

# Indonesian teachers' perception of assessment: A mixed method study on perceptions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> studying teachers, assessment, mixed method.</p>	<p><i>Studying teachers' conceptions is important as it relates to beliefs which influence teaching practices including assessment. The hot issue of character building in Indonesian education context particularly relates to teachers' conceptions of assessment. This study will investigate Indonesian junior high school teachers' conceptions of assessment in the learning of English, how they perceive their conceptions reflects their assessment practices, including how assessment is used to build students' character. This study will use a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. Brown's Hong Kong model of Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment will be used as the instrument in the first phase of the study to identify the conceptions of assessment held by teachers. These results will be used to select participants for the second qualitative phase of the study. Semi-structured interviews and analysis of teachers' assessment documents will be used to triangulate the data in this case study phase of the project. The results of the study will add to knowledge about how teachers in different contexts and cultures may conceive dissimilar conceptions, and how assessment relates to character building. It is also 'hoped that this study will encourage policy makers to take into account teachers' conceptions before implementing new plans for educational reform.</i></p>
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## 1. Introduction

Assessment is considered to play a critical role in education for both policymakers and practitioners as assessment practices inform accountability (how well students have learned) and instruction (how to improve) in educational contexts (Danielson, 2008). These two purposes sometimes support, or compete/conflict with one another, which indicate that assessment is a complex process (Earl, 2003).

For decades, the practice of summative assessment (SA) for accountability purposes has dominated classroom assessment activities. However, recent trends in teachers' classroom practices have undergone a paradigm shift (Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002) towards

assessment as a practice to improve learning (Guskey, 2003). This paradigm change is most visible in countries where low stakes examination policy is implemented. In other contexts where the practices of SA have been widely accepted as part of history and culture (Choi, 2008), teachers and the public tend to maintain the SA processes and practices because they find SA effective (Earl, 2003). This phenomenon suggests that teachers' beliefs or conceptions are intimately connected with teaching practices including assessment. This signals the importance of further investigation into teachers' conceptions of assessment in different contexts and culture such as Indonesia.

Assessment in Indonesian schools is currently regulated by Act no. 20/2007. The Act defines assessment as a process of collecting and processing information to determine students' achievement. The government policy requires that educational assessment is conducted at three levels: classroom assessment, school assessment, and national assessment. This implies that the assessment system in Indonesia involves both internal and external agencies (Harlen, 2007).

Classroom assessment is conducted continuously with three basic functions: to monitor the process of learning, to monitor students' progress and to improve learning. These purposes reflect the conceptions of improvement, school accountability and student accountability (Webb, 1992; Brown, 2008). Classroom tests, mid-semester tests, semester tests and class promotion tests are several forms of teacher assessment recommended in the policy. All tests are conducted at the end of the program period by teachers and function "to check up on what students have learned from a series of lessons over a period of time" (Harlen, 2007, p. 53).

## **2. Literature Review**

The studies focusing on teachers' conceptions of assessment investigated the influence of factors such as: teachers' views of learning (Brown, 2002; Bonner & Chen, 2009); education system and assessment policy (Brown, 2002; Remesal, 2011; Winterbottom, Brindley, Taber, Fisher, Finney, & Riga, 2008); teaching levels (Brown, Lake, Matter, 2011; Philippou & Christou, 1997; Bonner & Chen, 2009); participation in professional development (PD) programs (Calveric, 2010; Vardar, 2010); and the predominant examination culture (Noor, Muniandy, Krishnan & Mathai, 2010; Brown, Kennedy, Fok, Chan, & Yu, 2009; Li & Hui, 2007; Brown, Hui & Yu, 2010; Degbey, 2009). This paper will only focus on examination culture.

Teacher acculturation into an examination focus is a strong contributing factor in their conceptions of assessment. While examinations are found to be irrelevant in a low stakes examination context and sometimes at elementary school level, at secondary school level examinations become a crucial assessment focus for teachers. Interestingly most Asian studies on assessment reveal that the examination is a primary consideration for teachers at all levels. A study on teachers' conceptions of assessment was conducted in 2009 in Hong Kong using Brown's model (Brown, Kennedy, Fok, Chan, & Yu, 2009). The 288 elementary and secondary teachers who participated in the study supported improvement conceptions of assessment and rejected the irrelevance conception. Interestingly, these teachers strongly believed that assessment makes students accountable with a very positive correlation. These beliefs reflected the practice of assessment in Hong Kong in that participants of the study

reported a focus on preparing their students to pass examinations and viewed this practice positively, unlike the New Zealand and Australian teachers. In other words, Hong Kong teachers believed that improvement conceptions related to the examination process which is contrary to New Zealand and Australian teachers' interpretations.

meaning of good character. Character is defined as 'an individual pattern of behaviour ... moral constitution' (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999, p.5). Each of us has both positive and negative character, but the good character is more than the established patterns of behaviour. It is about knowing the good, loving the good and doing the good (Lickona, 1991; Ryan & Bohli, 1999) and reasoning the good (Lickona, 1991). Another crucial point to define is 'good'. Basically good means respect for the dignity of others (Ryan & Bohli, 1999) and good character means the life of right conduct, the right conduct in relation to other person and in relation to oneself (Aristotle in Lickona, 1991). To this end the definition indicates a great dependence on a strong community (Noddings, 2002) meaning that character building is the responsibility of all; parents, teachers, school and community. Are the good values shared among us? do teachers really educate themselves/students to be honest, respect, responsible, discipline and confidence in examination, to compete in fair game of assessment/examination policy, do teachers realize the relationship among their teaching, conceptions, and practices of assessment and how these conceptions reflect the building of character? This paper will seek answer of these questions from teachers' perspectives.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Research design is defined as 'procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies' (Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2007, p.58). This study will use mixed methods design, where the mixing between quantitative and qualitative data is conducted at some stages of the research process within a single study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The purpose of the combination is to 'provide strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.12).

In the first phase, the quantitative design will be used to describe teachers' current conceptions of assessment (improvement, accountability, and irrelevance). Quantitative research is 'based on the collection and analysis of numerical data' (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 8). For the second phase, qualitative design using a case study approach will be used to investigate factors believed by teachers to contribute to their conceptions of assessment. Qualitative research relies on the collection of non-numerical data, such as words, (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 388) and is used to understand 'the phenomena of interest from the participants' perspectives' (Merriam, 2001, p.6).

This study will adopt sequential explanatory mixed methods, consisting of two distinct phases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The design will help me use the qualitative data to explain and build upon initial quantitative results (Creswell, Plano Clark, et al, 2003).

## **4. Findings**

### **Phase 1 Quantitative**

#### **Population and sample**

The target population in this study will be English teachers at junior high schools in South Sulawesi province Indonesia. Participants' recruitment will occur through accessing the database of the English teachers who participated in PD programme under the Department of Education of Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi. These teachers will vary in terms of curriculum level, years of teaching experience, education level, and gender.

For the quantitative phase of the study, convenience sampling will be used (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This sampling encompasses two categories of teachers as identified in the database: (1) those teaching English at junior high school, and (2) those who are actively involved in a PD program. Using these criteria, 140 teachers will be invited to participate in the study. In the first phase of the study, 100 teachers from different PD groups will complete the questionnaire. The timing of the questionnaire distribution will be developed and adapted based on the teacher PD activity schedule.

#### **Data collection**

The quantitative phase of the study will focus on identifying teachers' conceptions of assessment. A cross-sectional survey design will be used which indicates the data will be collected at one point in time (McMillan, 2010). The primary technique will be an analysis of internationally validated survey on teachers' conceptions of assessment using the Hong Kong model of TCoA, (Brown, et al, 2010). The questionnaire consists of two sections:

1. The first section is comprised of 31 Likert-type items scored on a scale from 1-6 (1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree) which address conceptions of assessment (assessment for improvement, assessment for accountability, and assessment as irrelevant);
2. The second part asks demographic questions about the participants' backgrounds (gender, age, years of teaching experience, grade level teaching assignment, level of education, whether they are certified or not, and information about participation in professional development programs).

Preliminary discussions with Brown indicate that formal permission will be given for this research. The questionnaire was translated into bahasa Indonesia and was approved by Brown. The approved questionnaire will be piloted with individuals similar to the intended participants in Indonesia by mail. A pilot study such as this aims to check for ambiguity, confusion, and poorly reported items (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The pilot study will also help me to set the estimated time needed to complete the questionnaire (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Feedback from the trial will be used to revise the questionnaire before it is finalised.

## **Phase 2 Qualitative**

### **Participants**

For the qualitative phase of the study, purposeful sampling will be used to intentionally select individuals to better understand the central phenomenon (teachers' conceptions of assessment) (McMillan & Schumacher, 1994). This kind of recruitment aims to select participants who will best answer the research questions and who are the 'information-rich' persons (Patton, 1990, p. 169). In this second phase, a case study approach will be implemented. Two teachers representing each of the three conceptions (improvement, accountability, and irrelevance) will be selected for the case study. The factors influencing teachers' conceptions of assessment are likely to differ across the three cases. They might teach at different levels, different age ranges, be certified or not and have various levels of education. The recruitment of more than one teacher for each conception aims to allow for participant attrition as a result of illness, pregnancy or retirement. In an informed consent form in the phase one survey, the participants will be told that a small number of willing teachers will be asked to participate in the follow-up individual interviews.

### **Data collection**

The second, qualitative phase of the study will focus on explaining the results of the statistical data obtained in the first, quantitative phase. The multiple case study design will be used for collecting and analysing the qualitative data (Stake, 1995). The primary method of data collection will be in-depth semi-structured individual interviews where I set the topic and issues to ask in outline form but do not use exactly the same words or sequence for each one. This interview characteristic will increase the comprehensiveness of data yet ensure the data collection is systematic (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The interview will be conducted face to face and is likely to take around forty five minutes for each of eight participants. The interview protocol will include ten to fifteen open-ended questions and will be pilot-tested with similar teachers who would not be formal participants in this phase of study. Debriefing with pilot participants will provide information on the clarity of the interview questions and their relevance to the study aim. The interviews will be conducted in languages preferred by participants and will be recorded, translated, and transcribed verbatim. Participants will be given an opportunity to review and, if necessary correct the contents of the interview after it has been transcribed.

## **5. Discussion**

I will commence my data analysis once it is gathered from one PD group. Data from the first section or the participants' survey responses will be analysed with the intention of choosing two participants who favor each conception to interview in phase two (six in total). The reason for choosing a strong respondent to one particular conception is because it is the phenomenon or the conception of assessment held by teacher that will be the case unit of my study. These data will be scored based on how strongly each participant endorses each of the three conceptions. In the next phase, the corresponding average scores (averaged over the corresponding number of items) per each dimension will be plotted for each individual.

Data on the second section of the questionnaire will provide demographic information which may be also used to select participants for the qualitative phase in order to assist the purposive sampling, for example when more than six participants are willing to participate in the second phase of the study.

This TCoA survey results analysis will enable me to select participants who have similar patterns of endorsing the three dimensions (i.e. a strong preference for one particular conception of assessment). The following figure illustrates an example profiles for five fictitious participants. The value for each participant represents the mean Likert scale for one conception when the item scores from the survey have been averaged. Types of conception are represented as three different colours, green for irrelevance, red for accountability and blue for improvement.

As the case unit of my study will be the type of conception teachers' held, these participants (Wati & Rahmah) with such a strong preference on one conception may provide rich information regarding their values of assessment, factors influencing their conceptions, and perceptions of how their assessment practice reflects their understanding of assessment.

I will use several procedures to guarantee trustworthiness of the data in this study. For instance, credibility of the data which parallels internal validity in quantitative research will be enhanced through triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Triangulation which "involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data" will be achieved through using Denzin's multiple triangulation strategies (1989) including data collection from different methods such as interviews, and documents (Mertens, 2005, p. 255).

Another critical analysis to use in the study is dependability or reliability which means stability over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In measuring this criterion, I will apply a process which is called case study protocol to attest the quality and appropriateness of the inquiry process (Yin, 2003). Moreover, the use of a multiple case design will strengthen external validity or transferability of the data (Yin, 2003). In addition, confirmability which aims to certify the consistency of data and its interpretation (Guba, 1981), will be also be considered by providing a "chain of evidence" (Yin, 2003) or confirmability audit (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) such as asking my peers or supervisors to review field notes and interview transcripts, and keeping research journals.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study will adhere to the ethical rules and regulations set by the Victoria University of Wellington with regard to human research. To achieve this, first, I will gain permission to do my research from the education department of Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The department will provide information about the PD groups to be selected. I will contact the PD leader via mail or phone and develop a schedule to fit within the PD programme.

I will also adhere to the four guidelines suggested by Christians (2005) for conducting research, namely gaining informed consent, avoiding deception, protecting participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, and ensuring accuracy of the data. To this end, I will provide teachers with an information letter and a consent form which contains

information about the purposes of the research project, the nature and consequences of the research, the duration of the study and their rights as participants. The participants will be guaranteed confidentiality in any report of findings, and the data will remain confidential during and after the research. I will also strive to ensure that the research process and its findings will not have any negative impact on these participants..

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