Study of Pakistani Students' Perceptions about Fairness of Assessment Process at the University Level

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the views of Pakistani students towards the assessment process as well as to find out any differences in their perceptions regarding fairness in the process of assessment at the university level. The education system of any country is the root that nourishes the entire nation with all the ingredients of humaneness. The study conducted a quantitative research and survey to investigate the fairness in the assessment process among students, highlighting the negative impact of unfairness on the nation's education system, leading to restlessness, anxiety, and distrust. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was constructed, to collect the data from 100 randomly selected respondents. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. The study aimed to highlight the commonality of unfairness in educational institutions, revealing that teachers effectively deliver instructions and students are clear about assessment schedules and content. This study aims to help stakeholders understand and address injustice and misconduct in education, prioritize institutions' reputations and ethical values, and foster trust and equality among students. It encourages transparency in assessment, disregarding personal preferences, and fostering a fair and respectful attitude towards students and institutes.

Keywords: *Perception, Fairness, Assessment Process.*

Introduction

The word perception means the way one looks at the performance of others and form a view based on the same. This view converts into concrete belief with the passage of time and experiences and soon becomes visible in the society. The belief developed in the education system, is primarily the belief of the nation. The development of any society, mainly depends on the teachers, being the main component of any academic system (Barman, Bhattacharyya & Barman, 2015).

Therefore, in a learning institute where the learner is in a continuous process of gaining knowledge by interacting with teachers, is also a true percipient of teachers' performances. Teachers are perceived on their time management, content delivery of the lesson, command over vocabulary, ways of handling matters in the classroom, and their rapport with their co-workers and students (Chory & Asad, 2007). Perception is a two-way process, teachers perceive students' and students perceive teachers as well. It plays a major role in creating a fair, prejudice free environment and a better student-teacher relationship at the university level.

In addition, university students are competent to perceive the fairness in all aspects of academics. Whether, it be the content delivery or the assessment and evaluation process, students believe teachers play a major role in the progress and regress of the students. The teachers are the opportunity providers, test constructors and marks alloters and so the teacher community is accountable for the fairness in academic scenarios.

Hence, assessments should be transparent, standardized, and a mean of identifying gaps in students' learning. It should be conducted and marked fairly and contribute to the learners' and teachers'progress, as students' always remember those teachers who help them shine (Bollington, Hopkins, & West, 1993).

Further research is required to directly focus on fairness in interpreting students' perceptions using pertinent theories, despite the encouraging attempts made in previous studies to conceptualize and empirically investigate fairness. There is a need to identify pertinent theoretical foundations because recent reviews of fairness research have revealed that fewer studies have used theories to investigate fairness in assessment contexts (Nisbet, 2017; Rasooli, Zandi & DeLuca, 2019; Tierney, 2013). As a solid theoretical framework for analyzing assessment fairness, scholars have proposed social psychology theory (Grace, 2017; Rasooli, Zandi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, differentiating students' views of assessment attributes and dimensions—such as fairness across educational cultures—has been recommended by additional research (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2012; McMillan, 2016). This study investigated ideas that students might think about for improving the fairness of assessments in higher education, since Rasooli, DeLuca, et al. (2019) found that students most often chose inaction and remained silent in response to unfair and undemocratic assessments because of power imbalances.

An investigation carried out by Devi & Challa (2013) to measure students' course assessment views, in which gender differences, Students' Perceptions of Assessment Practices differences in area of specialization and year level differences were investigated. They found significant gender difference in perceptions of consultation of students and year level differences in perceptions of congruence and authenticity of course assessment, while the students were not different in their perceptions s with respect to their areas of study.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify the perception of students about the fairness of the assessment process at the university level.
- To find out the difference in the perception of students towards the fairness of assessment based on the demographic variables of gender, age, and work experience.
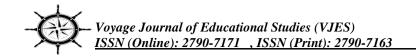
Research Questions

- How do students perceive the fairness of the assessment process at the university level?
- What is the difference in the perception of different groups of students about the fairness of assessment?

Literature Review

Assessment is an essential process for the standard recognition of students' academic life, foreshadowing the practical life, as it is based on the data of students' academic information collected by the teachers through tests, quizzes, assignments, projects etc. Being so important, the assessments are highly needed to be valid, reliable, fair and transparent (Jimaa, 2011).

The classroom performance defines clearly how well the students have grasped the content reflecting the teaching quality (Humayon et al., 2018). As Rowntree (1977) proposed, assessment gives a fine understanding of the students' academic performance and level of

competency. On the contrary, the matter of numbers and ranks has misled the process, giving opposite meaning to assessment (Adeniyi, 1993).

Infact, teachers are considered to be the main contributors in developing an educational enterprise. The distinguished and competent teachers need to reflect on their teaching strategies, instructional effectiveness, content selection, lesson delivery, assessment techniques, learners' grasping level, and fair attitude. All these traits of a constant self-evaluation makes a competent teacher. Fairness and justice are indeed a demand for every being (Tai, 1998).

Moreover, it has remained a practice to blame a student alone for securing low grades or fewer marks in assessments, on the contrary, the whole assessment process contributes to this including teachers' performance and assessments validity. In particular, it is necessary, for a teacher to help all learners progress socially, gain good grades, have healthy relationships with peers and parents and be well aware of contemporary issues (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010).

Consequently, fairness in assessments being the main resposibility of the learning institutes, play a vital role in the grooming of an effective learning attitude in students. Thus it needs to be taken care of with efficacy and competency. Notably, students believe one of the element of unfairness in education, is the existing conventional manner of evaluation and henceforth they wish for more creative and practical ways of inspection (Sambell & McDowell, 1997). Research on students' perceptions of assessment has provided initial evidence mapping out fairness in various domains in higher education. Such research is recently growing to examine how students interpret and engage with assessment processes and outcomes, including fairness as a basis to enhance their learning (Brown, 2021; McMillan, 2016; Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005). In this literature, fairness has been given scattered attention as a component of students' perceptions of assessment

Nonetheless, it is the students' right to have a prejudice free environment, as Theoharis (2007) states every individual has the desire to be treated respectfully, empathically and fairly. As a matter of fact, how students are treated today will have a great impact on how they treat the society in future, as a means of justice being perceived around (Greenberg, 1990). For the sake of the long-term sustainability of a fair and just society, it is utmost important to assess learners fairly, without being biased to make students learn from their mistakes and to fulfil the main purpose of assessment that is to develop a habit of

accountability among students and teachers beside mere ranking, allocating grades, and promoting to the next education levels (Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study was quantitative in nature and a survey method was adopted to collect students' perceptions about fairness in the assessment process at the university level. The purpose of this study was to measure students' perceptions of assessment practices at the university level of Pakistan. Further this study explored the gender differences, year level differences and differences with respect to shift of study in students' perceptions. Therefore descriptive survey research design was used to conduct current study.

Population and Sampling

Private universities were selected randomly to select the sample from various universities in Karachi. A sample of 100 students was selected randomly from these universities.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was used to identify participants' opinions regarding fairness in assessment. The questionnaire consisted of a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree= 1 to strongly agree= 5). It had five parts: the first part consisted of demographic variables of the respondents, the second part consisted of statements about the effectiveness of teachers' instructions, the third part consisted of statements related to students' perception of assessments, the fourth part had statements about students' perception of their teachers and the last part was about fairness in the assessment process.

Pilot Testing

The pilot testing was conducted to check the validity and consistency of the scale. Validity was ensured by the opinion of experts. Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire. There were 28 items in the questionnaire about fairness in the assessment process. The value of the reliability index was 0.816, which is statistically significant.

Data Collection

Data was collected personally. The questionnaire was distributed among the students and the rate of return was 99 percent.

Data Analysis and Findings

A detailed description of data analysis is as under:

Table 1

Demographic information of students

Variables	Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	51	51.0
	Female	49	49.0
		10	100.0
Age	18-28	40	40.0
	29-38	53	53.0
	39-48	07	7.0
		100	100.0
Working Experience	0-5	26	26.0
	6-10	55	55.0
	11-15	19	19.0
		100	100.0
District	South	24	24.0
	East	31	31.0
	West	26	26.0
	Central	19	19.0
		100	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic information of selected students. The sample of the study had different demographic characteristics (Gender, Age, Work Experience, and District). The total sample of the study was 100 students from private universities.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness

Statements	Mean	SD
Our teachers are well organized and use time wisely.	3.55	0.925
Our teachers use a variety of resources.	3.64	0.990
Our teachers give in-depth information about the subject being taught.	3.68	1.053
Our teachers make efforts to clear all queries of students.	3.84	0.896
The assignments give students an insight into the subject being taught.	4.10	0.732
Our teachers encourage us to look at problems in a new way and find new ways to solve them.	3.34	1.165
When any student is confused about an assessment task, she/he is given another way to answer it.	3.63	0.991
The teacher checks to make sure, students understand what she is teaching.	3.98	0.816

The assignments give students an insight into the subject being taught has the highest mean score (M=4.10, SD=.732). It means the students believe that the assignments are truly helpful

in an in-depth study of the subject being taught, an essential belief for the effectiveness of teachers' instructions. My teacher checks to make sure students understand what she is teaching, has the second highest mean score (M=3.98, SD=.816), this indicates that teachers are highly perceived on their content delivery and methodology. Teachers are competent in knowing the learning style and pace of every student and make all possible efforts to gain their teaching objectives. This is also a positive approach towards the effectiveness of instructions in the teaching-learning process.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Perception of Assessments.

Statements	Mean	SD
I am told in advance when I'm being assessed.	4.13	.872
I am clear about the type of assessments being used.	4.06	.827
I am clear about what my teacher wants in my assessment.	3.99	.718
I know how a particular assessment task will be marked.	4.21	.689
Teachers' feedback is helpful for improvement.	4.27	.679

Students strongly believe that the teachers' feedback is helpful to them for their improvement with the highest mean score (M=4.27, SD= .679). It shows that the teachers provide valuable feedback which is a step towards the correction of mistakes followed by the statement that students are well aware of how their assessments will be marked (M=4.21, SD= .689). The two statements closely illustrate the students' vigilance in their perception of assessments.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Perception of Teachers

Statements	Mean	SD
Our teachers value students.	3.91	.866
Our teachers do not show favoritism.	3.77	1.033
Our teachers are concerned about the students' conceptual clarity.	4.17	.739
Our teachers give opportunities to students to speak up and share their ideas.	4.13	.837
Our teachers show concern about the students' problems.	4.09	.818
Our teachers refrain from improper comments.	3.98	.964
Our teachers provide prompt feedback on assignments.	3.92	.861
Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time.	4.11	.584
In class, we learn to correct our mistakes.	4.00	.752

It is indeed a time of acclamation for teachers that students accept and believe that their teachers are concerned with students' conceptual clarity and the students are also given opportunities to speak their ideas loud and clear, with mean scores (M=4.17, SD=.739, and M=4.13, SD=.837) respectively. But at the same time the statement that "Our teachers do not

show favoritism" stands with the least mean score (M=3.77, SD=1.033) giving a slight tinge of favoritism which should be pondered upon by the teachers since it causes anxiety and disliking among students, as the more the learners perceive their teachers to be fair, the more their belief in their teachers and institution gets firm and positive.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics Mean and Standard Deviation of Fairness in Assessment Process*

Statements	Mean	SD
The teachers treat all students fairly.	3.98	.724
The students are priorly informed about the assessment.	4.28	.889
The students are assessed on the taught content only.	4.08	.662
The students are informed about the marking of assessments.	4.22	.733
Students can complete the assessment tasks by the given time.	4.10	.644
The teachers explain how each type of assessment is to be used.	4.16	.581

The cause of concern here is again the statement with the least mean score is "The teachers treat all students fairly" with a mean score (M=3.98, SD=.724). It is assumed that in the whole process of assessment which begins with students participation in class lectures, more importance is given to the teacher's favorite student and the same goes for the marking of the answers in the assessments specifically in extended response questions, even though the students are priorly informed about when to be assessed and are aware of the marking of assessments as well, showing the highest and second highest mean score (M=4.28, SD=.889, and M=4.22, SD=.733 respectively).

However, a majority of contextual factors and reasons for unfair treatment (university practices, teachers' personal choice and preferences based on looks, caste or religion, and student's level of intelligence) are not found prominent in the study. It is interesting to note that the students are clear about how each assessment is to be used and they can complete the assessment task in the given time and are assessed only on taught content then what leads to unfair treatment specifically indicates the marking of the assessments, assignments, etc. and it is truly in the hands of the teachers and therefore reasonable and justified timely feedback for the marks allotment is solely the ball in the teacher's court which needs to be played skillfully and fairly.

Table 6

An Independent Sample t-test for differences of Fairness in the Assessment Process based on Gender

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	df	Sig.
Teachers Instructional Effectiveness	Male	51	3.75	0.603	0.698	98	0.570
	Female	49	3.67	0.559			
Students' Perception Of Assessments	Male	51	4.188	0.422	1.332	98	0.664
	Female	49	4.073	0.439			
Students' perception of Teachers	Male	51	4.087	0.348	2.169	98	0.135
	Female	49	3.927	0.387			
Fairness in Assessment Process	Male	51	4.176	0.358	1.119	98	0.571
	Female	49	4.095	0.367			

Overall, there was no significant difference related to the fairness of the assessment process between male and female students. This implies that both male and female students have similar views about the teachers' instructional effectiveness and assessment fairness at universities. Henceforth, both genders have similar levels of vigilance in perceiving their teachers.

Table 7

One-Way ANOVA for the difference in the Mean scores of Students based on their Age

Variable		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness	Between Groups	.930	2	.465	1.39	.254
	Within Groups	32.448	97	.335		
	Total	33.379	99			
Students' Perception of Assessments	Between Groups	0.17	2	.009	0.05	.955
	Within Groups	18.480	97	.191		
	Total	18.498	99			
Students' perception of Teachers	Between Groups	0.32	2	.016	0.11	.896
	Within Groups	13.886	97	.143		
	Total	13.918	99			
Fairness in Assessment Process	Between Groups	0.302	2	.151	1.15	.322
	Within Groups	12.774	97	.132		
	Total	13.077	99			

The table shows that one-way ANOVA was used to explore the difference among the mean scores of perceptions of students regarding teachers' instructional effectiveness, assessments, teachers' teaching attitude, and fairness in the assessment process of university students. Perceptions were collected in four areas i.e. Teachers' instructional effectiveness: $F(2,297)=1.390$, $p=.254$; perception of assessments: $F(2,97)=.046$, $p=.955$, perception of

teachers: F(2,97)=.110, p=.896 and fairness in assessment: F(2,97)=1.148, p=.322. There was a significant difference in the result of teachers' instructional effectiveness and fairness in the assessment process. However, there was no significant difference between the other two areas based on age. It means that students of different ages had different perceptions about the effectiveness of teachers' instructions and fairness in the assessment process.

Table 8

One-Way ANOVA for the difference in the Mean scores of Students based on their work experience

Variable		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness	Between Groups	2.145	2	1.072	3.331	.040
	Within Groups	31.234	97	.322		
	Total	33.379	99			
Students' Perception of Assessment	Between Groups	.297	2	.149	0.793	.456
	Within Groups	18.200	97	.188		
	Total	18.498	99			
Students' perception of Teachers	Between Groups	.757	2	.379	2.790	.066
	Within Groups	13.161	97			
	Total	13.198	99			
Fairness in Assessment Process	Between Groups	.857	2	.429	3.402	.037
	Within Groups	12.774	97	.132		
	Total	13.077	99			

One-way analysis of variance was applied to explore the difference among the mean scores of the effectiveness of instructions, assessments, teachers' teaching attitude, and fairness in assessments through perceptions of different work experiences of students. Perceptions were obtained in four areas i.e. teachers' instructional effectiveness: F(2,97)=3.331, p=0.40; assessments: F(2,97)=.793, p=.456; perception of teachers: F(2,97)=2.790, p=.066; and fairness of assessments process: F(2,97)=3.402, p= 037. There was a significant difference in the opinions of students about the fairness of the assessment process based on their work experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The study lends substantial support to Houston & Bettencourt (1999) who uncloaked that fair treatment is a human right and desire and has a great impact on the future actions of humans in their daily lives. The more people are dealt with justice, the more they feel secure, they trust and accept the results and take steps in the light of justice for the upcoming events, as perceived justice has significant effects on the behaviours and attitudes (Rogelberg, 2007).

This yields a great part in the well-being of the teaching-learning process, from where the future of the nation blooms. The current study proves that despite all the steps being crystal clear for the students, the marking process in assessments play a major role in students' academic and pragmatic life later. Here the biases in the assessment process leave a mark of injustice in the students' academic progress, leaving a space of anxiety and a misanthrope behind, this aligns with Rawl's (1971) view, that individuals behave in society in the manner they were justified.

Henceforth the study also reveal the significant difference in the students' perception of teachers' didactic effectiveness and fairness in the assessment process based on their age and work experiences. It indicates that as the grade level increases, students' perception regarding fairness decreases, indicating a diminishing of fairness level, a moral corruption as a social norm. However, a more in-depth study would be required to attain valuable reasoning for this.

Conclusion

This study was directed to explore Pakistani students' perceptions of fairness in the assessment process at the university level. Facing the situations, such as getting marks against one's expectations or observing the genuine hard workers being neglected, teachers showing favoritism to some of their pet students, whatsoever, any unfairness to self or any other student in academic scenarios, lead to developing a misanthrope attitude and frames a question mark towards the quality of education and the product passing through that vulnerable education system. The answerability of each factor posing the quality of education becomes obligatory.

Likewise, The National Education Policy of Pakistan (1998-2010), states, teachers play important role in the education system of any country, therefore they are accountable for the fulfillment of their duties (Perveen, Kang, & Saeed, 2020). Teachers are acclaimed to be the part and parcel of an educated, civilized society, and are active preachers primarily in continual contact with their students while delivering, assessing, and sculpturing the homo-sapiens. They are true, ground-level observers of the national upcoming future. Bitterly, the study corroborates that the assessment process is not fair at the university level and students believe their teachers show favoritism towards students which has a strong negative, stressful impact on students' behavior regarding teachers, assessments, the entire education system, and henceforth, the society.

However, teachers are appreciated, as the students admit that the assignments are productive and give students an insight into the subject that is been taught and that the teacher is concerned about the students learning and makes effort to check that the students are understanding what has been taught. Students are also certain that the teachers' feedback is important for their improvement and they are well aware of how the particular assessment will be marked. Students are entrusted, their teachers are concerned about the conceptual clarity and the students are given opportunities to discuss their views in class. Regarding the student's perception of fairness, they believe that they are informed systematically before the day of assessment and students also know the marking criteria. At the same time, previous research identified poor assessment literacy and a tendency towards summative assessment as areas of concern among the faculty in Afghanistan (Mussawy, 2009; Noori et al., 2017). The findings of our study show substantial growth in faculty professional skills (i.e., teaching and assessment), which is consistent with previous research (Mussawy & Rossman, 2021).

The result of the research indicated that the male and female university students had the same perceptions regarding fairness in the assessment process and both genders have similar levels of vigilance in perceiving their teachers. There was a significant difference in perception regarding teachers' instructional effectiveness and fairness in assessments, based on their age. It was noted that there was a significant difference in all four areas, e.g. teachers' instructional effectiveness, perception of assessments, perception of teachers, and fairness in assessments between university students based on their work experiences. It is proclaimed that the students at the university level, believe their teachers are competent in their course delivery, they are also proficient in giving valuable feedback, with immaculate time management skills, but teachers need to be thoughtful of their favoring behavior, as it has an enduring negative long effect on their learners, and has proved to be a catalyst in damaging the teachers' demeanor and leaving an example of contaminated educated personnel. The entire team involved in the nation's education system needs regular self-evaluation to maintain a high regard for such a noble profession.

Recommendations
Fairness in academics is today's need to get a long-lasting, just, and fair mechanism throughout the country. This research helps the teachers and administrators to set a clear mechanism to probe into the assessment and evaluation methods that are creating a disliking among students towards their teachers and institutions.

Marking criteria should be justified and the construct validity of the assessments should be revisited. The quality control department for assessment and evaluation should be made functional by continuous observations. Face-to-face interviews, counseling sessions, and confidential written reports from students and teachers should be taken into account for analysis and betterment of the teaching-learning process. Seminars and workshops should be arranged along with role models of concerned authorities of educational departments, to inculcate the importance of fairness and justice. Measures must be taken to involve students in the university's affairs, which may reduce the feeling of alienation and contribute to ownership of the institution. Where assessments are considered to be an essential component, students can partake in developing an item pool for assessments, peer assessments would also be a fruitful activity in the process of gathering data of students' achievements (Dhindsa, Omar, & Waldrip, 2007).

More effort is required to rectify this unfairness to control biases in institutions. Actions should be taken if any individual teacher or student is found guilty of being unfair or academically dishonest. We need to be unbiased in our words and actions. One must apprehend that the environment in which the current teachers were trained is of utmost importance and demands to be looked upon. Along with it, the educative personnel must pay heed to the traditional degree system that has prevailed in the country, for the sole proof for good job opportunities. It has remained one of the darker sides of the academic system of Pakistan that has inculcated the adoption of unfair ways and means for the sake of getting good marks (Josien and Broderick, 2013). The stereotype degree taboo if have been innovated with skills, the level of unfairness would have lessened with the passing years. The educational organizations' incompetence to adapt to the timely economic and social needs at large is responsible for the unjust in the education scenarios.

Since the teaching and administration body has experienced the traditional tug of war for mere degrees, it is a hard time for them to accept and realize the malpractices they have been a part of and pledge to self-evaluate and develop productive skills for the self-betterment and ultimately for the progress of the society, as the academic corruption in any shape or form, is a scar on the education system with contagious devastating aftershocks.

Finally, it is suggested that there should be an environment and culture of not committing and not propagating any unjust to others. This is a human right and should be given sheer importance through educational policies and practices.

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