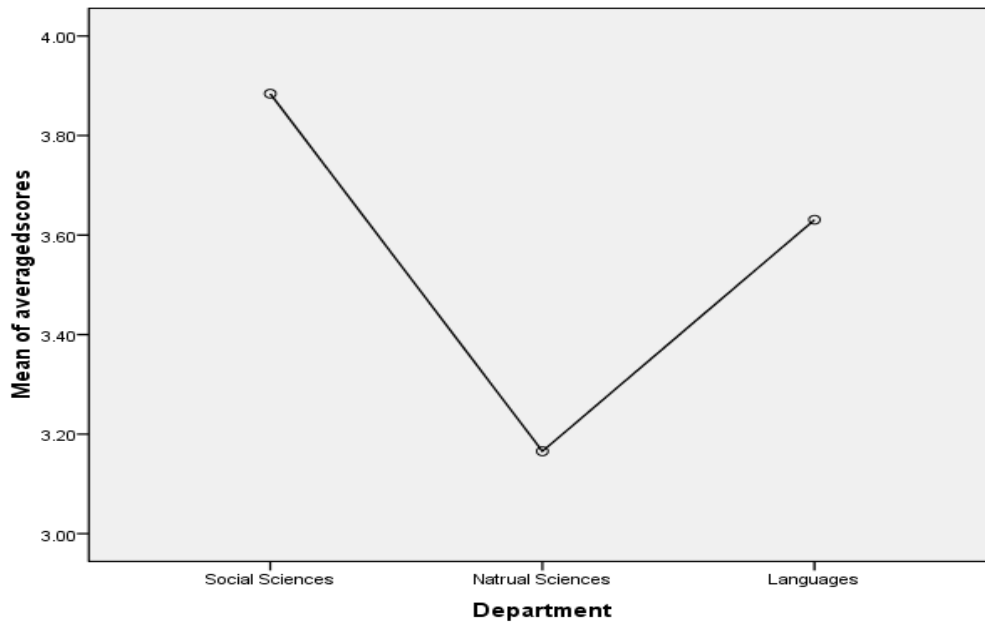


Figure 5.3

In sum, the analysis shows that differences exist among the departments in terms of perceptions of students' about classroom assessment. However, the average mean value (3.42) across the three departments suggests that students have positive perceptions in terms of assessment practices in Baghlan Higher Education Institution.

Qualitative Section—Results

What and Why of Assessment

Definitions provided by the respondents answers part of the first main research question, perceptions of students about assessment. Definitions given by students and the faculty members will shed light on how they see classroom assessment based on their position as students and faculty members. Various definitions were presented by the students and the faculty members regarding the (*what & why*) of classroom assessment. They expressed their view points by discussing the forms and purposefulness of assessment in different classroom environment.

Students defined classroom assessment, primarily, as activities that teachers use in a class to see whether students understood the contents. According to the students, classroom assessment has two main forms, oral and written.

For example, a senior male student from the language department said, “before presenting a new lesson the teacher asks students what they know about the previous lesson, then he asks about the current lesson; teachers make an observation to see the extent students are exposed to the topic”. In terms of written form of assessment, students mentioned quizzes, homework, midterm and final exam. In addition, some students pointed at the alternative forms of assessment including seminars, projects, semi-research topics, journals etc. A female student from the natural science department (NSD) illustrated, “any fruitful activity that causes an increase in student’s capacity to learn, is assessment”. This implies that to a great extent, students are aware of various formats and occasions of classroom assessment.

In addition, some students illuminated about various forms of assessment activities that cause learning in a classroom. For example, a female student from the NSD characterized assessment as activities that included “designing projects, group activities, class participation, and solving a problem on the board”. Likewise, social science students noted that assessment cover activities that teachers assign students. “Teacher asks our class to prepare 3-5 pages paper about a certain historical period,” a junior student from social science department stated, “when we submit the paper and the teacher scores, that is assessment”.

Aligning with definition, students raised the issue of purposefulness of classroom assessment as an important factor in the approach that teachers use in their classrooms. They stated that a teacher performs an activity to see how much students learned, whether the

instruction was beneficial, whether students were ready for the new lesson and more. A third year male student from the language department (LD), for example, observed that the purpose of assessment is both for teachers and students, “teacher assesses him/herself, looking whether his/her teaching was effective, looking if the intended program is accomplished”.

Another purpose of assessment, said a senior student from the same department, “is to make justification between students, dividing students in groups that make the teacher aware... to structure the lesson to address everybody’s needs”. Meanwhile, another senior female student from the social science department (SSD) argued that assessment “stimulates learning, which occurs through individual observation or group activity.”

A consensus existed between teachers and students in explaining the (*what* and *why*) of classroom assessment. According to an assistant professor from the LD, “assessment is what we monitor students’ academic and psychological activities, we observe where they started and where they are now”. In addition, other teachers agreed that the goal of assessment depends on time assessment is implemented that occurs daily and weekly to the entire semester period. Teachers made a distinction between two forms of assessment, formal and informal assessment.

According to a male language faculty member, “formal assessment is another word for measurement that we use in mid-term and final exam, checking students’ mastery of the content”; informal assessment, on the other hand, he explained, occurs during the instruction “with an emphasis on inclusion of assessment in the daily instructions”. Aligning with that, a pedagogy faculty member asserted, “Assessments that occur during the semester assess students’ confidence in relation to a subject they were taught”. The distinctions that the faculty members make between assessment forms, imply the extent the faculty members are exposed to this

concept and with that in mind, their assertion whether they are applying those methods will be addressed in the next topic, *current practices of assessment*.

In addition, the faculty members pointed at the mission and vision of higher education institutions in terms of defining assessment activities. A pedagogy faculty member, who served in Baghlan Higher Education Institution over five years, observed, “Assessment is a broad concept that cannot be summarized only during the instruction, it has two branches: introductory assessment (pre-assessment) and periodic assessment that occurs during the instruction”. However, the majority of the faculty members had little emphasis on the formative side of assessment; they were often concerned about the achievement part that occurs at the end. Linn and Miller (2005) characterized them as assessment for learning and assessment of learning with an emphasis on the importance of the first one that occurs during the instruction.

Based on the distinction made, a senior faculty member from the LD described assessment as “tests that teachers give students to make sure students learned something and the teacher could transfer the lesson”. Similarly, a female faculty member from the natural science department (NSD) supported, “assessment is a mutual activity between students and the teacher”. However, one faculty member from the social science department (SSD), among the respondents had a different view in terms of classroom assessment. He labeled assessment as a sub-part of an exam, “assessment is a small section of evaluation,” he summarized.

In sum, an analysis of the overall perspectives of the students and teachers in terms of defining the *what* and *why* of assessment shows that both students and teachers had a recognition of various forms and purposes of classroom assessment. In addition, both students and the faculty members viewed assessment as activities for educational purposes not just assigning

score or grade, although to some extent the faculty members leaned towards the achievement unit that is assessed at the end of a course. Additionally, some level of disagreement existed among the faculty members in terms of the scope of assessment: some viewed assessment encompassing all activities during the semester, while a few viewed it as a small segment of an exam, which implies that not all the faculty members had been exposed to the concept of assessment similarly. Overall, responses from the student respondents attest that they remained one voice regarding the definition and the purpose of classroom assessment.

Current Practices of Assessment

Under this theme, the study generally reflects on the second main research question, main methods the faculty members use in their classroom. The current assessment practices vary in Baghlan Higher Education Institution, given the subjects that are taught and teachers' exposition to different forms of assessment methods. Students responded that they performed project activities as they were expected to go outside the class and do research about the topic they were assigned. In addition, some students mentioned that some of their teachers relied only on mid-term and final-exams. A fourth year female student from the language department (LD) shared, "Some of our teachers rely on the final and mid-term exam that causes students to not study the lessons daily". However, a junior female student from NSD said that some of their teachers assigned group projects in their classes and students prepared a chapter as a result of their work. Students refer to chapter as students' collaborative or individual work on a topic that teachers assign them on a project. Likewise, another senior female student from LD supported:

Differences are among the teachers, some come in the class and directly start the new lesson, which I doubt the effectiveness of that lesson. This is because students may not even look what they studied the other day and they don't care because they will not be asked the next day. Students just say I don't care now; I will study during the exam.

In addition, some students were cautious about the implementation of group projects in their classrooms. A junior male student from NSD, for example, asserted, “Teachers use different forms of assessment, some subjects can be assigned group activity, and some cannot,” he continued, “group activities are not helpful in our class because we are around 50 students in the class, not everybody will have a chance to present his/her topic.” This implies that each student has to present his/her project in order to get the full score and, to a great extent, that seems reducing the interest in group or project activities.

However, another junior student from the SSD maintained that group activities and projects were helpful for their future learning. Presumably, he points at the overall advantages of formative assessment activities but not the current practices at Baghlan Higher Education Institution (BHEI). He asserted, “assessments that require us to perform a work outside the class is helpful in a sense that we try hard and provide a long chapter (paper) and present that in the class,” he insisted, “this activity is real and help us in the future activities and teachers always encourage when we produce a good work”.

Some students seemed dissatisfied with the current practices of assessment in BHEI. For example, a junior female student from the LD said that their teachers sometimes gave them 50-100 questions and mentioned that their final exam would be based on those; however, during the exam the teacher had changed those questions which were not included in 50-100 questions. She claimed that such an action “increases mistrust between students and teachers”. Conversely, another male senior student from the NSD supported the formative forms of assessment. He said, “In a project, we refer to many references and we defend from it.” In addition, a third year student from the SSD claimed that through project presentations, “our classmates have a chance to ask questions and we provide answers”. As students often mentioned assessment activities that

were in a project format implies that this form of classroom assessment to some extent occurs in their classrooms.

In addition, students' responses show that they realized the forms of assessment that are helpful in their learning. In addition, application of project activities and other alternative forms that required students to perform an outside activity and then present them in their classes seems paradoxical given the context, populated classes and teachers being responsible to teach various subjects. Generally, the current practices of classroom assessment seemed dissatisfying for some students given the dominance of traditional forms, assessing students at the end of the semester. Using assessment at the end of the semester leaves an instructor very little chance to use the assessment results to improve instruction and students' learning. Overall, there seems an understanding of various forms of assessment by students with some level of application in terms of the alternative assessment forms in BHEI.

The faculty members' responses varied based on their work experience, the subjects they taught, and their exposition to various forms of classroom assessment. They pointed that, to a great extent, traditional form of assessment dominated their assessment practices, given various reasons. According to a pedagogy faculty member, the current context of BHEI was not ready for an extensive assessment. He insisted that the kind of thinking, understanding and ideology that the faculty members and the administration had, hardly permitted an extensive assessment. He maintained:

Knowing students from different perspectives, such as economical, social, cultural, racial, tribal... is a key in educational process so that we can teach those students. This is not applied in Baghlan Higher Education Institution and we are not doing it. We only rely on a very traditional form of assessment, which may not be appropriate even for schools, but this is accustomed in our institution.

In terms of personal practices of assessment, a science faculty member asserted that he used questioning method in his class to check students understanding orally. In his words, “I stimulate students by writing the topic on the board and ask them what they know and think about the topic,” he continued “I observe the topic from students’ point of view first then I share my understanding of the topic with them”. Similarly, according to a language teacher, “I ask students to describe the purpose of the current lesson and its relation to the previous lesson”. These responses suggest that an informal ongoing assessment occurs in these faculty members classes. In addition, a science faculty member indicated that she used a research-way method when she assessed her students. She said, “I asking students to draw chart of concepts (find the conceptual framework of the lesson) or any other creative ways”. She retained, “I review their work and understand the extent students picked the main features of the lesson”.

Although commonly practiced in BHEI, some faculty members doubted the effectiveness of traditional forms of assessment, assessment of achievement. They illustrated that the traditional forms hardly accounted for a holistic observation of students’ progress. According to a language faculty member, “we look at an issue from one aspect, assessing students’ achievement of the texts that are taught through midterm exam, final exam and students’ seminar; we do not assess the personality aspect of students”. He seemed more in favor of alternative forms given the definition that they occur ongoing and inform the instructor about students’ progress as they teach them. Another faculty member from the same department asserted that he used group dialogues to assess students’ reasoning skills. He stated, “We should not criticize any group which fails to provide an adequate explanation, in stead, we should motivate both groups alike”.

In addition, a pedagogy faculty member illuminated that his assessment practices were integrate with his instruction. He said, “I facilitate small group discussion, and my students often work on projects that are topics from the text chapters, or topics that students investigate the outside sources.” Correspondingly, a math faculty member stated that he assessed students through monthly projects as students worked on a specific topic. He upheld, “students have a chance to consult with me and I share my perspective, guiding them how they should pursue their work”. This suggests that some faculty members provide the opportunity for the students to interact with them and they provide them feedback as they prepare their projects. The science faculty member articulated:

Sometimes, I assign students in a project, because a lesson that I plan for the next month may need some background information (or pre-requisite) of another topic that students should know in order to learn the new concept; however, the time does not allow me to include that in my syllabus, therefore, assigning project prepare students for new learning.

However, some faculty members maintained positive perspectives about the traditional assessment forms. “We ask oral questions during the instruction,” asserted a senior faculty member from the LD, “we give students tests including midterm and final exam”. Another assistant professor from the LD expressed that he knew only oral question, midterm and final exams as the assessment the only forms. He said that he poses direct questions and understand if students learned those concepts through these questions. This implies that defending the traditional forms stems from the lack of exposure to the new forms of classrooms assessment. He precisely explained, “I try to explain the lessons several times myself... students do not learn from my explanation, I think direct questions are helpful”. This assertion suggests that some faculty members are not familiar with different assessment formats to make their classes be involved in collaborative work in order to increase the possibility of learning.

Two faculty members, a novice from NSD, and a senior from LD asserted that they gave students some questions during their instructions and used those questions in their exams. The faculty member from the LD clarified, “I do not want to give new questions to students and distract their minds in the exam” implying that he engages students in problem solving activities by giving questions during the instruction and test them based on those at the end of the course.

Correspondingly, other instructors too put more emphasis on the integration of assessment during the instruction. “When I teach a three or four credit course in a class,” noted a history faculty member, “I allocate one day of instruction in a week for assessment”. However, a pedagogy faculty member asserted that he facilitated discussions in a class to collect information about “the extent gap existed between the teacher and students, students and students, students and the text materials,” he stated.

The faculty members seemed agreed with students that their current practices of assessment were dominated by the traditional forms, with more reliance on the mid-term and final exams that are assessment of achievements. Their responses attest that a culture of alternative assessment was new in BHEI given the current context. Overall, the study suggests that either the majority of faculty members lacked the information or skills to perform alternative assessments, or the administration of BHEI hadn’t provided a support and encouragement for applying new methods of assessment in this institution. In addition, in terms of personal experiences, the faculty members seemed relying on their personal experiences that what worked and what did not work for them, which suggest they did not use a reference or source for their practices.

Although the faculty members recognized the lack of effectiveness of traditional forms of assessment, they seemed keeping that tradition. Their persistence seemed stems from the top-down nature of authority control in the structure of higher education system. The faculty members may not have a control over those practices but to implement what came to them from the Ministry of Higher Education. There seems that some faculty members embedded alternative forms of assessment in their instruction, such practices and realization appear to be missing at the institutional level in BHEI.

Students' Experiences and Stories about Assessment

Students' experiences in relation to classroom assessment are important factors in shaping their current perceptions of classroom assessment. Students articulated their stories that how other issues in addition to classroom assessment dominated their scores. The issues varied from administration failure planning a reliable mechanism for managing the two formal exams to inclusion of various biases in assessing students' work.

According to a junior female student from the NSD, she was more frustrated as a freshman because she assumed that she would fail in the exams. She said, "I remember the first semester was tough because teachers used to warn us that we will fail," she clarified, "I was really frustrated, and during the exam everybody was nervous, for example, in the mid-term, I got 5 out of 20 in one subject". Another junior female student from the LD raised a similar story that she was not familiar with the college assessment system and the way teachers scored them. These students were affected by the new environment perhaps their first time studying in a class mixed with boys and girls.

In addition, some students from the NSD raised a concern in terms of the lack of clarity in their tests. For example, a junior female student asserted, "Teachers did not make it clear how

they assess us. I was not happy with one exam and when I complained, the administration of the institution reconsidered scoring my test paper, and when the teacher realized that he missed to score one entire question,” she continued, “however, instead of that question, the teacher deducted points from another question”. This implies that students were not only victims of unclarity of the assessment form implemented in their classes, but also they were punished for asking what they deserved.

However, some students interpreted teachers’ push and enforcement in a positive way. For instance, a senior male student from the SSD observed that initially he thought teachers were warning him about the exam, later he realized that those pushes were not warnings; in fact, teachers pushed them in order to study more and be ready for the college life. In addition, another male respondent from the LD agreed that his efforts paid him off. According to him, “I know whether I earn high or low scores in an exam once I take it,” he continued, “when I study more, I always get higher scores”. This contradicts some other students’ views given the reason that they complained for the lack of clarity. In addition, it sheds more light in terms of the learning responsibility whether students or teachers burden it.

Moreover, a junior female student from the NSD asserted that the college assessment provided the opportunity to realize that unlike her earlier perceptions, girls could perform as well as boys did in a class. She said, “As a girl, I had this assumption that boys are smarter than us (girls) since we haven’t been in a class with them before; however, the university provided me this opportunity to see that we can be as smart as boys, we can be even smarter.” This suggests that in addition to assessment, other elements were included in constructing students’ view of learning, co-education in the context of Afghanistan, in particular.

Students pointed at some other elements, in addition to the hard work and self-study which had an impact the way some teachers evaluated their work. Some students from the SSD asserted that, due to the domination of other issues in exam, such as language, ethnic, tribal and religion discriminations, parties and group among the faculty members, they could not earn what they deserved in an exam. A senior female student from the LD supported that in some occasions their teachers valued where students came from, the ethnicity they were, the party they were attached etc, rather than assessment and evaluation and the purpose they serve.

Another junior female student from the NSD raised a matching scenario, “these divisions, such as ethnicity, religion, language... undermine the purpose of assessment,” she added, “we were victims of being from a different ethnicity”. These issues seem dominant in the current nature of BHEI that block the educational aspect of assessment; they rather politicize classroom assessment which carries ethical dilemmas as well. The case is clearly represented in the following quote from a senior female student from the LD:

I worked with one of my classmates at my place one whole day because she was absent during the instruction and when we went to take the exam the next day, she scored way higher than me, and I knew she wasn't that smart, and I was sure about my responses. In addition, I knew that my responses did not count, what counted was me, what ethnic group I was from.

Experiences and stories that students shared show that, to a great extent, teachers used assessment to control these students which was taken into consideration as an issue in conceptualizing this study. In addition, the study reveals that although some students took teachers pressure for granted, given their rationale, teachers push them to get used to the college life; however, the majority of the students felt that they were pushed to study for exam. In addition, as students responded that they were frustrated in their freshman year; one reason could be co-education because boys and girls study separately up to 12 grades at school.

Moreover, an important factor that the majority of the students emphasized was the existence of various discriminations that undermined the importance of assessment. Having analyzed various opinions and voices, discriminations could be as a result of the current politics and situation of Afghanistan, or the lack of collaboration and coordination among the faculty members at BHEI in defining the educational goals which has left the students becoming the victims of individual faculty members' preferences.

Forms (Methods) of Classroom Assessment

Aligning with the current practices of classroom assessment, methods of classroom assessment is concerned to the second research question, the methods teachers use in their classes to assess students, whether they use the results to improve instruction or to report the scores. Students expressed that both paper and pencil tests (traditional form) and some level of alternative (formative) assessment was implemented in BHEI. They asserted that the alternative forms they witnessed included diagnostic/pre-assessment, self-assessment, and peer-assessment among the many. Interestingly, students discussed the frequency of formative assessment in their college life; in particular, some students expressed that they experienced formative assessment once or heard the idea for the first time.

According to a fourth year student from the LD, he experienced diagnostic assessment for the first time in his fourth year of education at BHEI. Similarly, two other junior students from the LD responded that they hadn't seen any written forms of diagnostic assessment; however, they recalled that some of their teachers asked oral questions on the first days of the classes. The extent teachers can use the information from those first days of the classes to adapt their instruction and the extent they involve all students' voices seem relevant to reflect on the research question. This is because some students claimed that they had not witnessed any change

in the instruction as a result of those questions. However, a senior female student from the NSD asserted, “our pedagogy teacher posed a question to the class and then he asked individual students to express their opinions, once he heard from all students; he divided us in small groups of mixed (smarter and average students)”.

Some students remained less optimistic regarding the current use of peer and self-assessment in their classes. A third year junior student from the SSD asserted, “peer-assessment does not happen in our class, or the culture of peer and self-assessment is not yet improved in our institution,” he continued, “even if it happens, students look for the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers”. However, some students were positive, given the reason that peer assessment occurs during students’ presentations. Based on a junior female student from the NSD, students were given a chance to ask questions when another student presented.

Likewise, another junior student from the same department maintained, “Yeah, in presentations we can ask questions, but it is very rare that students give feedback about the strength and weakness of a presentation”. This implies that the oral form of peer-assessment is, to some extent practiced in BHEI, however, students had little to say about the written forms. Correspondingly, a senior female student from the LD added, “When our classmates assess our work, we are more stressed than the teachers’ assessment, because we do not want to look unprepared to our colleagues.”

However, some students were concerned about the management of peer assessment in the context of BHEI. For example, a senior student from the LD explained that students often asked questions to challenge the presenter, questions above his/her capacity to be able to respond. Correspondingly, another junior female student from the NSD supported, “sometimes we cannot

ignore that some students, purposefully, ask questions that a student who present cannot answer”. These assertions suggest that students lack the information to understand the purpose of peer-assessment and count it as an opportunity for learning, rather than a chance to challenge their colleagues. In addition, facilitation of peer-assessment requires that the instructor educate students how to use that opportunity for learning and collaboration.

However, a few students remained positive about the challenging questions posed to students based on a rationale that a presenter needs to spend more time to prepare for a presentation. A junior female students from the NSD claimed, “they (challenging questions) make the presenter be prepared more and when a question challenges a student, that makes him/her work hard and be prepared for the *in case moment*”. Another female student from the NSD supported that although some students cause trouble and challenge their classmates, “there are some other students who look for meaning in a presentation” she insisted, “they should be given a chance”. Students’ responses show that students are appreciative of peer-assessment when the condition is provided, that peers be supportive.

A great number of students were enthusiastic about the idea of peer and self-assessment. Their interest was that peer and self-assessment enhanced communication among students and increased learning. A senior male student from the NSD remained positive by asserting that if teachers hadn’t provided them an opportunity to give feedback to their peers; the presenter communicates with colleagues and asks them after the class. Similarly, a senior female student from the LD shared her experience that she enjoyed a lesson when their teacher divided their class in to two groups that each group provided feedback for the other group. She asserted, “The teacher asked half of the class to prepare to facilitate the class for one day and asked the second half to assess them.” She added, “This experience in fact had two outcomes, we assessed our

colleagues and we were assessed by the instructor”. However, some students raised a concern in terms of teacher’s confidence in facilitating peer and self-assessment. A junior male student from LD stated:

There are teachers who do not feel confident about the topic they teach and they hesitate providing a chance for students to ask questions and make comments. One reason is that they are afraid of a question being posed and he may not be able to respond. Another point is that perhaps a student poses a question in such a class and the interpretation that emerges from student question will be that he is *filled with information from outside*, that may be true and that is the reality.

Not surprisingly, some senior students had observed a connection between assessment forms that were performed in their classes and their future career becoming prospective teachers. For example, according to a senior female student from the LD, “because we are studying education and sooner we become teachers, doing self- and peer-assessment is very helpful for our future”. She continued, “for example, in a presentation we should learn how to make comments, how to look for strengths and weaknesses”. Another student noted alike, “I think when giving a presentation, a teacher’s comment is not enough.” She added, “it would be good if some students are involved because they may capture a point that the instructor hasn’t noticed”. The study shows that an interest in peer-assessment exists among the student participants, in particular, for senior students because they are expected to graduate soon.

The study highlights that due to the current politics in the region, some level of discrimination has been witnessed against the female students. This is particularly, seen in some classes as peer-assessment was implemented. According to a junior female student from the LD, “Peer assessment is a good idea when the instructor can have a control over the class and eliminate biases against female students.” She continued, “After I presented a topic in front of the class, our instructor asked the class to ask questions; however, one of my classmates (male student) made a bad comment that I never forget”. Meanwhile, few other students from the same

department supported that the instructors should be aware of the class environment and the context of the university when applying peer assessment. These responses suggest that an awareness about the dynamics of peer-assessment is required if a concept is new or the environment is politicized.

In terms of marking peers' papers, students had a shared understanding that the instructor be in charge of scoring their work. They maintained that they were less comfortable scoring their own work or another colleague's. Leahy, Lyon, Thompson and Wiliam (2005) agree that "students should not be giving another student a grade that will be reported to parents or administrator," they insisted, "Peer-assessment should be focused on improvement, not on grading" (p. 23). According to a senior male student from the SSD, he appreciated the idea of self and peer-assessment; however, he said that he felt not comfortable scoring his own paper. Correspondingly, another third year female student from the NSD insisted, "Providing an opportunity to peer-assess and self-assess is a great idea, but the teacher should give the score because the teacher has more experience". These observations distinguish between the purpose of formative and summative assessment and their implication in a particular context.

Aligning with students, the faculty members pointed at the importance of formative assessment, diagnostic and peer and self-assessment, in particular. The faculty members had a shared understanding about the construction and application of diagnostic (pre-assessment). A pedagogy faculty member declared that he posed general questions on the first day of his instruction to examine students' thinking and reasoning. He maintained, "The way students respond and give reasons, I can understand the extent they know about the topic," he continued, "I can adjust my syllabus based on students readiness".

In addition, another faculty member from the NSD observed that because no link existed between schools and educational colleges, they hardly knew perceptions of their new students in the university. She insisted that new students should be given a diagnostic test, and added, “We should be careful in designing our chapters for students, because that may be the only source of information student will have and that should be based on their level”. She refers to chapter as an equivalent form to the textbook. Since text books rarely exist, teachers prepare chapters for students. Correspondingly, another faculty member from the SSD stated, “pre-assessment is important because we can see where students are in terms of their academic skills based on the result from their responses and we can adjust our syllabus based on their needs”. The study reveals that the faculty members seem well-aware of the importance of pre-assessment (diagnostic assessment); however, the practical unit is missing, whether they perform diagnostic assessment in their own classes.

However, there seems a misconnection between teachers’ and students’ assertions in terms of the implementation of pre-assessment (diagnostic). The majority of students responded that they either hadn’t experienced diagnostic assessment, or had experienced once or twice in the entire three to four years of their experiences in BHEI. Conversely, the faculty members maintained that they used pre-assessment to adjust their lesson plans and instruction. This suggests that diagnostic assessment is not clear to students or a gap exists between teachers and students in terms of defining pre-assessment.

In terms of peer-assessment and self-assessment, the faculty members at BHEI were positive and admired the idea. Few faculty members maintained that they embedded self and peer-assessment in their instructions; however, the majority responded that they had not done peer-assessment or hadn’t even heard about it. A female faculty member from the NSD asserted

that she encouraged her students to be reflective among one another: “I ask my students from the first year that they should learn acting as a teacher.” She also said, “of course, we provide them opportunities that they can make comments about their peers”. In addition, a pedagogy faculty member notified that he used peer assessment in his classes and assessed students based on the criteria on the rubric that he develops. This suggests that, to some extent, the concept of peer-assessment is not very new in BHEI given the fact that some faculty members embedded it in their instruction.

However, another faculty member from the LD stated that he hadn’t seen or done peer and self-assessment in his three years of teaching experience. Correspondingly, another faculty member from the same department explained, “we can only provide student a chance to peer assess or to cooperate with teachers in seminars that has 10 points, not the rest of exams”. Similar to pre-assessment, the faculty members seem use peer-assessment in oral format, not in terms of written form of students’ work. A male faculty member from the LD stated, “it does not mean that we hesitate doing peer-assessment, the reality is that there is not such an environment that we can implement peer and self assessment”. Supporting this idea, another faculty member from the NSD asserted that a major reason for not applying peer and self-assessment is the lack of trust between students and teachers. He maintained, “the only thing that barely exists in BHEI is *trust*, neither students trust teachers, nor teachers trust students”. This implies that application of various forms of assessment require an environment that those methods be applied.

Furthermore, a senior faculty member from the LD who had not performed any form of self or peer-assessment, admired the idea of peer and self-assessment as an alternative form of assessment, but he cautioned about the misinterpretation and mismanagement of it. He said, “peer assessment is a good alternative given the condition that teachers prepare students to be

informative in order to avoid future risks; students become upset from their colleagues”.

However, another language faculty member who had only three years of experience remained reluctant by defending that Afghanistan was not ready for application of peer and self-assessment. He said, “Afghanistan witnessed three decades of conflict.” He continued, “I am not sure if Afghans are ready for peer-assessment”. Another faculty member from the SSD too, warned that BHEI was not ready for such a culture that “students assess teachers, students assess peers.” He added, “it may result in physical argument”.

Overall, the responses show that implementation of new forms of assessment; peer and self-assessment in this case, need support from the administration and among the faculty members to be fully effective. In addition, creating an environment that increases trust between students and teachers, students and students seem a pre-requisite for peer-assessment based on students and teachers’ responses.

Consultation about Assessment

The concept of consultation about assessment seemed very rare in Baghlan Higher Education Institution (BHEI). Students expressed that their teachers often asked their opinions about an exam; however, later the instructors seemed to do their own work and neglected students’ suggestions. According to a junior female student from the NSD, “teachers consult with students and ask their opinions about assessment, but they do not put them in action.” She continued, “The consultation is just to show that he consulted, so that he is not criticized”. Likewise, another senior female student from the LD supported that their suggestion weren’t heard, “our suggestions are symbolic, and it never happens that they (teachers) listen to us”. This suggests that, to a great extent, the perception that students’ voices being ignored increases the gap of trust between teachers and students.

Students appreciated the instructors who provided them some guidelines about their exams. A junior male student from the NSD observed that their teachers informed and guided them about the types of questions and topics in their exams. In addition, students from the SSD remained optimistic that their teachers guided them what units they should read and whether their test items included essay formats (open-ended) or selected response (multiple choice). The study shows that some level of consultation occurs in BHEI; however, the extent teachers include students' suggestion when they develop their test items remained unanswered in this study.

In addition, some students from the LD maintained that some of their teachers, who gave them some questions during instruction, helped them know about the form and requirement of an exam in a particular subject. For example, a junior male student said, "some teachers give us questions during the instruction based on a topic we studied and then they use them in exam," she added, "we know how questions are framed and what the instructor is looking for". This suggests that students have a sense about the importance of consultation in terms of their awareness about how to approach an exam, particularly when guidelines are provided for them.

Similar to students, teachers agreed that consultation about classroom assessment barely took place between them and the students. Some faculty members expressed that they could not consult with students because they felt consultation was unnecessary. According to a faculty member from the LD, "I cannot ask students what questions they want in the exam." He continued, "Our students always want easy questions". There seems to be a gap between students and teachers in terms of interpreting the concept of consultation. The way the faculty members interpret this idea is that students will control the way questions are structured, while students

expect to be heard by the faculty members. Overall, an important factor in this scenario is an agreement between students and teachers in terms of the purpose of consultation.

In addition, some faculty members raised a concern in terms of teachers' ignorance given their responsibility in terms of students' learning. According to senior faculty member from the LD, there are some faculty members who barely think about students' learning. He continued, "They (some teachers) never think or feel responsibility for students learning". The concept that teachers take responsibility is an important factor in the way teachers assess their classes. Teachers may not know what it looks like to see that learning occurs; however, they can develop criteria to show the intended goals of instruction and assess students based on them.

However, some faculty members argued that they provided some guidelines for students about the length and the form of questions in their exams. They avoided sharing whether they involved students' voices in developing their test items. A faculty member from the SSD asserted, "consultation happens in different ways here, sometimes students ask teachers to provide them information about the topics they taught in a class, and sometimes teachers try to embed all the instruction materials in question formats and distribute them to the students". This suggests that some level of consultation exists and teachers see consultation in terms of providing guidance about the exam; however, the extent to which teachers include students' suggestion cannot be predicted from their responses.

Overall, in terms of consultation between students and the faculty members, the study suggests that some level of consultation exists in the way teachers interpret it, the form of questions, and the topics to be covered. However, the bigger concepts of consultation to ask students what works for them during the instruction, not just during the exam, remain

unanswered. What the current context of BHEI suggests is that the traditional forms of assessment dominate the assessment practices of the faculty members. Additionally, the study highlights that both students and teachers interpreted the concept of consultation the extent to which teachers include various items in their tests, such as constructed responses and selected responses.

Meaning and Distribution of Scores

The study revealed that scores or points that students earn during or at the end of a semester, to a great extent, characterize the way they pursue their education. This suggests that scores has a considerable role on students' approach to learning. Students shared that competition exists in BHEI in terms of getting a higher rank in the class. In addition, students raised the fairness of distribution of scores, criticizing the current distribution which put more weight on summative assessment (midterm and final exam). Students had different interpretation of the scores they earned in their classes. For some, scores meant the extent they studied, for others scores had relative meaning, hard work and efforts, or cheating and other connections. A third year student from the SSD shared that he thought of higher scores the extent he made efforts in an exam.

In addition, a junior female student from the NSD said, "Higher score means that a student is active and the instructor prepared good lesson and he/she could convey the content". Conversely, another student from the LD asserted, "score does not mean how much a student learned because students can get high score by force, cheating and knowing a teacher, too". Correspondingly another senior male student from the NSD supported that test anxiety too, will have an effect in students' test scores. Based on these responses, the study suggests that students

scores are not that reliable indicator of students' learning given the context of BHEI, which corruption and nepotism dominate.

In addition, students emphasized the significance of the score meaningfulness when a balance existed between instruction and assessment. A third year male student from the LD maintained, "score means a lot when the score is distributed equally and I earn the score at different stages which covers my overall progress; however." He continued, "If the score is as a result of the one night that I study for the test, or if I get high score through my connections, that score has no value".

Another female student from the SSD added that part of a teacher's responsibility is to know her students' abilities within a course of time. She emphasized, "A teacher cannot test students' abilities with 5-10 questions, and students can earn scores by cheating and many other ways". Likewise, another senior student from the LD supported, "scoring is a norm, and it does not represent learning". The study suggest that, although summative assessment controls the way teachers evaluate students' work, to a great extent, the concept of scoring undermines the bigger picture of classroom assessment that stimulates learning.

Some students raised a concern that there are some other issues that can occur during the exam which would affect students' scores. According to a senior male student from the NSD, "a teacher needs to be aware of his students during the exam." He added, "higher or lower score in situations that students have other problems in addition to the exam, does not count". In addition, another student raised the level of difficulty in test items as an issue. She said, "It happens that sometimes I know the content, but questions are difficult or hard to understand, therefore, I may not earn higher scores". She added, "If questions are based on our ability, we will get higher

scores.” The literature refers to the level of difficulty or easiness of test items as a validity issue, construct validity; construct validity emphasizes that a test should measure what is intended to measure (Linn & Miller, 2005).

In terms of the distribution of scores, students pointed at a lack of balance in the current system of classroom assessment in BHEI and nation wide. They maintained that the majority of their scores were allocated to the final exam (60%) and midterm exam (20%). A third year female student from the NSD asserted, “We spend more time on projects and they have very few scores”. Likewise, another female student from the LD supported that because projects had between 5 to 10 points from the total score, some of their classmates ignored them as they had a reason that they could pass the class without them. Furthermore, a senior male student from the SSD claimed, “if the project score is higher, that motivates to put more efforts and provide thorough information”. This indicates that the unbalanced distribution of scores de-emphasizes the importance of formative assessment and triggers the traditional forms.

Likewise, some other students had an observation in terms of the value of the project work. According to a junior female student from the NSD, projects have fewer scores compared to the exams; however, she maintained “projects have a special value for us they are our own work”. Given the responses, the current system discourages the implementation of formative assessment as fewer score is allocated for the project activities.

In addition, students were concerned about the lack of support for alternative assessment, given the current practice of classroom assessment in BHEI. They expected that the administration should acculturate projects, portfolios, journals etc as an alternative form of assessment to reduce dependency to final and midterm exams. Their rationale was that

assessment of the content which is taught in a semester is barely possible to assess by 5-10 questions at the end of the term. For example, a junior female student from the LD asserted, “We study a chapter between 50-100 pages during a semester, but when the exam comes, teachers will bring 5-10 questions. It is not fair to test students based on just these questions”.

These students were eager to see more items in their classroom tests so that they had more chance to earn higher scores, on the one hand, and the teachers could measure the major contents that were taught on the other. The literature refers to this concept as the reliability of classroom assessment, given the rationale; the more the number of items in a test, the higher reliable the test (Linn & Miller, 2005).

Some students maintained that an equal distribution of scores could reduce the risk of nepotism and other fraudulent in the final exams. For example, a third year male student from the LD asserted, “If the scores are fairly distributed into different tests, or projects, that will reduce the risk of nepotism and fraud that disqualify assessment”. Similarly some other students noted that, allocation of more scores for projects and journals would increase students’ willingness to take these activities seriously. This suggests that an internal interest exists among the student respondents in performing formative assessment activities in their classes, which implies that the current system has put very little weight on it.

According to a senior student from the SSD, “the only thing that matters for students is the final exam and students study for it”. Likewise, another student maintained that his classmates would participate in project activities more if projects had higher scores. Overall, the analysis suggests that two main reasons exist that stand as obstacles in terms of application of alternative assessment forms in BHEI, unbalanced allocation of scores, and students lack of

interest in project activities. This, to a great extent, stems from the policies of the Ministry of Higher Education that has a fixed format for assigning scores for students' work, and leaves little autonomy for the individual institutions and particularly the individual faculty members.

The majority of faculty members, similar to the student respondents, acknowledged the flaws of the current distribution of scores. They responded that based on the policy of the institution, their role was to implement the rules and regulations that was articulated by the Ministry of Higher Education. In addition, the faculty members provided some rationales why students' projects or seminars were not taken seriously, particularly in BHEI. According to a male faculty member from the LD, "one reason that projects are not taken seriously is because teachers are not serious about them." He continued, "I am sure that teachers even do not open them once; whatever students bring for the project, they blindly score them".

Another reason that he pointed was the lack of facilities for students to perform research on a topic. These dynamics, based on the faculty members reasoning, suggest that the faculty members lack a commitment in terms of fully implementing formative assessment as they require more time and focus. On the top of that, they try not to take them seriously because few resources exist in the context of Baghlan for students to perform a thorough study.

In addition, another faculty member from the NSD agreed that judging students' work based on their exam papers was "unfair". He continued, "We should have different forms of assessment, such as projects, seminars etc." Likewise, a pedagogy faculty member asserted, "there is not an understanding among the people about education and students' responsibility in relation to their learning, "he continued, "the assumption is that teachers take students to the destination whether he/she puts efforts or not and what they always value is the final exam". This

suggests that according to the teachers, students are not exposed to various purposes of education. Another faculty member supported, “students are sleeping during the entire semester, once the exam is announced, and they wake up to study for the test”.

Given teachers’ autonomy in assigning students’ scores, a senior faculty member from the LD maintained that, to a great extent, teachers lacked the authority to implement their own philosophy in terms of students’ scores. He asserted:

Distribution of scores depends on the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education, and we are the implementers. In the past, it was even worst, students had one midterm and one final plus 10 points for homework; however, some teachers were not taking midterm and homework, so they were testing students based on one final exam. I think the new system, credit system, is better than the previous system because students gain 40% of their scores during the semester and 60% left for the final.

However, some faculty members criticized the *credit system* reasoning that it has negative consequences in the higher education system in Afghanistan. Their rationale was that the credit system was imposed in Afghanistan and they had very limited knowledge of its implementation. They maintained that higher education institutions lacked basic educational resources that either faculty members or students could use to perform extensive study. The study discloses that not only ignorance about different forms of classroom assessment is an issue, but also the faculty members’ resistance to the new system counts consideration.

In addition, some faculty members complained that they lacked the authority in terms of distribution of students’ scores. They reasoned that, when all efforts are put on the final exam, which opens a room for some to use exam as their weapons. For example, according to a faculty member from the LD, “teachers encourage students what group to join and what position to take based on their interest”. He refers to groups as divisions among teachers based on race, language, religion etc.

However, some faculty members remained positive about the credit system and realized that the credit system was a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. According to a pedagogy faculty member, “no new system can be perfect at the beginning or in its birth”. In addition, he remained in favor of the current distribution of scores in the higher education system of Afghanistan as he said:

Ideally a teacher should teach two or three classes a week and the class size should be 25-30 students. A teacher who teaches at least 6 different subjects, 30-40 hours a week and the number of students in each class range from 50 to 90, how is this possible for teachers to assign students to perform project activities and how can a teacher review the projects and provide feedback for them. We experienced monthly assessment with schools, and at the end of the year teachers were successful to teach 40% of the curricula and could not reach to the other 60% because the exam took all the time.

Indicator of Good Assessment

Students viewed good assessment from three major aspects: outcomes of assessment, forms of assessment, and the environment in which assessment is implemented. According to a senior male student from the LD, a good assessment might have a positive impact on students’ learning. On top of that, another student from the SSD agreed that when assessment involved students in activities, such as working on a project or developing a journal etc, students would learn something and remember that in the future. Meanwhile, a female student from the NSD emphasized, “A good assessment is when the teacher measures the extent he/she is close to the intended goals of instruction”. This implies that, according to the students, a good assessment has more emphasis on learning rather than reporting scores.

Regarding the form of questions in a test, students preferred constructed responses rather than selected ones. For example, a third year student from the SSD urged, “I like to see more descriptive questions rather than multiple choice or questions with the blanks”. Likewise, another student responded that she favored variation in classroom assessment. She maintained, “I think, a

good assessment should embed all education activities including posters, presentations, projects, journals, exams etc that focus on the main concepts”. In addition, another female student supported the idea of authenticity in a classroom assessment. She argued, “A good assessment provides a chance that we can apply what we learn in a class to the real life, or when we are asked, we can provide a satisfactory response”. The study portrays that students’ respondents favor both summative and formative assessment as good indicator of assessment with an emphasis on constructing responses in terms of the summative assessment and applicability of assessment in real life situation under the formative assessment.

In addition, some students maintained that a good assessment bounded to a good instruction. According to a third year female student from the NSD, “if the instruction is not good, there is no way to apply good assessment”. Similarly, another senior student from the LD asserted that the indicator of a good assessment is “when we are tested based on what we are taught”. These responses suggest that the method used for instruction, to a great extent, determine the assessment format be used in a class.

Notably, some students were concerned about the purpose of classroom assessment, seeking to ensure that assessment serves educational purposes. A fourth year female student stated that a good assessment has a purpose that involves both teachers and students in the process. She added, “A teacher should assess himself whether he could teach the content and whether he could transfer the information he intended to”. In addition, another student from the same department insisted that teachers should avoid biases in viewing students, “they (teachers) should not distinguish between ‘black and white’.” She continued: “they should avoid prioritizing among students”. This implies that the current context at Baghlan Higher Education

Institution has an impact on students and teachers' view of classroom assessment, which will be addressed under the ethics of assessment more thoroughly.

Another issue that students raised was the environment where the exam was held. They asserted that good assessment occurs when teachers create a learning environment as they control for cheating, students' connections with teachers, and any other revenues that undermine classroom assessment. A third year student from the LD explained, "justice in exam motivates real learning and students know that their efforts pay off; however," she continued, "exams leave negative impacts when they are not based on merit, when they are based on who knows the instructor or the instructor's help with a particular student". Likewise, some other students supported this view, noting that teachers should avoid using assessment as a power to panelize students from other ethnicity, region or language. The literature refers to this concept when it argues for the validity of assessment, stipulating that assessment should measure what it intends to measure (Black & Wiliam, 2008; Linn & Miller, 2005).

The faculty members had a parallel observation in defining a good assessment. In terms of the form of assessment, they maintained that the new form of instruction provided students and teachers a chance to assess the class regularly. For example, a faculty member from the NSD asserted, "we can involve our students in the process of classroom assessment in the new form of assessment and teaching". She continued, "When students have a say in their assessment that qualifies assessment as a good assessment." Another senior faculty member supported that good assessment has a longitudinal format that encourages students to do their work beyond the exam.

The faculty members agreed that assessment not only reflects students' progress but also the extent to which the teacher was able to transfer the information. To support the point, a

female faculty member from the NSD asserted, “Students’ success is teacher’s success.” She continued, “if students could provide good responses in a test that means the instruction has been successful”. A male faculty member maintained, “When no other issues including tribal, religious, and language discriminations are included in an exam that can be called a reliable assessment”. These quotes depict that, similar to the students, the faculty members are aware of the political dynamics of classroom assessment, in particular given the discrimination as an important factor. Similarly, another faculty member pointed at the authenticity of classroom assessment as a good indicator of classroom assessment. He said, “A good assessment provides student with the capacity to use learning in their daily lives”.

Overall, the study reveals that, based on the students’ and the faculty members’ responses, the indicator of a good assessment depends whether the assessment assesses (measures) what it intends to assess. Forms, environment, and the intended goal (outcome) of classroom assessment were the three main indicators of good assessment. In addition, the study sheds light on an agreement between the faculty members and the students in characterizing a good classroom assessment, given the current dynamics at BHEI.

Ethics of Assessment

Ethics of assessment entail issues that students brought up in the conversations that they had with the investigator. Primarily, students talked about the lack of teachers’ acknowledgment of formative assessment, ambiguity in test items, the role of connections in terms of getting higher scores, various biases, etc. Likewise, students talked about other biases that undermined classroom assessment at BHEI, such as language, race, *madhab* (religious division), geographic division, gender, etc.

Some students maintained that some of their instructors used some level of alternative assessment, for example, they assigned students group projects or individual projects. However, students prepared their projects little acknowledgement was given to the hard work and efforts students made by the instructor. This implies that the current dynamics, particularly domination of the summative assessment de-emphasizes formative assessment given teachers less attention to projects and presentations.

According to a third year female student from the NSD, “when individuals or groups present a project, there is no value given to the presentation because neither the instructor nor the other students provide any follow up comments or ask questions once the presentation finishes.” There is no interaction and reflection about the presentation, another female student supported. Likewise, one of the faculty members attested that the faculty members barely opened students’ projects, which implies that for some the symbolic representation of formative assessment mattered.

Students added that because little value was given to the ongoing assessment, such as class projects, presentations and other activities, they hadn’t heard some of their classmates in three years of the college experience although they were all in the same class. For example, a senior male student from the SSD said, “I know some of my classmates who have not done any presentations since we started the university”. This was because these students never paid attention to prepare projects and give seminars in the class. According to the students, their rationale is that projects worth only 10 points and they do not take it very important, “they just want to pass the class,” said a female student from the NSD.

Some other students supported that their teachers treated their class presentations symbolically and continued that those instructors relied only on the assessment at the end of the course. Few female students asserted that compared to their male colleagues, they took the class projects more seriously, due to which a few of their male colleague can hardly tolerate. A female student from the NSD asserted:

Sometimes teachers say, you should finish the presentation in two minutes. Some students leave the class and say we do not listen to girls. For example a teacher said, ‘none of you will get a complete score, but you can come and give your presentation’ respectively’. In addition, the teacher said the presentation is useless, ‘it is a waste of time’ before we even start.

Another issue that students were concerned about was that teachers used ambiguous questions in their exams that students had to write every detail to satisfy the teacher. According to senior male student from the LD, “some of the items in exams are ambiguous and we have to include different interpretations.” He added, “The risk is if we do not include everything, we will lose points”. Another female student from the same department supported his point, noting that, “some of the teachers use exam as an opportunity to practice their power, to panelize students, or they use it as income revenue to fill their pockets”. This suggests that classroom assessment has less value in such a context that corruption exists in an institution. For example, a third year female student from the LD explained that some teachers preferred that students bring them books if they resisted preparing a project.

In addition, some female students expressed that they felt ignored when the class discussion went off tangent, particularly when the political topics were discussed. For example, a third year student maintained, “ when some students pose questions, the teacher goes off the topic and talks about the politics or other things that are not related to the lesson which creates an arguments between male students and the instructor; therefore, the girls will be left aside”. Given

these assertions, the implication is that, in male dominated classes, female students receive less attention, which the institution and the faculty members need to be aware of.

Furthermore, some female students were concerned about the emergence of gender biases in the recent years at BHEI. These female students' witnessed some sort of discriminations against them, primarily by those male students who come from the rural areas. A third year female student from the NSD asserted, "there are some of my classmates who do not allow female students to present their topics in the class by saying 'we are not listening to girls' presentations'," She continued, "these boys arrange meetings and all reach an agreement that they will neither listen to girls' presentations, nor to their opinions in terms of the class decisions".

The complaints from the female students imply that other factors in addition to the classroom assessment affect their learning and particularly their interest in higher education in the context of BHEI. In addition, the study reveals that discrimination against female students shows weakness of BHEI in controlling over this issue. Overall, the study generalizes that other elements such as discrimination, corruptions, ignorance and more are imperative to consider when investigating about a research topic, as in this study, classroom assessment. While a seemingly uncontroversial topic, such was not the case when I conducted my study.

Impacts of Assessment in Learning

Students expressed an agreement that assessment accelerated their routine study program. Some concurred that they studied more during the exam than the regular days; some emphasized that assessment became a culture that motivated their learning. A senior male student from the SSD asserted that assessment motivated him to study and get rewards (scores). Correspondingly, a female student from the NSD agreed that tests speeded up her routine studying program. She

said, “I regularly repeat my lessons when I go home, but when I know that the next day or week I have an exam, I will study 80% more than the regular days”.

In addition, some students argued that assessment was part of the instruction and they went along together. For example, a third year male student from the LD stated, “learning would not occur if assessment is missing”. The arguments imply that assessment can play as a stimulus that motivates learning, especially when reward is attached to, for example, scores in this scenario. The literature refers to this learning method as behaviorist reasoning that learning occurs when incentive is provided for the learner (Driscoll, 2000).

However, fewer students maintained that exams did not interfere with their routine studying schedules. According to a female student from the NSD, “some may study for the exam or to get higher scores, but I study for myself to learn new information”. In addition, students pointed at the responsibility of themselves and teachers in terms of learning. They used analogies for the role of an instructor who can facilitate learning and students as learners. For example, one student from the LD asserted that learning was “a mutual responsibility between teacher and students,” he added, “teachers facilitate as leaders and we process information based on our ability”.

In addition, they maintained that learning occurs when the instructor creates such an environment. According to a senior student, assessment is an activity that the instructor actively involves students to reflect on what they learned and guides them what actions to take in the future. In addition, another student recognized that students were primarily responsible for their learning; however, he had an acknowledgement that scores dominated students’ current learning habits. Overall, students’ discussion implies that although learning is assumed to be the ultimate

goal of assessment, to a great extent, students work harder when they have an exam. This suggests that inclusion of assessment during the instruction may increase students' responsibility for their learning.

The faculty members agreed that assessment activities were used to inform them in terms of students' progress and the effectiveness of their instruction. They stated that students' success and failure in exam had a huge impact in their practice of instruction. For example, according to a female faculty member from the NSD, "if students perform well in a class, that does not mean that the instructor relaxes and pretends that she did everything, and received good results," she continued, "the instructor should try more and find alternative ways to reach greater outcomes".

In addition, a senior faculty member pointed at the mutual nature of assessment in terms of students learning and teacher's responsibility. He maintained, "Assessment is not only for students, it is also for teachers, the teacher assesses his class whether students learned from his instruction". Overall, both teachers' and students' responses show that an agreement exists between them both in terms of the use of assessment results to adapt instruction and students and teachers responsibility in terms of students' learning.

In sum, the study reveals that a shared understanding existed among the faculty members and students in terms of the impacts of classroom assessment in students learning. Student respondents remained supportive of assessment as an external stimulus that increased their learning. In addition, the study reveals that drawing on students' and faculty members' responses inclusion of assessment during the instruction may increase students learning and adjustment in teachers' instruction.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The study reveals that students responded differently in two approaches used by the investigator, quantitative and qualitative. Students showed more positive perceptions in the quantitative approach, seeing their classroom assessment more inclusive in terms of their learning rather than in the qualitative approach that they felt the current practices had limited relevance to their learning. Although the study shows that current dynamics, to a greater extent, had a negative influence on assessment practices in Baghlan Higher Education Institution (BHEI), both students and teachers demonstrated an awareness of the importance of assessment in relation to students learning. In addition, the overall analysis suggests that in terms of implementing various forms and approaches of classroom assessment, there is a potential at the institution level.

In addition, the faculty members showed willingness in terms of including students' voices in their assessment methods and had an appreciation of the alternative approaches aligning with traditional methods. Although diversity existed among the faculty members the way they defined classroom assessment, the majority of them recognized the weakness of the traditional methods which are dominant in this institution. Similarly, the way student defined the (*what* and *why* of assessment), they leaned more on the formative aspect of classroom assessment while teachers favored the summative or achievement part.

The study reveals that primarily the current practices of assessment were focused on exams, classroom discussions, classroom assignment, projects, and seminars. In addition, the study found out that an informal exposure to formative assessment (alternative approach) existed

among the faculty members and based on students' responses, overall, as a formal approach, alternative assessment was considered as a new paradigm. This means that as a formal assessment method, formative assessment was not introduced and had not received support from the administration as well. Additionally, the study indicates that the faculty members had not attended any workshop or any courses about classroom assessment; they just relied on their own experiences except the pedagogy faculty members.

As students shared their experiences and stories, the study found out that classroom assessment, in addition to education purposes, served political purposes in BHEI given the current context. This reflects on the assumption that whether assessment is used to improve instruction and student learning or to control students. Meanwhile, female students shared that co-education provided them an opportunity to compare their strengths and skills compared to the male students. Overall, the study revealed that given the various reasons, students sensed being victims of in some occasions.

In terms of the forms of assessment used in BHEI, two major forms of assessment approaches were witnessed including some level of formative assessment and primarily summative assessment. Among the many approaches within formative assessment, class projects and students' seminars were utilized by the faculty members as a formal representative of this approach. However, informally, teachers used the oral format including questioning method and classroom discussions. Overarching issues that were pointed were the general concept of formative assessment, particularly, peer-assessment and the dynamics embedded in implementation of this approach.

Although the study suggests that given students' and the faculty members' responses, consultation about classroom assessment rarely occurs in BHEI, the way students and teachers interpreted this concept differed respectively. Students, to a great extent, thought of consultation as guidelines provided by the faculty members about the assessment. Conversely, teachers interpreted consultation as sharing how they will assess them, ignoring what they suggested them, "students always want to easy questions," asserted by a faculty member from the language department. The main issue that the study was concerned about is the extent of responsibility students and the faculty members felt in terms of learning and students' progress.

Score meaningfulness and its distribution emerged as two important factors in shaping the current practices of classroom assessment respectively high. Scores students earned from their classes perceived to have relative meaning given the context, hard work and efforts or nepotism and cheating. The study indicates a lack of balance in distribution of scores, more reliance on midterm and final exam comparatively less on formative aspect. Although as the faculty member's little attention to the projects prepared by the students demonstrated a negative picture of this approach; however, students' enthusiasm in terms of valuing the project activities put forward the potential for more formative approaches in the context of BHEI.

The study highlights that indicator of good assessment and ethics of assessment are in a close relation that existence of one defends impacts that other. For example, in terms of indicator of a good assessment, students indicated that justice and lack of discrimination in an assessment characterize a good assessment. On the contrary, existence of various discriminations, fraud and nepotism were considered to disqualify an assessment. Overall, the study suggests that good assessment has a relative interpretation given the context and politics of an institution. For example, at the individual level good assessment meant fairness of assessment that addressed

every student's needs, while at the class level good assessment meant justice and transparency consideration respectively.

In terms of impacts of assessment on students' learning, the study revealed that students made more efforts during their exams than their routine schedule. In addition, the study shows that students demonstrated a willingness to perform more collaborative and individual activities outside the classroom particularly, preparing a project. Correspondingly, the faculty members considered assessment more informative in relation to students' progress and the extent to which their instruction met the intended goals. Overall, the study suggests that a shared understanding exist among the faculty members and students in relation to the main purpose of classroom assessment, improving instruction and increasing learning. In this study, it is not as important that students' responses were high or low, or that they had different views, but rather what teachers and, generally, BHEI could do to address these perceptions.

Limitation

The result of the study should be treated with caution. Filling a research questionnaire was administered for the first time in Baghlan Higher Education Institution, and there might be some biases and power dynamics as the investigator used to teach at this institution. In addition, the sample was selected few days before final the exam; therefore, fewer students were present at that time, indicating that the sample may not represent all students' perceptions.

Furthermore, as questionnaire sample was not controlled for gender, race, language, and socio-economic status (SES), the generalizability of the study will be limited. Because the data is translated from Dari to English, translation biases and some students' whose native language is not Dari, to a great extent, might have an impact on the interpretation and the analysis. Because the study is performed in only one institution, particularly, in a northern province, generalizability of the study should be cautioned in all areas of Afghanistan. To gain a deeper

insight, future studies should be focused on exploring the extent assessment results are used to improve instruction and students' learning. In addition, further studies should be performed examining the relationship between the current assessment practices and students' learning.

Recommendations

Based on findings, the study suggests that an institutional support is needed to foster alternative assessment approaches in BHEI. In addition, another factor that will increase awareness about classroom assessment and support authentic assessments approaches could yield by embedding classroom assessment as a subject in the curriculum of education faculties. Furthermore, to increase the knowledge of classroom assessment within higher education institutions, short-term course, workshops and seminars should be conducted and supported.

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Appendix A

Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ)

This questionnaire aims to explore your perceptions as a student who studies in Baghlan Higher Education Institution. Please read the following statements carefully and circle the number in front of the item that applies to your perspective. In these items 5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= neutral, 2= disagree, 1= strongly disagree

Congruence with planned learning

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. My assessment in social science department tests what I memorize. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My assessment in social science tests what I understand. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. My assignments are about what I have done in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. How I am assessed is similar to what I do in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I am assessed on what the teacher has taught me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Authenticity

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. I am asked to apply my learning to real life situations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. My social science department assessment tasks are useful for everyday life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I find social science department assessment tasks are relevant to what I do outside of school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Assessment in social science department tests my ability to apply what I know to real-life problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Assessment in social science department examines my ability to answer every day questions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I can show others that my learning has helped me do things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Student Consultation

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. In social science department I am clear about the types of assessment being used. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I am aware how my assessment will be marked. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. My teacher has explained to me how each type of assessment is to be used. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I can have a say in how I will be assessed in social science department. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Transparency

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. I understand what is needed in all social science department assessment tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I am told in advance when I am being assessed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I am told in advance on what I am being assessed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I am clear about what my teacher wants in my assessment tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I know how a particular assessment tasks will be marked. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Students Capabilities

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. I can complete the assessment tasks by the given time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I am given a choice of assessment tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. I am given assessment tasks that suit my ability. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. When I am confused about an assessment task, I am given another way to answer it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix B

Questions for teachers about assessment

Assessment Practices and Knowledge about Assessment

1. I was wondering how you define assessment?
2. How do you assess your students?
3. When are you happy with assessment results?
4. Have you ever been in a situation that you did not feel satisfied or comfortable with the assessment results?
5. Have you experienced any change in the way you assess students before to now since you have been involved in teaching?
6. Do you assess students at the beginning of the class, how do you indicate that they made progress?

Forms of Assessment

7. What assessment forms do you use to assess your class?
8. What do you think about alternative assessment forms, such as peer assessment, self-assessment, portfolio, and presentations?

Uses of Assessment

9. As an instructor, what are some dynamics that you are accountable for, in terms of students' assessment results and affairs related to the university?
10. Do you think that students' scores represent what they learned?
11. What is your opinion if students are informed what they will be assessed on?
12. Do you feel comfortable if students' assess other students' work?

Students' Involvement

13. Do you consult with students about how you assess them? To what extent do you consult with students about assessment?
14. What is the use of assessment results? Tell me about your experience in this regard.
15. Do you support this idea that instructors need to have some sort of background about classroom assessment?

General Opinion

16. Is there a timeline when to perform assessment, when can be a good time to assess students?
17. In your opinion, does assessment impact the way they study their lessons or doing assignment?
18. What is the indicator a good assessment? Or is there any?
19. Do you have any recommendations for other instructors that how they should assess their classes?

Appendix B

Questions to be asked about classroom assessment from Students

General

1. What are some forms of activities that you think are related to assessment? Does homework count as assessment? What else?
2. In your opinion, why teachers assess students?
3. How teachers assess students in your college?
4. Did you have any impression that you did not feel satisfied with assessment result or assessment form?
5. What is a good impression you had about classroom assessment? Why?
6. Do you see any change in the way your work was assessed at school and now at the college?
7. How your teachers know about your class at the beginning of the semester/year?
8. How do you know that you learned something?
9. Do you think that your score tells you either you learned?

Use of assessment

1. In general, what is the assessment information used for/ elaborate? What ways?
2. What does grade mean to you? Do you always expect to be graded? Why?
3. Does classroom assessment encourages or discourage the way you are doing your class work or they way you study? You either take that serious, or take it easy? Or you will study for the test?

Kinds of assessment

1. What are some ways your teachers assess your work? Do they give your written or oral feedback? Do their feedbacks help your perform better in your future work?
2. Do you like multiple choice, yes/no, true false, essay questions, take home etc... ?
3. What do you think (about alternative assessment methods) presentation, portfolio, poster presentation, on the field work etc...?
4. How do you feel if you are asked that you assess your work by yourself? Or assess your classmate?

Knowledge about assessment

1. Do you think that knowing about what will you be assessed on will help you score higher?
 2. Do your teachers consult with the class about what you will be assessed on? Topics or chapters?
 3. As a student what is a preferred way to assess students' in a classroom?
 4. When taking a test or exam, can you say if that was good or bad? What is your reason?
- Quality of assessment

Appendix C

University of Massachusetts

Informed Consent Part I:

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Research Description: You are invited to participate in a research study on classroom assessment. I am interested in working with you to explore your perceptions of assessment practices in Baghlan Higher Education Institution. It is hopeful that the results of this study can be useful in informing policy makers, teachers and students about the current practices of assessment and issues behind it.

If you agree to participate, you will commit to participate in a semi-structured interview based on your schedule. We will work together to decide when you are available to share your experience and perspective. I am interested in your experiences and what you have to say. Your participation in this study will allow integration of voices from various stakeholders to be heard and the importance of your experiences to be shared with the larger educational community.

Risks and Benefits: Although all studies have some degree of risk, the potential in this investigation is quite minimal. If at any time, you feel you do not want to answer a question – you don't have to. You are also welcome to discuss any concerns you have with me along the way and withdraw from the study at any time. The benefits of being in the study are the chance to have your opinions heard, and your experiences documented to possibly influence assessment practices in the future.

Payments: You will not receive any payment for your participation in this study.

Data Storage to Protect Confidentiality: I will not use your name in my study in order to ensure confidentiality of data. Each subject will choose with the researcher a code name, which will be used throughout the research. There will be no identifying information about you. In addition, all the field notes and transcriptions from the audiotapes will be stored in a secure file in my home. The data collected will be used for my master's thesis project and possibly in presentations and publications.

Time Involvement: Your participation will take maximum two hours for the interview whenever you are ready

How Will Results Be Used: The results of this study may be used in any or all of the following ways: master's thesis, at conferences, presented at meetings, published in journals, articles or in book form.

Appendix C

University of Massachusetts

ASSENT FORM

I _____ (your name) agree to participate in the study entitled “*assessment practices.*” Sayed Ahmad Javid Mussawy has explained to me why he is doing this study and I understand what is being asked of me. If I have any questions, I know that I can contact him at any time. I also understand that I can leave the study any time I want to.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Investigator’s Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to _____ . S/he has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all her/his questions and s/he provided the affirmative agreement (i.e., assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

University of Massachusetts

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Informed Consent Part II:

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Principal Investigator: Sayed Ahmad Javid Mussawy

Research Title: Assessment Practices: Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Assessment

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary and without financial compensation. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. His email is smussawy@educ.umass.edu.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the University Of Massachusetts School Of Education Institutional Review Board/IRB. I can reach the IRB by calling (413) 545-1056 or I can write to the School of Education, University of Massachusetts, and 813 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I () consent to be audio/video taped. I () do NOT consent to being video/audio taped.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials () may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research, () may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Annex

Descriptive Statistics

Items on Questionnaire	NO	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My assessment in class tests what I memorize	197	1	5	3.34	1.377
My assessment in class tests what I understand	193	1	5	3.03	1.473
My assignments are about what I have done in class	195	1	5	3.81	1.448
How I am assessed is similar to what I do in class	191	1	5	3.54	1.356
I am assessed on what the teacher has taught me	199	1	5	3.87	1.403
I am asked to apply my learning to real life situations	199	1	5	4.10	1.270
My class assessment tasks are useful for everyday life	198	1	5	3.60	1.347
I find my class assessment tasks are relevant to what I do outside of school	187	1	5	2.64	1.446
Assessment in my department tests my ability to apply what I know to real-life problems	196	1	5	3.63	1.316
Assessment in my department examines my ability to answer every day questions	198	1	5	3.68	1.350
I can show others that my learning has helped me do things	198	1	5	3.99	1.179
In my department I am clear about the types of assessment being used	202	1	5	3.29	1.326
I am aware how my assessment will be marked	200	1	5	3.41	1.387
My teacher has explained to me how each type of assessment is to be used	202	1	5	3.33	1.504
I can have a say in how I will be assessed in my Class	202	1	5	3.94	1.318
I understand what is needed in all of my class assessment tasks	203	1	5	3.50	1.303
I am told in advance when I am being assessed	200	1	5	3.92	1.417
I am told in advance on what I am being assessed	195	1	5	3.38	1.479
I am clear about what my teacher wants in my assessment tasks	194	1	5	3.02	1.375
I know how a particular assessment tasks will be marked	194	1	5	3.11	1.297
I can complete the assessment tasks by the given time	197	1	5	3.65	1.299
I am given a choice of assessment tasks	194	1	5	2.63	1.322
I am given assessment tasks that suit my ability	194	1	5	3.15	1.372
When I am confused about an assessment task, I am given another way to answer it	193	1	5	2.59	1.515