

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES (CAPS) AND ITS RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE SIX CAPS SCALES

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Abstract: This study investigated the students' perceptions of Classroom Assessment Practices (CAPs) in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (MHEIs). The objectives of this study were to explore students' perceptions towards CAPs and investigate if there is any relationship among the students' perceptions towards the six scales of CAPs. There were 109 participants participating in this study and they were randomly chosen from first semester of diploma students in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (MHEIs). This study employed quantitative research method utilising questionnaire survey, adopted and adapted from Fisher, Waldrip, & Dorman (2005). The data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and reported using the mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study suggested that the students in MHEIs agreed the CAPs implemented were congruent with planned learning, authentic and transparent, a mean to consult the lecturers and classmates, appropriately matched with their level and capability and have helped them to develop and improve their soft skills and there was a significant positive correlation among the six scales of CAPs. The recommendations and limitations of this study were also discussed.

Keywords: Malaysia, Higher Education, Classroom Assessment Practices, Malaysian students

1.0 Introduction

Classroom Assessment Practices (CAPs), has been debated to have a significant influence on students' learning (Struyven, Dochy & Janssens, 2005). They added that some assessment methods that are not compatible to students' learning claim to encourage surface approaches and some of the assessment tasks utilised are insufficient to induce deep approach to learning. It has been argued that solely depend on behavioural learning principle alone is inadequate if one needs to gain higher level skills or in-depth understanding in learning such as language development, problem solving, and critical thinking (Schunk, 2012).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Many research on assessment in Malaysia Higher Education Institutions (MHEIs) revolve around the lecturers' perceptions of or participation in CAPs: (Congruence with Planned Learning (CPL), Authenticity, Students'

Consultation (SCON), Transparency, Students' Capabilities (SCAPs) and Students' Soft Skills (SSS) (Elshawa, Abdullah, & Md. Rashid, 2017; Swaran Singh et al., 2017; Tunku Ahmad et al., 2014) Hence, there is a small number of studies on assessments that highlights the students' perceptions of CAPs (Chan & Gurnam, 2013). Lee, Hazita, and Yew (2010) conducted a research on the undergraduates' experience of assessment in higher education, alongside the lecturers' experience in conducting the assessment in classroom learning. Some studies have focused on the language assessment, particularly on test construction and validity issues (Lee, Hazita, and Yew 2010). These studies mostly focused on the test-takers' perspectives on the language classroom assessment (Kartini Md Kalid 1999; Foziah Rahman, 2004, cited in Lee, Hazita, & Yew, 2010). Nevertheless, there seems to be little research on how students in MHEIs perceive CAPs in general and also in terms of six scales of CAPs. Five of the scales mentioned above were developed by Fisher, Waldrup and Dorman (2005). The students' soft skills aspect is adapted from the MEB (HE) aimed at developing graduates who possess good communication skills, collaborative skills. and are able to think critically and creatively (MOE Malaysia, 2015). Hence, this study aims to answer the following research questions: How students in MHEIs perceive CAPs and Is there any relationship among students' perceptions towards the six scales of CAPs?

Below is a full description of the six scales:

SCALE	DESCRIPTION
Congruence with Planned Learning (CPL)	The extent to which assessment tasks align with the goals, objectives and activities of the learning module
Authenticity (A)	The extent to which assessment tasks feature real life situations that are relevant to the students.
Students Consultation (SCON)	The extent to which students are consulted and informed about the forms of assessment tasks being employed.
Transparency (T)	The extent to which the purposes and forms of assessment tasks are well – defined and clear to the learner.
Students Capabilities (SCAPs)	The extent to which all students have an equal chance at completing assessment tasks
Students Soft Skills (SSS)	The extent to which assessment tasks employed are beneficial to the students in developing their soft skills.

Adopted from Fisher, Waldrup, & Dorman (2005)

2.0 Assessments

The roles of assessment for the past years have been continuously changing in fulfilling the demands and producing positive outcome of the educational context. Assessment has been utilised to gather information of learning or learning acquisition in relation to whether it could benefit the students' learning and to what extent they perform in learning. Traditional assessment has been associated with a presentation of students' academic attainment results where the teachers are responsible in utilising the assessments as a method for reporting and categorising students to be selected to any educational programmes (Robertson, 2005, cited in Malakolunthu & Kwan Hoon, 2010).

Nevertheless, Heady (2000) mentioned assessments should not be only in the form of reports and categorisation of the students' attainment, it should also be a platform for teachers to guide and help the students to improve and maximise their learning experiences. This could be done by serving the assessment as a platform to portray their abilities, continuous improvement and to reflect on their performance in learning. Wiliam (2011) suggests that assessment could encourage effective and meaningful learning if it serves the teachers some information or evidence that could be used as feedback to help the students learn and also to adjust teaching and learning activities. This kind of assessment is different from the traditional assessment used where it fits the purpose of 'accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence' (Wiliam, 2011, p. 8).

3.0 Methodology

Utilising a quantitative research approach, this study employed a survey design. It intended to assist the explanation of opinions or perceptions provided by sample of the study. Because it is economical and time-efficient, the survey design or questionnaire was also utilised (Creswell, 2014). The participants of the present study were randomly chosen from first year diploma students of two public Malaysian universities and 109 completed the questionnaire. These students were registered for English module and therefore were required to take the assessments. Being randomly chosen gives the population an equal chance of being chosen as participants of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

The research employed in this study was self-administered survey, hence the data was collected through a questionnaire. The instrument was chosen because it is an instrument that has been developed from a research and it is validated based on previous study done by Fisher, Waldrup, & Dorman (2005). Fisher, Waldrup, & Dorman (2005) used the questionnaire on students in science classes in their studies and found that it was appropriate to assess students' perceptions based on the scales of assessment provided in the questionnaire. Sayed Ahmad (2009) also used the same instrument in his study on students' and teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment in a higher education institution and had also validated the questionnaire by piloting it to a group of ten students beforehand. Hence, it can be said that the questionnaire is valid to be used for the current study. The questionnaire was also translated from its original language, English language into Malay language. The translation of the questionnaire was validated using back translation method as suggested by Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike (1973). Hence, two panels of English and Malay language experts were chosen. The panels translated the original English version of the questionnaire into Malay language. Then, they translated back the Malay translated version of the questionnaire into English language to ensure that it was identical to the original English version. Both then discussed among themselves regarding correction of the questionnaire in terms of its language accuracy so that the questionnaire was aligned with the original version of the questionnaire. This was done to ensure students fully understood the statements given in the questionnaire and to minimize the researcher's participation in administering the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections, Section A and Section B, containing 42 items. There were five items in Section A requiring the participants to share their demographic details: gender, age, university, email and contact number. Section B contained 37 items and the participants were required to share their perceptions towards CAPs, based on the 5 – point Likert Scale; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. There were six parts in this section: Congruence with Planned Learning (CPL), Authenticity (A), Students' Consultation (SCON), Transparency (T), Students' Capabilities (SCAPs) and Students' Soft Skills (SSS). The reliability test of this questionnaire shows that the questionnaire is consistent and thus reliable.

3.1 Procedure of Data Collection and Data Analysis

First, the convener of the English module from the two universities in Malaysia were contacted and were given the information sheet pertaining the study, asking for their permission to allow their students to participate in the study. After it was approved, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants through a generated URL link to the google form. Alongside with the questionnaire, the information sheet and consent form asking for the students' permission to participate in the study were attached. The 37 items in Section B of the questionnaire was computed using SPSS software version 23 and named as SP, CPL, A, SCON, T, SCAPs and SSS. The items in Section A were analysed and presented in a form of percentage. In analysing data for the research question, all the items in Section B of the questionnaire were analysed. The data is presented in a statistical form of measurement which includes Pearson Correlation, the two-tailed significance level and number of cases. The data analysis for the research questions were copied and pasted from SPSS and presented in the form of tables.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

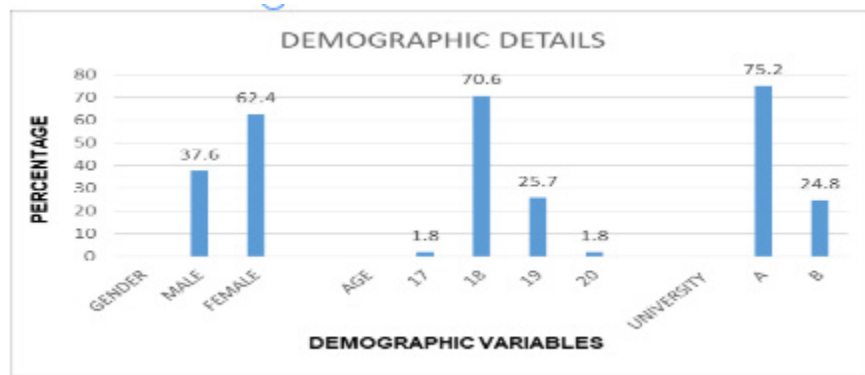


Figure 1 shows there were 62.4% females and 37.6% males of the participants. The majority of the participants (70.6%) were 18 years old and 25.7% of them were 19 while the rest of them were 17 (1.8%) and 20 (1.8%) respectively. Among the 109 participants, 75.2% of them were from University A and 24.8% were from University B.

4.1 Overall students' perceptions on CAPs in MHEIs

Table 2: Students' Perceptions

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' Perceptions on CAPs in MHEIs	3.8894	.39860

Table 2 indicates the overall statistical result of students' perception of CAPs in MHEIs. From the table, it can be seen that the mean for the overall students' perceptions of CAPs is 3.8894 (SD: .39860). This means the students in this study generally agreed that CAPs in MHEIs were congruent with planned learning, authentic and transparent. It also suggests that besides agreeing that CAPs was enabled them to consult their lecturers and classmates, the students also agreed that the CAPs were appropriate and best suited to their level and ability.

This also means that the students agreed that CAPs developed and enhanced their soft skills. Despite conducted in two different settings, the findings of this study confirms the findings found by Sayed Ahmad (2009). He conducted the study in an Afghanistan higher institution.

4.2. Relationship among students' perceptions towards the six scales of Classroom Assessment Practices (CAPs)

**Table 2: Pearson Correlation among the Six Scales
 Pearson Correlations**

		CPL	A	SCON	T	SCAP	SSS
CPL	Pearson Correlation	1	.589**	.558**	.510**	.447**	.571**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109	109	109
A	Pearson Correlation	.589**	1	.745**	.562**	.644**	.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109	109	109
SCON	Pearson Correlation	.558**	.745**	1	.750**	.665**	.734**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109	109	109
T	Pearson Correlation	.510**	.562**	.750**	1	.518**	.674**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109	109	109
SCAP	Pearson Correlation	.447**	.644**	.665**	.518**	1	.506**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	109	109	109	109	109	109

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 indicates the Pearson correlation among the students' perceptions towards the six scales of CAPs in MHEIs, which are CPL, A, SCON, T, SCAPs and SSS. From this table, it can be suggested that there was a statistically significant positive correlation among the students' perceptions towards the six scales of CAPs. For instance, the r values of the relationship between CPL and A, SCON, T, SCAPs and SSS, are .589, .558, .510, .447 and .571 respectively, and the significant two – tailed values, p, are .000. This means that if the students perceived assessment practices as congruent with planned learning positively, it was highly likely that they would perceive the authenticity, students' consultation, transparency, students' capability and students' soft skills of the assessment practices positively. Referring to the strength of correlation index (Singh, Ghani, & Teoh, 2009, p.75), the strength of the relationship among all the six scales is approximately moderate ($0.5 < r < 0.8$) except for between CPL and SCAPs is approximately weak ($0.5 \leq r$). This reveals that when classroom assessment practice is more congruent with planned learning, it moderately guarantees that the authenticity, students' consultation, transparency, and students' soft skills of the assessment practices will increase. The weak relationship between CPL and SCAPs suggests that although the classroom assessment practice is congruent with planned learning, it does not guarantee that students have high capabilities in completing the assessment tasks.

Table 3 also demonstrates that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between Authenticity and SCON, T, SCAPs and SSS with the r values of .745, .562, .644 and .655 respectively. The significant two – tailed values, p , of these relationships are .000. This means that if the students positively perceived classroom assessment practices as authentic, it was highly likely that they would perceive the other four scales of the assessment practices: students' consultation, transparency, students' capability and students' soft skills, positively. Based on the strength of correlation index (Singh et al., 2009, p.75) the strength of the relationship among all the six scales is approximately moderate ($0.5 < r < 0.8$). This shows that when classroom assessment practice is more authentic, it moderately guarantees that students' consultation, transparency, students' capability and students' soft skills of the assessment practices will increase.

From the table, the data shows that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between SCON and T, SCAPs and SSS. The r values of these correlation are .750, .665 and .734 respectively, and the significant two – tailed values, p , are .000. This suggests that if the students positively perceived classroom assessment practices as allowing for students' consultation, it was highly likely that they would positively perceive CAPs' transparency, students' capability and students' soft skills. Considering the strength of correlation index (Singh, Puzziawati and Teoh, 2009, p.75), the strength of the relationship among all these four six scales is approximately moderate ($0.5 < r < 0.8$). This shows that when classroom assessment practice considers students' consultation, it moderately guarantees that the classroom assessment practices will consider its transparency and relation with students' capability and students' soft skills.

In addition, it is suggested that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between Transparency and SCAPs and SSS ($r = .518, p < 0.01$; $.674, p < 0.01$). This indicates that if students viewed assessment practices as transparent, it was highly likely that they would positively view how these tasks improved their capabilities and soft skills. Considering the strength of correlation index (Singh, Puzziawati and Teoh, 2009, p.75), the strength of the relationship among all these three six scales is approximately moderate ($0.5 < r < 0.8$). This shows that when classroom assessment practice is transparent, it moderately guarantees that the classroom assessment practices will increase the involvement of students' capability and students' soft skills. This finding is supported by the previous study where it was argued that the alignment between well-defined purposes and forms of CAPs and the CAPs' goals, objective and activities could enhance students' academic attitudes and abilities thus significantly affect their academic attainment (Koul & Fisher, 2006; Reynolds, Doran, Allers, & Agruso, 1995)

The study also suggests that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between SCAPs and SSS ($r = .506, p < 0.01$). This could mean that when students perceived assessment practices' consideration of students' capabilities positively, it was possible that the students would view their soft skills development positively. Taking into consideration of the strength of correlation index (Singh, Puzziawati and Teoh, 2009, p.75), the strength of the relationship among these two scales is approximately moderate ($0.5 < r < 0.8$). This shows that when students perceived classroom assessment practice involves students' capabilities, it moderately guarantees that the classroom assessment practices will increase the involvement of students' soft skills.

As mentioned earlier, classroom assessment plays a vital role in students' learning. The assessment conducted in classroom learning is one of the main indicators in determining the students' level of attainment. The assessment could also be set as a guide for teachers and students, to help the students perform better in learning. Hence, it is important to explore and investigate students' perceptions of CAPs as it can aid not only the teachers and students, but also the stakeholders, parents, and the institution administrators especially in identifying the initiatives that need to be taken in order to enhance and improve students' performance in learning.

The findings of this study are similar to the findings of a study conducted by Alkharusi and Al-Hosni (2015) on students' perceptions of classroom assessment tasks. Assessment has largely become part of students' learning and this study found that students are quite aware and concern of the role of the assessment itself (Gao, 2012). Hence, it is crucial to design CAPs that could feature real life situations, relevant to the students and are aligned with the learning objectives. The mismatch between CAPs and students' learning objective might decrease the level of confidence among students in successfully attempting the given tasks or assessments (Dorman, Fisher, & Waldrip, 2006). CAPs that are well-defined and mirror the real-world practices could also help students to utilise the transferability of the knowledge and skills assessed in CAPs to real-life situations (Cheng, Wu, & Liu, 2015). This could reduce the disparity between the supply of and the demand for graduates with the required knowledge and skills to compete in the workforce (MOE Malaysia, 2015)

5.0 Conclusion

The focus of this study was to explore students' perceptions towards classroom assessment practices and if there was a relationship among students' perceptions towards the six scales of Classroom Assessment Practices (CAPs). There were 109 participants and they were randomly chosen from diploma students of two public universities. The data was collected utilising a questionnaire adopted and adapted from Fisher, Waldrip, & Dorman (2005) and was analysed using SPSS, presented in the form of percentages, means and standard deviations. The findings of this study demonstrate the students to agree that classroom assessment practices of the English module they took were congruent with planned learning, authentic and transparent, required students' consultation and assessed students' capabilities and soft skills.

In other words, students would prefer to have assessments where they can apply it in the future when they work. The findings also reveal that there was a statistically significant positive correlation among the students' perceptions towards the six scales of CAPs. It can be concluded that the educators need to consider all the six scales in developing their assessments.

This study could inform the important stakeholders such as lecturers and educational administrators on students' perceptions towards current classroom assessment practices. This would help these stakeholders to investigate further the strengths and weaknesses of classroom assessment practices in Malaysia. It would also assist the stakeholders in improving the current assessment practices in classrooms to prepare students for the future by equipping them with appropriate skills and knowledge. The findings of this study would provide academics with a general idea as how the students perceive the assessment they give to the students (James, 2006).

5.1 Limitations of the study

Employing the survey method, this study investigates students' perceptions towards classroom assessment practices and if there was a relationship among students' perceptions towards the six scales of Classroom Assessment Practices (CAPs) in MHEIs. However, this study is limited especially in terms of the sample and field of the study and needs to be acknowledged. Firstly, this study was limited to the respondents of the survey who were chosen from diploma students in two MHEIs. Hence, the findings found in this study could not be generalised to all first-year diploma students in MHEIs as other students from other MHEIs might provide different responses to the questionnaire involving other external or internal factors. Another limitation of this study was the fact that this study only investigated how students perceive CAPs and the relationship of these students' perceptions towards CAPs. It only involved CAPs of one subject area, the English module. It could be more comprehensive if the study looks at not only lecturers' perceptions of CAPs and in the other subject area, but also students' perceptions based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Despite these limitations, it is hopeful that the findings of this study would be able to enlighten those who have similar research interest.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This study recommends other researchers to investigate the students' perception of CAPs with a bigger sample. It could also be extended by investigating other elements of CAPs such as students' preferences of CAPs especially with regards to their learning performance (Watering et al., 2008) and the roles of teachers in assessing students' learning particularly in the tertiary level (Assessment Reform Group, 2003). Future studies could also explore whether the CAPs in Malaysian universities caters to the needs of future employers. The result of these future studies could then be compared to the findings found in this study. Lastly, related studies in the future could employ interviews and focus group discussions in addition to the survey. The findings gained from the interviews and focus group discussions might be able to provide further explanation and clarification on CAPs providing more comprehensive findings. In conclusion, it is hoped that future research would and could involve more or different aspects of CAPs, with a larger sample, and more comprehensive data collection and data analysis.

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