

Students' Assessment: Contrasting Perspectives of the Undergraduates and their Lecturers

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Student enrolment in undergraduate education in Sri Lanka has increased gradually over the past few decades. At present, the student population of universities represents diverse background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, social class, culture, ability, second language competency, and aspirations. University curricula and assessment processes are designed and implemented in ways, which do not necessarily pay much attention to the variations in these characteristics. These variations can play a major role in what is learned by the students and the way they respond to the academic demands of the undergraduate courses. Therefore, it is attempted to study the experiences of students in some detail.

In this paper, the findings of the first phase of data collection of the above mentioned longitudinal qualitative study, which spans over a 2-3 year period, is discussed. Particular questions addressed here are, how do the undergraduates and their lecturers interpret assessment, how do they act on their interpretations and what effects assessment process make on student learning? In this first phase, I have observed teaching and learning of three whole modules taught in the second year, interviewed the lecturers and the students, collected journal entries made by a small sample of students over a period of about one month. In addition, I have analysed a sample of assignments, examination grades of the students and feedback comments made by the lecturers who taught the particular modules.

The analysis of data reveals that the students and the lecturers hold contrasting views about the goals, processes and effects of assessment. Students' responses to the assessment demands vary according to socio-cultural factors, previous experiences and personality factors.

Assessment can be used as a powerful tool for student learning. However, when it is used only for grading and selection, it becomes counter productive.

Keywords: Students' assessment; Undergraduates; University curricula; Competency; Aspirations

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