

**TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT PRACTICE:
EXAMINING SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS'
CONCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT**

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Abstract: Assessment is an important part of the teaching and learning process. It helps teachers to assess student learning and to use the information to improve learning and teaching in the classroom. The purpose of this study is to investigate secondary school teachers' conceptions of assessment. The teacher's conception of assessment (TCoA) online survey was completed by 50 secondary school teachers in Selangor in total. The survey included 27 items classified as school accountability, student accountability, irrelevance, and improvement. The findings revealed the highest mean for improvement, followed by irrelevance, student accountability, and school accountability. The findings also revealed that there was no significant difference in teachers' conceptions of assessment among male and female secondary school teachers. In order to integrate assessments in the classroom, policymakers, teachers, researchers, and school administrators should include these findings in their practices.

Keywords: Accountability, Assessment, Conception, Improvement, Secondary School

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that school systems are transitioning from fully central to partially school-based assessments around the globe (Fullan, 2011; Rodgers Gibson, 2019). Also, it is thought that centralized summative examination is only partially useful and does not aid student learning (Rosin et al., 2022) and as a result, public school exams are becoming a hybrid of centralized examination and school-based assessment (SBA). In Malaysia, assessment has long been a formal, centralized process. The National Educational Assessment System (NEAS) was established by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia to revise the current curriculum and examination in 2011. This was done in recognition of the significance of meaningful learning and the urgent need to produce excellent human experts equipped with problem-solving and thinking skills rather than merely being good test takers.

Assessment serves several functions, including providing data on student learning and progress, teaching quality, in addition to program and institutional accountability (Guangul et al., 2020). The researchers believe that studying teachers' conceptions of assessment is an important issue in the field of assessment research. Although the research in this field has broad implications for primary and secondary school policy and practice, little is known about how teachers perceive various parts of the assessment. There is abundant evidence that the views about teaching, learning, and curricula have a significant impact on how teachers teach and what students learn or achieve, making the domain of teachers' beliefs particularly appealing (Savasci-Acikalın, 2009; Bruggeman et al., 2022). Examining teachers' conceptions offers a way to comprehend the connection between beliefs and student results as well as insight into teachers' pedagogy and classroom practices (Epler, 2011; Schuld et al., 2017).

Teachers' conceptions are seen as a component of a complex, multifaceted system that may contain opposing views which depending on an individual's or a situation's circumstances, may or may not manifest in practice (Opre, 2015). Meanwhile, Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) defined assessment conceptions as people's perceptions of assessment based on their experiences with and of assessment. Since there is compelling evidence that these perspectives have a major impact on how teachers evaluate their students' learning and outcomes, teachers' assessment conceptions are vital (van der Kleij, 2019; Abduh, 2021). Although there are significant implications for teaching and learning from this field of study, little is known about secondary school teachers' conceptions and how they relate to their assessment procedures. Thus, the primary goal of this study was to examine secondary school teachers' conceptions of assessment.

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Research Questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding assessment?

RQ2: Are there any significant differences in male and female secondary school teachers' conceptions of assessment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptions of Assessment

The major premise of this conception, according to Brown (2006), is that assessment informs the improvement of students' own learning and improves the quality of teaching. There are two important caveats to this improvement; (a) Assessment describes or diagnoses the nature of a student's achievement or performance; and (b) Assessment information is of sufficient quality to be considered a valid, reliable, and accurate description of a student's performance. This method is thought to provide students/pupils with useful feedback and facilitate their engagement in assessment through self-assessment or peer assessment (Sukiennik et al., 2021).

The second conception of assessment is that it can be used to account for how a teacher, a school, or a system uses society's resources (Brown, 2006). Brown added that the school accountability concept has two rationales: one emphasizes illustrating publicly that schools and teachers provide quality instruction, and the other emphasizes improving instruction quality. According to Opre (2015), the emphasis is not on students' acquisition or learning process, but rather on their position in comparison to other students in the same year of study.

Brown (2006) aligned the third conception of assessment with the premise that students are individually accountable for their learning through their assessment performance. This can be seen frequently in the numerous qualifications examinations that secondary school students take for graduation or entry into higher levels of educational possible chance. This point of view contends that teachers and educational institutions are to blame for any shortcomings in students' performance (Opre, 2015).

Last but not least, the premise of Brown's (2006) fourth conception of assessment is that assessment, as defined as a formal, organized process in assessing student performance, has no legitimate place in teaching and learning. Teachers' long-term relationships with students, as well as their knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, eliminate the need for any kind of assessment beyond the intuitive in-the-head process that occurs naturally as teachers interact with students, referred to by Airasian (2000) as 'sizing up' assessment. This viewpoint specifically argues against the utility of the assessment process in education and that assessment is thought to have detrimental effects on students, teachers, and the educational process (Opre, 2015).

Teacher's Conceptions of Assessment

"Conceptions" are generally associated with the term "beliefs" (Mahasneh & Al-Zou'bi, 2021). Opre (2015) added that conception is based on beliefs, meanings, preferences, and attitudes in order to explain complex areas of experience such as assessment. Teachers' assessment conceptions are defined as structured systems or frameworks of meaning based on their perspectives, interpretations, and interactions with the teaching environment (Brown & Gao, 2015). Teachers' conceptions of assessment, according to this viewpoint, are socially and culturally shared (van den Berg, 2002; Bøhn & Tzagari, 2021).

From the previous studies done by Unal and Unal (2019) on teachers' assessment conceptions and practices in relation to their years of teaching experience, the findings revealed that both new and experienced educators valued assessment in their lessons. The findings also revealed that fair assessment practices are used in lessons by both new and experienced teachers. The study's findings suggest that many lectures integrated into courses or a specific classroom assessment course, as well as seminars and workshops, could help preservice teachers broaden their understanding of how to effectively use classroom assessment approaches.

It is crucial to keep in mind that teachers have traditionally supported several conceptions of assessment. For instance, they may have understood assessment as a way to hold them accountable for the student's learning as well as a way to optimize their own learning (Rohm et al., 2021). Another characteristic that sets concepts apart is that they are the result of attitude; they include both direction (positive or negative) and strength (strong or weak)

(Brown, 2002; Luttrell & Sawicki, 2020). It is obvious that teachers' assessment conceptions will have a significant impact on what pupils learn or accomplish as well as how learning is measured (Tittle, 1994; Pastore & Andrade, 2019).

There is a substantial association between how assessment conceptions are impacting teachers' assessment practices at the micro level, according to a number of scholars (Yan et al., 2021; Brown & Ramesal, 2012; Ramesal, 2007). Additionally, Yidana and Partey (2018) have shown how various assessment conceptions result in various assessment practices. Teachers will therefore frequently utilize assessment tools that are complementary to the teaching and learning process if they view assessment as a valuable technique for gathering the information required to make judgments about learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive research approach since it was the most appropriate given the objectives of the investigation. A sample of 50 secondary school teachers was randomly sampled from secondary schools in five schools in Selangor. Of the total of 50 participants, 38 (74.1%) were female and only 12 (25.9%) were male. Teachers' ages ranged from below 30 to above 50. The sample displayed a balanced representation in this setting. The majority of the teachers had been teaching for more than 5 years. The academic credentials of the sample teachers range from teacher certificates to master's degrees. The disparity, which was mostly between teacher certificates and bachelor's degrees, accurately represented the situation on the ground.

Research Instrument

This study combined a survey from the literature with the Conceptions of Assessment III (CoA-III) Inventory (Brown, 2006; Calveric, 2010). Brown developed the CoA-III inventory in 2006. It can be utilized in teacher professional development and assessment-related research programs since it provides a reliable measurement of teachers' conceptions of assessment (Brown, 2006; Looney et al., 2018). Brown implemented the CoA-III inventory in a number of nations, including New Zealand, Queensland (Australia), the Netherlands, Spain, China, Hong Kong, and India, to examine instructors' concepts of assessment in diverse cultural contexts (Barnes et al., 2017). Brown's investigations in New Zealand and Queensland provided evidence of the reliability and validity of the CoA-III inventory: New Zealand ($\alpha^2 = .841$; $df = 311$; $RMSEA = .057$; $TLI = .87$) and Queensland ($\alpha^2 = .82$; $df = 311$; $RMSEA = .074$; $TLI = .80$). CoA-III inventory was used in this study to examine secondary school teachers' conceptions of assessment. The questionnaire included 27 Likert-scale questions about assessment conceptions, with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To establish the internal validity of the Malay version of TCoA, Pearson's correlation between the total scale and its dimensions was calculated, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Pearson Correlation Between TCoA and Its Dimensions

		School accountability	Student accountability	Irrelevance	Improvement
School accountability	Pearson Correlation	1	.68*	.70*	.74*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.00	.00
Student accountability	Pearson Correlation	.68*	1	.68*	.82*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		.00	.00
Irrelevance	Pearson Correlation	.70*	.68*	1	.82*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00		.00
Improvement	Pearson Correlation	.74*	.82*	.82*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	

Note. (Level of significance = 0.01)

The TCoA and its dimensions were correlated from ($r= 0.68$) to ($r= 0.82$), and the TCoA dimensions were correlated from ($r= 0.68$) to ($r= 0.82$).

In the current study, Cronbach's Alpha (0.92, 0.82, 0.73, and 0.62) was used to confirm the internal consistency of the TCoA for school accountability, student accountability, irrelevance, and improvement.

RESULTS

Secondary School Teacher's Conceptions of Assessment

Table 2 illustrates the means and standard deviations of teachers' assessment perceptions.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviation for Teachers' Perceptions of Assessment

Variable	Mean	SD
School accountability	3.89	1.44
Student accountability	3.99	1.32
Irrelevance	4.00	0.95
Improvement	4.03	0.86

Table 2 shows the highest mean score for assessment as Improvement ($M= 4.03$), followed by Irrelevance ($M= 4.00$), student accountability ($M= 3.99$), and school accountability ($M= 3.89$).

The Difference between Male and Female Secondary Teacher's Conceptions of Assessment

Table 3 pictures the means and standard deviations of teachers' conceptions of assessment based on gender.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviation for Teachers' Perceptions of Assessment Based on Study Variables

Variable	Level	School accountability		Student accountability		Irrelevance		Improvement	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Gender	Male	4.00	0.79	3.89	0.47	3.84	0.48	4.02	0.40
	Female	3.85	0.71	4.02	0.69	4.05	0.63	4.03	0.66

T-test analysis was used to identify significant differences by gender as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Results of T-Test Analysis

	F	Sig.	t	df
School Accountability	.136	.714	.627	48
Student Accountability	1.53	.222	-.620	48
Irrelevance	1.63	.207	-1.06	48
Improvement	3.18	0.81	-.045	48

The T-Test analysis revealed no significant gender differences in teachers' conceptions of assessment in school accountability, [$t(48) = .627, p = .714$]. There were also no significant differences in teachers' conceptions of assessment in student accountability [$t(48) = -.620, p = .222$], irrelevance [$t(48) = -1.06, p = .207$], or improvement [$t(48) = -.045, p = 0.81$] based on gender.

DISCUSSION

The focus of this research was to understand secondary school teachers' conceptions of assessment. The results revealed that the highest mean of teacher conceptions of assessment as the form of assessment used to improve education, with participants strongly agreeing that assessment has an impact on teaching. This could be the teacher's perspective of assessment informing the improvement of student's own learning and the quality of teaching (Chng & Lund, 2018). The second rank of conception is Irrelevance. This could be the attitude of teachers who regard it negatively, either because it undermines teachers' autonomy or because they feel assessment and teaching are the same things (Takrouni & Assalahi, 2022). As much as the teacher perceives the assessment is crucial in the student's progress, the teacher should also be aware that irrelevant assessment may impede the students' comprehension and ability to accomplish the tasks and develop necessary skills and strategies (Mat Yusoff et al., 2022). Student accountability is ranked third on the teacher's conceptions of assessment. Since assessment is highly crucial in students' learning, student accountability in assessment permits teachers to ensure that students learn what they need to know to satisfy the course's learning objectives (Chung et al., 2020). Last but not least, school accountability is ranked last among the factors. According to this viewpoint, the teacher believes that the school assessment data should be used to judge school quality at the very least (Su, 2020).

On the other hand, the current study's findings also revealed no significant gender differences in teachers' conceptions of assessment among all factors. These present findings contradict a study done by Mahasneh and Al-Zou'bi (2021) on perceptions of Jordanian science teachers' conceptions of assessment and found significant differences in the teachers' conceptions of assessment in all factors which are school accountability, student accountability, irrelevance, and improvement. On the contrary, Yetkin (2018) found that there are no significant differences in the teachers' conceptions of assessment in all factors; school accountability, student accountability, irrelevance, and improvement of the teacher's conceptions of assessment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the significance of teachers' beliefs and practices impacting the assessment conceptions and implementation in the classroom setting. A teacher should place higher importance on assessment and use self-created assessments rather than ready-made ones. Since this study has found that the teacher values assessment for improvement, the teacher should play their role to create and use the assessment in a way to improve students learning and grasping the knowledge. Also, no significant difference was found among gender in conceptions of assessment. Despite the gender, the teacher should play their role to nurture their students and monitor their students' learning progress through assessment. Finally, the assessment had a significant impact on teachers' pedagogical practice and was linked to the majority of other components, such as teacher accountability for students' achievements and pressure from schools and policymakers to create a score-oriented culture.

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