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Exploring student-centred assessment practices in higher education for developing adaptive graduates

Abstract

The last three decades have seen significant educational reform, which have influenced the transformation of assessment practices in higher education institutions (HEIs). In addition, various societal and global changes have required that higher education create adaptive graduates who acquire and develop higher-order skills which include problem-solving skills, critical thinking, creativity and autonomy. Thus, HEIs are expected to produce adaptive graduates to meet the demands of the current national and international society and workforce. Literature suggests that student-centred assessments (SCA) can promote such higher-order skills, which have also become known as 21st century skills. Since, assessment is an integral part to learning and instruction, the design of assessments have become an important aspect in HEIs. This entails HEIs adapting to the paradigm shift from traditional assessment methods to student-centred assessment methods. This study adopted a case study approach to explore staff and student's experiences of student-centred assessments. The respondents for this study were the staff and students from a Faculty of Accounting and Informatics at a HEI in South Africa. The findings reveal that while staff and students support various SCA and activities, the implementation of these assessments are hindered by challenges faced by staff. The contribution of this paper is to emphasize how student-centred assessment (SCA) practices foster the development of adaptive graduates while addressing the challenges to their effective implementation. Furthermore, this paper is significant to policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders seeking to enhance assessment practices and prepare adaptive, future-ready graduates.

Keywords: *Student-centred assessment, higher education, 21st century skills*



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1. Introduction

The last three decades have seen a transformation in education, whereby, there has been a universal demand for higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare students for the 21st century by facilitating and guiding them in a developing global knowledge economy that require individuals who can adapt, be creative and collaborate

across diverse contexts (Tierney & Kan, 2016: 1760; Stolberg, *et al.*, 2018: 1; Teo, 2019: 170). This has led to a holistic approach in the facilitation of teaching, learning and assessment that enables students to be autonomous, creative and critical thinkers which are features of student-centred learning (Ross, 2024:6). As a result, literature suggests a paradigm shift from the traditional or passive learning approach which focuses on content knowledge, remembering of facts, examination skills and 'teach to test' (Reich *et al.*, 2019: 48; Teo, 2019: 170) to a student-centred approach.

Student-centred assessments (SCA) promote active participation, autonomy, metacognitive skills, creativity and assist students to apply knowledge to real-life situations (Bremner, 2021: 166) as compared to the traditional approach whereby the connection between learning and assessment is linear (Cope & Kalantzis, 2022: 17). Furthermore, SCA stimulates student interaction with peers, introspection of learning, and a sustained desire to learn (Al-khresheh, 2022: 34; Xhomara, 2022: 102; Grøndahl Glavind *et al.*, 2023: 1255).

Aside from the preparation of adaptive graduate with higher-order thinking skills, scholars emphasise that HEIs are being subject to institutional and government audits (Tierney & Kan, 2016: 1761; Marginson, 2018: 26; Sutin, 2018: 19; Reich *et al.*, 2019: 41). These audits evaluate scholarly output, rewarding HEIs that align career-orientated curricula with the development of adaptable graduates equipped with the necessary 21st century skills, enabling them to apply knowledge, remain relevant and be employable (Jacob & Gokbel, 2018: 7; Small, *et al.*, 2018: 148, 150; Santos, 2019: 4). In addition, Temoso & Myeki (2022: 1) maintain that HEIs, which include South African universities, are under pressure to deliver and increase output. This entails stepping up efforts to improve student learning, lecturers' productivity as well as retention and graduation rates.

Thus, Cele (2021: 68) claims that HEIs are striving for student-centred education to help with student engagement, since research suggests that student participation in activities with a purpose is a prerequisite for achieving good learning outcomes. Furthermore, processes for learning and evaluation must include specific outcomes, well-defined expectations for students, and tests that foster self-efficacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, autonomy, creativity, and self-reflection while delving into issues and challenges encountered in the real world (Heilporn, *et al.*, 2021: 10; Cole, 2022: 2; Singh *et al.*, 2022: 7). As previously mentioned, these are key features of student-centred assessments (SCA), which include assignments, case studies, portfolios and project-based learning, as well as peer and self-assessment.

Hence, student-centred assessment, can be used as a tool to nurture skills needed for the 21st century and promote student active participation in their studies. HEIs should support the development of skills generated by student-centred assessment practices to address the knowledge and skill gaps that impair graduates' employability (Ross, 2024: 7). This is important if institutions aim to be relevant, responsive, and adaptable to the evolving 21st century society. Furthermore, it is critical to assess the degree to which assessment is student-centred and helps to achieve successful learning outcomes.

This paper aims to investigate student-centred assessment practices at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa, with a focus on how these practices contribute to developing adaptive graduates by fostering higher-order thinking skills and other critical skills. This aim will be addressed through the following objective:

- To explore staff and student's perceptions of student-centred assessments and their role in developing graduates who are adaptable and equipped for real-world challenges. The study will therefore ponder over the below question to address the objective.
- What are students and staff perceptions and experiences of student-centred assessments and how do these assessments contribute to the development of adaptive graduates?

2. Literature review

The needs of the twenty-first century students have prompted HEIs to shift their focus to student-centredness (Ross, 2024:27). Implementing adjustments in methods of assessment that foster more profound learning, prioritize student-centeredness, and support 21st-century educational reform is important. The global shifts in educational policy and research studies that highlight the importance of lecturers' roles and efficaciousness in redefining instruction as facilitators, creators of learning opportunities, or providers of learning experiences provide the context for this type of educational reform (Biesta, 2015: 75,76; Darling-Hammond, 2017: 291;).

Thus, the changing role of education, places emphasis on the importance of assessment in developing adaptable graduates who are responsive to the needs of the 21st century by having the necessary higher-order thinking skills, which include critical thinking, autonomy and responsibility for learning. These higher-order skills are key attributes of student-centred assessments.

3. Student-centred assessments

A substantial body of research and meta-analyses highlight the importance of assessment as a crucial component of education (Kleyn & García, 2019: 76; ; Khan & Jawaid, 2020: 108). Assessment is ideally conceptualised as an essential component of instruction that helps, enhances, and recognizes student learning (Sabbag, *et al.*, 2018: 141) by considering how students can apply their knowledge through the various assessment methods used (Wicaksana *et al.*, 2019: 375). There are various approaches to assessment, including both traditional methods and more innovative techniques, collectively referred to as student-centred assessments (SCA), which are focused on active, student-centred learning.

This shift to active learning has prompted the emphasis on equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to navigate the challenges of the modern workforce. Thus, the need for assessments is beyond measuring academic achievement but also preparing students for real-world demands Croft *et al.* (2019: 1). Student-centred assessment practices are designed to promote critical thinking, reflection, and the evaluation of students' knowledge and skills, making them inherently authentic by being adaptive graduates ready for real-world demands (Maulidhawati, *et al.*, 2021: 68; Ashipala, *et al.*, 2022: 2).

Student-centred assessment, is goal-oriented and emphasizes the student's direct learning, the development of higher-order thinking skills, and their capacity to collaborate with others in groups (Wicaksana *et al.*, 2019: 376). It further provides flexibility in learning and is multifaceted, integrated into the curriculum, and embedded in the context (Bijsterbosch, *et al.*, 2017: 17; Morselli, 2019: 20). The goal of SCA is to foster students' interest, critical thinking, and creativity (Ross, 2024:43).

Student-centred assessments promote collaborative learning and the acquisition of essential skills while enabling critical evaluation of oneself and others as an integral component of learning and assessment. Student-centred assessments and activities include group work, flipped classrooms (Dori, *et al.*, 2020: 2), portfolios, project-based assessments (Flores *et al.*, 2020: 379; Pereira *et al.*, 2021: 10), self-assessment, peer assessment and oral presentations (Ocampo & Panadero, 2023: 168). These methods foster critical thinking, confidence and encourage learning, in contrast to passive learning and assessment methods that prevent knowledge from being applied to solve issues in practical settings (Rich Jr *et al.*, 2014: 24; Kaya & Akdemir, 2016: 159; Findo and Hussein, 2023: 2).

Over the past two decades, student-centred assessment has gained significant traction in higher education as a focus strategy with the goal of connecting academic content to real-world work settings (Croft *et al.*, 2019: 15). Furthermore, it is widely regarded as beneficial for students' personal and academic development to encourage engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful learning. However, scholars have identified several challenges and barriers to the effective implementation of student-centred assessments in higher education contexts.

4. Challenges in implementing student-centred assessments

Even though SCA is considered to be a form of collaborative learning and the enhancement of higher-order skills, there are various challenges in implementing SCA methods. The subsequent paragraphs examine the multifaceted challenges faced by lecturers in employing SCA practices, drawing on literature to highlight institutional, systemic and student-related barriers. These hindrances highlight the difficulties of integrating SCA in HE, despite these methods potential to encourage deeper learning and promote critical thinking.

Unparalleled expansion in student enrolment, large class sizes and a lack of resources have been identified as obstacles to the implementation of student-centred assessment (Adamu, Tsiga & Zuilkowski, 2020: 2). In addition, heavy workload, the time required for preparation of SCA (Musarat, *et al.*, 2019: 38; Trinidad, 2019) and the need to be trained to conduct student-centred assessment and facilitate effective learning, rather than just transmitting knowledge may be hindrances.

Literature postulates that the designing of SCA is time-consuming, and lecturers may experience pressure to conclude the syllabus prior to the examination leaving little time to design and facilitate student-centred assessments and activities (Aladawi, 2020: 17;). If the curriculum and policies are strict, staff members might see student-centred learning initiatives as ambitious objectives (Ross, 2024: 49).

Furthermore, students may have certain expectations regarding how teaching, learning and assessment should be conducted, especially, if they have not experienced student-centred pedagogy (Rowley, *et al.*, 2018: 37). Another barrier is difficulty in encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning, particularly if they feel anxious and uneasy about receiving feedback (Oyelana *et al.*, 2018: 121; Shekhar *et al.*, 2019: 7). The following section details the methodology used to explore these issues comprehensively.

5. Methodology

To investigate the objectives of this paper, the quantitative approach was adopted. This methodology was appropriate since it emphasises the validity and reliability of the findings and communicates it in a methodical and collaborative way (Kumar, 2019: 16). A census encompassing all final-year diploma students and staff from Business and Information Management, Financial Accounting, Information and Communication Technology: Application Development, Information, and Communication Technology: Business Analysis at the Durban University of technology was conducted.

An electronic questionnaire was designed separately for staff and students which served as the primary data collection tool. The design of the instrument was informed by the research question as well as scholarly literature related to student-centred assessment. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to capture participants' levels of agreement or disagreement with the series of statements. In addition, a limited number of open-ended questions were included. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire via email. The total number of respondents were 310 students and 65 staff.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0 was used to analyse the data collected for the close-ended questions. The results were presented using descriptive statistics (e.g. charts or graphs) and inferential statistics. The data collected from the open-ended questions, were coded and the frequency of a particular response was counted and presented in a table format. Hence, quantitative methods were used to identify trends and patterns in participants' responses.

6. Findings and analysis of results

6.1 Different types of current assessments

This section focuses on the different types of assessments that students participated in, which includes the frequency of use.

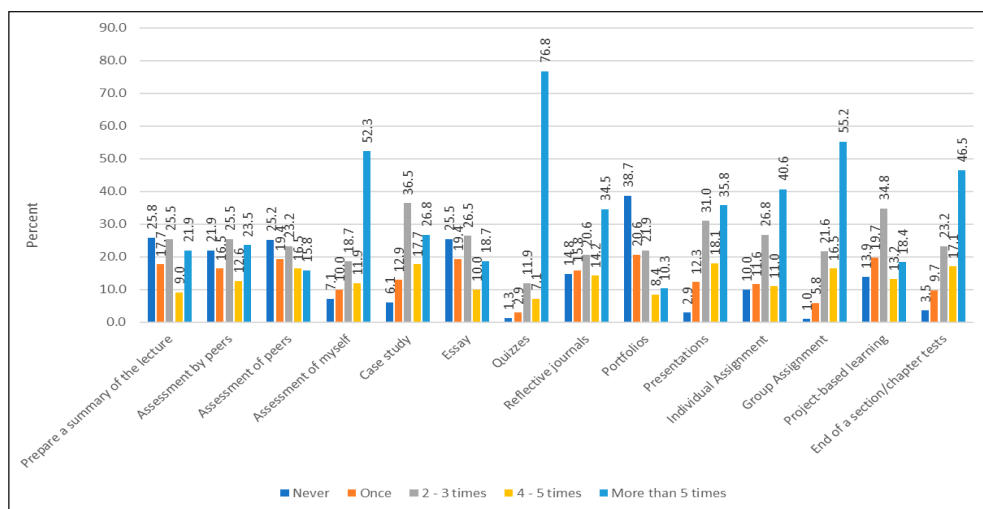


Figure 1: Students' involvement in different types of assessments

As evident in Figure 1, a variety of assessments was used more than 5 times in a semester. This included assessment of myself (52.3%), end of a section/chapter tests (46.5), individual assignments (40.6%), presentations (35.8%) and reflective journals (34.5%). However, group assignments (55.2%) and quizzes (76.8%) scored the highest. Interestingly, data revealed that a significant number of students have ‘never’ prepared a summary of a lecture for the lecturer (25.8%), assessed a peer (25.2%) and completed portfolios (38.7%).

6.2 Students’ perception on different types of student-centred assessments and activities in prompting higher-order skills

This section focuses on students’ perception on student-centred assessment in eliciting higher-order skills and enhancing the students’ overall learning experience. These include developing into an autonomous learner, accepting accountability for one’s own education, sharpening focus, and inspiring the use of higher order skills.

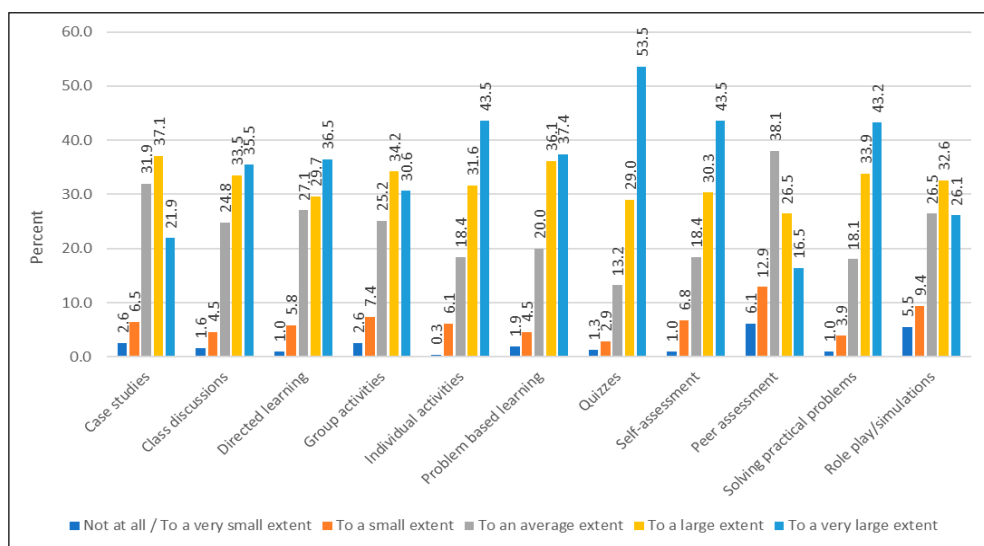


Figure 2: Students’ perceptions on different types of student-centred assessments and activities in prompting higher-order skills

Figure 2 identifies two sub-themes that have emerged from the factor analysis, namely individual assessment activities and group assessment activities. Data revealed that students identified individual assessment activities as significantly effective in developing higher-order skills. Among these, quizzes were rated as the most effective (53.5%) followed by individual-based activities (43.5%), self-assessment (43.5%) and solving practical problems (43.3%). In contrast, group-based activities received lower effectiveness ratings (30.6%), with role play/simulations scoring 26.1% and peer assessment being rated the least at 16.5%.

6.3 Open-ended questions (student questionnaire)

The student questionnaire included open-ended questions aimed at exploring students’ perspectives on assessment types, focusing on their preferences for the best and least liked methods. This section will investigate the responses by highlighting key patterns and themes that emerged from the data.

6.4 Preferred assessments

The data suggests that students preferred to work independently over collaborative or complex scenario-based tasks. This may be an indication of their comfort levels, perceived fairness, or clarity of expectations in these assessment types.

Students described MCQs as straight-forward, easy to complete and less time-consuming. Students appreciated individual assignments and tests because they were accountable for their own results, adhered to timeframes and demonstrated commitment. Additionally, they found case studies, scenarios and projects particularly helpful and valuable as these methods facilitated the development and application of knowledge, making these assessment types highly appreciated. It's interesting to note that students acknowledged the challenges of group projects and presentations. Students said that group work was ineffective if group members did not contribute or if others dominated the group discussion. Nonetheless, they believed that this kind of evaluation was considered advantageous since it promoted thoughtful discussion and a range of perspectives

Table 1: Preferred assessments

PREFERRED ASSESSMENTS	RESPONSE
Individual assignments	23%
Quizzes	21%
Tests	19%
Group assignments	11%
MCQs	9%
Project-based learning	7%
Case studies	5%
Scenario-based assessments	3%
Presentations	2%

6.5 Least preferred assessments

The findings regarding preferred assessments indicated a range of assessment methods, including individual and group. Even though these assessment types were favoured by students, they also experienced challenges. Students said that group work was ineffective and least preferred, if students did not contribute or if others dominated the group discussion. Hence, in these instances, individual assessments were preferred over group assessments. Conversely, students who struggled to complete individual assignments and tests within the allotted time, preferred group work.

6.6 Staff member's perception of different types of assessments as being effective in achieving the stated learning outcomes

This section discussed the assessments that staff members believe are useful in gauging the degree to which stated learning objectives have been met. The assessment types range from traditional summative assessments to student-centred assessment, which includes individual and group assessments.

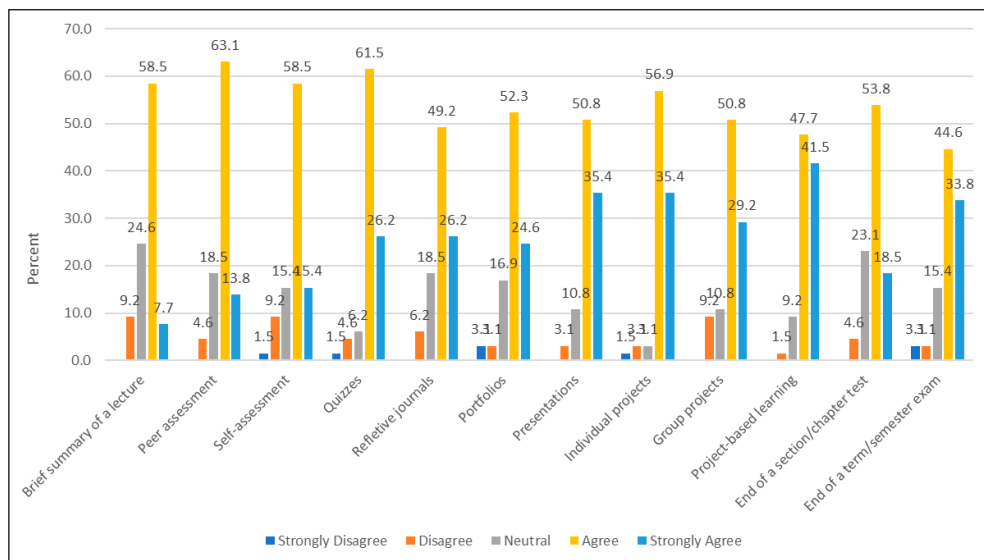


Figure 3: Staff member’s perception of different types of assessments as being effective in achieving stated learning outcomes

Figure 3 shows that all assessment types have notably high levels of agreement. Student-centred individual and group assessment types scores ranged from 63.1% (peer assessment) to 47.7% (project-based learning). The data also revealed that high importance was placed on the traditional summative assessments, namely end of a section or chapter tests (53.8%) and end of term or semester final exams (44.6%).

6.7 Staff member’s perception on different types of student-centred assessment and activities that promote autonomy, responsibility for learning and student engagement

The staff member’s perspective on student-centred assessments and activities is discussed in this section. It reflects their viewpoint on the extent to which such approaches contribute to enhancing students’ overall educational experience. This includes improving focus, encouraging the application of higher order skills, fostering autonomous learning, and increasing students’ sense of responsibility for their education. Table 2 below summarises the scoring patterns.

Table 2: Staff member’s perception on different types of student-centred assessments and activities in promoting student autonomy, responsibility for learning and student engagement.

		Not at all / To a very small extent		To a small extent		To an average extent		To a large extent		To a very large extent		Chi Square p-value
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	
Case studies	B9.1	0	0,0%	2	3,1%	14	21,5%	33	50,8%	16	24,6%	< 0.001
Class discussions	B9.2	0	0,0%	1	1,5%	9	13,8%	40	61,5%	15	23,1%	< 0.001
Directed Learning, which involves specific preparation and readings on related content	B9.3	1	1,5%	2	3,1%	22	33,8%	29	44,6%	11	16,9%	< 0.001
Group based activities	B9.4	0	0,0%	3	4,6%	17	26,2%	33	50,8%	12	18,5%	< 0.001
Individual based activities	B9.5	0	0,0%	2	3,1%	11	16,9%	38	58,5%	14	21,5%	< 0.001
Problem based learning	B9.6	0	0,0%	1	1,5%	5	7,7%	31	47,7%	28	43,1%	< 0.001
Quizzes	B9.7	1	1,5%	5	7,7%	22	33,8%	23	35,4%	14	21,5%	< 0.001
Self-assessment	B9.8	0	0,0%	10	15,4%	21	32,3%	21	32,3%	13	20,0%	0,120
Peer assessment	B9.9	2	3,1%	5	7,7%	26	40,0%	24	36,9%	8	12,3%	< 0.001
Solving practical problems	B9.10	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	5	7,7%	26	40,0%	34	52,3%	< 0.001
Use of role play/ simulations	B9.11	3	4,6%	5	7,7%	9	13,8%	29	44,6%	19	29,2%	< 0.001
Students present recommendations about assignment choices and course activities	B9.12	5	7,7%	5	7,7%	24	36,9%	21	32,3%	10	15,4%	< 0.001
Students design and manage their own timeframes in the completion of tasks Failure to do so will make them liable for their actions	B9.13	7	10,8%	10	15,4%	17	26,2%	21	32,3%	10	15,4%	0,036

Table 2 highlights two sub-themes that emerged from the factor analysis, namely individual assessment activities and group assessment activities. Staff responses indicate that individual student-centred assessment and activities are highly effective in developing student autonomy, responsibility for learning and student engagement. The most effective being class discussions (61.5%) and individual-based activities (58.5%). Conversely, the least effective methods, each with a score of 32.3%, included self-assessment (, students presenting recommendations for assignment choices and course activities, and students designing and managing their own timeframes for task completion.

6.8 Staff members' perception on the positive outcomes of student-centred assessments

This section pertains to the staff's view of how student-centred assessment can improve student motivation, foster peer-lecturer interaction, promote in-depth learning and responsibility for learning.

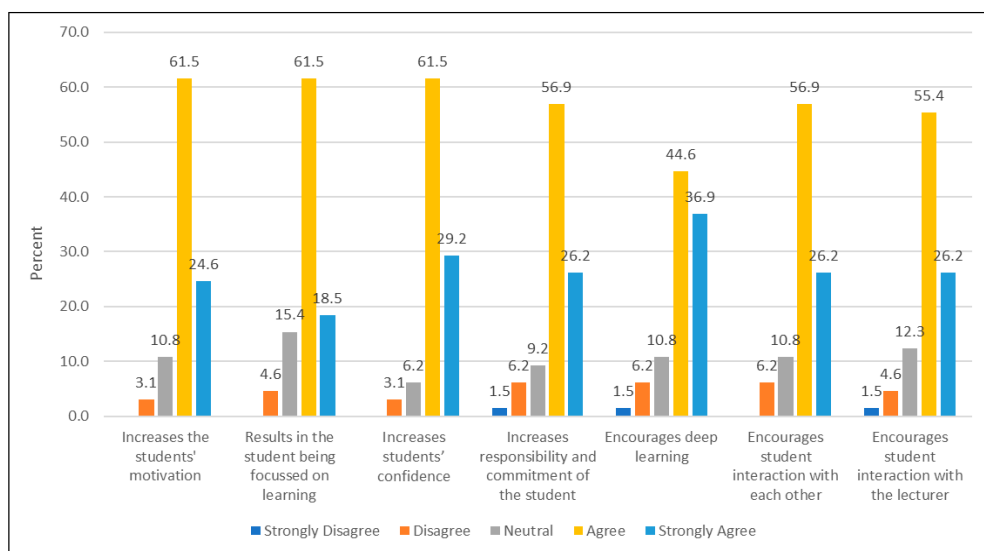


Figure 4: Staff member's perception on the positive outcomes of student-centred assessments

Based on the data presented in Figure 4, there is a strong consensus that student-centred assessments have the potential to enhance students' motivation, self-assurance, concentration, and foster communication between peers and lecturers.

6.9 Open-ended questions (staff questionnaire)

Open-ended questions examined the types of student-centred assessments that staff prefer to use to encourage critical thinking and collaborative learning. These questions were designed to explore staff perceptions on the role of student-centred assessments in promoting students to think critically, solve real world problems, collaborate with peers. The aim of these questions was to ascertain which assessment methods staff find most effective in developing these skills and how these approaches can assist in enhancing the students' learning experience.

6.10 Student-centred assessment types that staff prefer to use to promote critical thinking

Staff provided various insights into the methods that can be employed in nurturing critical thinking, underscoring the importance of practical and applied learning approaches. The predominant theme in the staff findings was the application of knowledge by making use of real-world problems, case studies and scenario-based questions based on real-life contexts, as a preferred method to enhance critical thinking. In addition, staff highlighted that critical thinking could also be stimulated through project-based learning. Even though discussions, were not formally assessed, they were a popular student-centred activity that staff believed encouraged critical thinking.

Table 3: Student-centred assessment types that staff prefer to use to promote critical thinking

TYPE OF STUDENT-CENTRED ASSESSMENT	RESPONSE
Questions based on real-world problems	23%
Case studies	21%
Discussions	16%
Scenario-based	11%
Project-based learning	7%
Reading more	4%
Group discussion	4%
Group work/projects	4%
Asking questions	2%
Encourage decision-making	2%
Practical write computer programs	2%
Self-evaluation	2%
Integrated tutorial questions	2%

6.11 Student-centred assessment types that staff prefer to use to promote collaborative learning

Staff findings indicated that group projects, group work, peer assessment, group presentations and group assignment are valuable tools that can foster student collaboration. In addition, it helps students to develop communication and interpersonal skills. In addition, staff emphasised the importance of monitoring group work to ensure that all students actively contributed. An oversight of this, will lead to some students dominating the group discussions, whilst other may provide little or no contribution.

Table 4: Student-centred assessment types that staff prefer to use to promote collaborative learning

TYPE OF STUDENT-CENTRED ASSESSMENT	RESPONSE
Group projects	32%
Group work	20%
Group presentation	13%
Peer assessment	13%
Group assignments	9%

TYPE OF STUDENT-CENTRED ASSESSMENT	RESPONSE
Case studies	7%
Discussions	4%
Case study	2%

6.12 Challenges associated with attempting student-centred assessment

This section is designed to determine if lecturers experienced any challenges associated with conducting student-centred assessments.

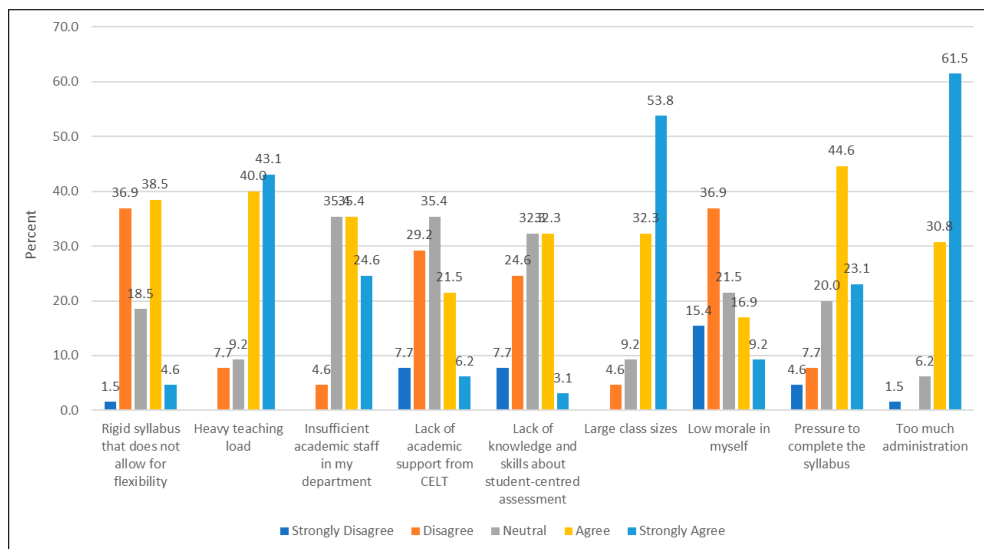


Figure 5: Challenges associated with attempting student-centred assessment in a face-to-face/contact class.

According to Figure 5's statistics, there was a notably high degree of agreement on certain questions pertaining to the difficulties encountered when attempting student-centred assessments. Overall, staff have indicated that they have experienced challenges with all aspects listed under this item. However, the most challenging aspect was too much administration 92.3% (strongly agree 61.5%, agree 30.8%), large class sizes 86.1% (strongly agree 53.8%, agree 32.3%), heavy teaching load (83.1% (strongly agree 43.1%, agree 40%) pressure to complete the syllabus 67.7% (strongly agree 23.1%, agree 44.6%) and insufficient academic staff in the department 60% (strongly agree 24.6%, agree 35.4%).

A supplement question relating to challenges, identified venue constraints (both office space and lecture venues) were not conducive to teaching, learning and assessment needs, as well as poor infrastructure and insufficient resources. Staff stated that because students were used to online learning, there was a noticeable rise in absenteeism (contact classes).

Staff 10

“Lecture venues either being too small for the number of students as well as the venues not being conducive to TLAs.”

Staff 15

"Data issues with students, lack of an office working environment as I work in a 'make-shift' space shared with another staff member. No plug point, network point, proper lighting or even space to move around or store files. Very tiny make-shift office space that does not allow even a student consultation in privacy or any meeting in confidential. ZERO social distancing in my 'office' space."

Staff 41

"Lack of facilities for teaching, learning and assessment such as working data projectors, mics, well ventilated venues with good lighting and seats. Our venues are just so outdated and under-resourced."

Staff 16

"On-line learning has promoted absenteeism among students in terms of participation in class and on-line quiz. This means as a lecturer you cannot really be able to implement teaching and learning strategies successfully."

Lastly, results also showed that lecturers believed students lacked critical thinking skills and learning accountability. In addition, staff 44 mentioned, *"Poor assessment practices in the initial years can hinder the success rates of student-centred assessment practices in later years"*.

7. Discussion

Discussions regarding the results and their interpretations are provided in this section.

7.1 Alignment of student-centred assessment practices to the development of adaptive graduates

High levels of agreement were found in the staff findings regarding the contribution of all student-centred assessments to the stated learning outcomes of students. The students' results further supported this by noting that student-centred assessments encourage higher-order thinking. These findings denote that SCA practices have significant potential to provide graduates with the necessary higher order skills, which include autonomy, critical thinking and problem-solving, which are required in the 21st century workforce.

According to the results of this study, students perceived individual assessment activities, which include class discussions, directed learning involving specific preparation and readings on related content, individual based activities, problem-based learning, quizzes, self-assessment, and solving practical problems, have succeeded in enhancing or advancing their overall educational experience. The strong inclination to individual assessment methods suggests that students have identified their role to be autonomous and accountable for their learning. Furthermore, SCA were perceived by the students as fostering the essential higher-order skills, which include autonomy, critical thinking and taking responsibility for one's own learning. These findings align with studies by Bremner (2021:166), Al-khresheh (2022: 34) and Grøndahl Glavind et al., 2023: 1255, which highlight the importance of autonomy and introspection in preparing adaptive graduates.

Although SCA and graduate adaptability are theoretically aligned, the findings revealed many barriers in implementing such assessment methods. The results indicating the predominant use of quizzes (76.8%) and end-of-section tests (46.5%) points to the continued

influence of traditional, summative assessment methods, despite staff support for a variety of student-centred assessment methods. Additionally, the limited use of student-centred assessment methods, such as peer assessment (16.5%) and scenario-based assessments (6%) reveals gaps in understanding and recognising the transformative influence of SCA. Also, adaptive graduates would require a mix of both independent and collaborative abilities. This may be related to the difficulties staff members encounter when attempting student-centred activities and assessments, as discussed in the literature review. This aligns with literature that has identified institutional constraints, such as large class sizes, a lack of resources and poorly equipped venues and heavy staff loads (; Adamu, Tsiga & Zuilkowski, 2020: 2;) as barriers to SCA practices. For example, staff reported that excessive administrative duties (92.3%) and inadequately equipped venues (e.g., outdated technology and overcrowded classrooms) hinder the delivery of innovative assessment practices.

7.2 Mismatch between student and staff perceptions

There's a notable difference between staff and student perceptions of SCA effectiveness. Staff data reveal that a strong agreement of peer (63.1%) and project-based assessments (47.7%) for promoting critical thinking and collaboration, yet students remain less receptive. This mismatch may be connected to the students' lack of exposure to these practices during their HE years and interestingly, staff data reveal that this could be related to potentially subpar assessment procedures in a student's early years of education. This is congruent with literature that indicate scaffolding of SCA may lead to resistance (Rowley, *et al.*, 2018:37).

7.3 Addressing literature misalignment

Interesting to note that the findings indicate a lesser use of role-play/simulations and scenario-based assessments (26.1% and 6%, respectively) despite literature underscoring their importance in developing situational understanding and problem-solving skills (Croft *et al.*, 2019: 15). This misalignment stresses the need for staff development initiatives to build staff confidence and abilities in preparing and facilitating student-centred assessments.

Since literature has also identified lecturers' and students' 'reluctance to change' as a barrier to student-centred assessments. This is ascribed to the pedagogical and assessment approaches of the lecturers, as well as the students' self-assurance in their ability to participate and their expectations for the course (Ross, 2024: 176).

8. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that lecturers support the idea that student-centred assessments are a useful tool for improving student learning by raising students' motivation, self-assurance, focus, and depth of understanding as well as fostering interaction between peers and lecturers. Students also understand that student-centred assessments have a significant impact on critical thinking, independence, learning accountability, and higher-order thinking abilities. This means that there is potential for higher education to develop adaptive graduates by using SCA practices, however, this potential is hindered due to barriers and inconsistent adoption. Thus, to bridge the gap, institutional interventions such as staff training, improved resource allocation, assessment and curriculum adjustments must be in place to support the development of adaptive graduates.

Further research

The study sets a foundation for further research into student-centred assessment practices, promoting exploration of strategies which can be used to overcome implementation barriers, and assessing the long-term impact of SCAs on student learning and employability.

Disclaimer

The content of this paper highlights a subset of findings from a larger research project.

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