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Student feedback on assessment design for learning success: Findings from a qualitative study

Cachia, Moira ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4470-1701 and Lynam, Siobhan (2023) Student feedback on assessment design for learning success: Findings from a qualitative study. In: Festival of Learning and Teaching (6th July 2023) hosted in Ealing, London, 6-7 Jul 2023, Ealing, London.

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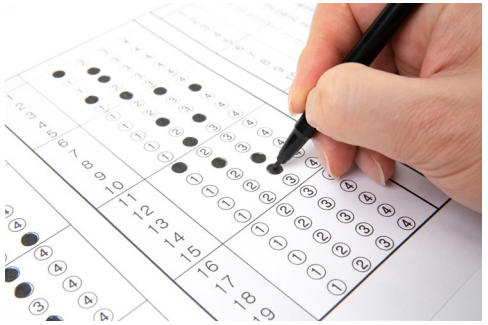
Student feedback on assessment design for learning success: Findings from a qualitative study

Dr Moira Cachia (Presenter) & Dr Siobhan Lynam

Background & Rationale



An understanding of students' perceptions and experience of assessments **allows for better design of assessments by teaching staff** (Fletcher et al., 2012)

Assessments affect the quality and quantity of student learning (Raupach et al., 2013)

Researchers have called for the use of more alternative assessments that prepare students for the real-world by building on their skill sets (Keppell & Carless, 2006; Libman, 2010) – referred to as '**authentic assessments**'

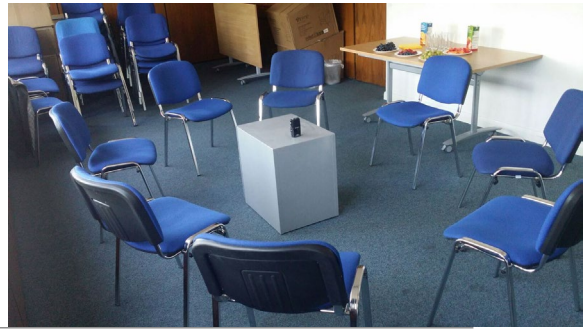
Aims and Research Questions

Personal factors affect student learning including emotional response to assignments (Rust, 2002), perception of workload (Naude et al., 2016), time management, self- regulation skills, motivation, conscientiousness and social support all have an impact on academic success (Asikainen et al., 2013; Busato et al., 2000; Rytkoen et al., 2012)

The research question:

What is our psychology students' experience of assessments in higher education?

Method



Design

Qualitative approach - 3 focus groups, each lasting 1 hour;

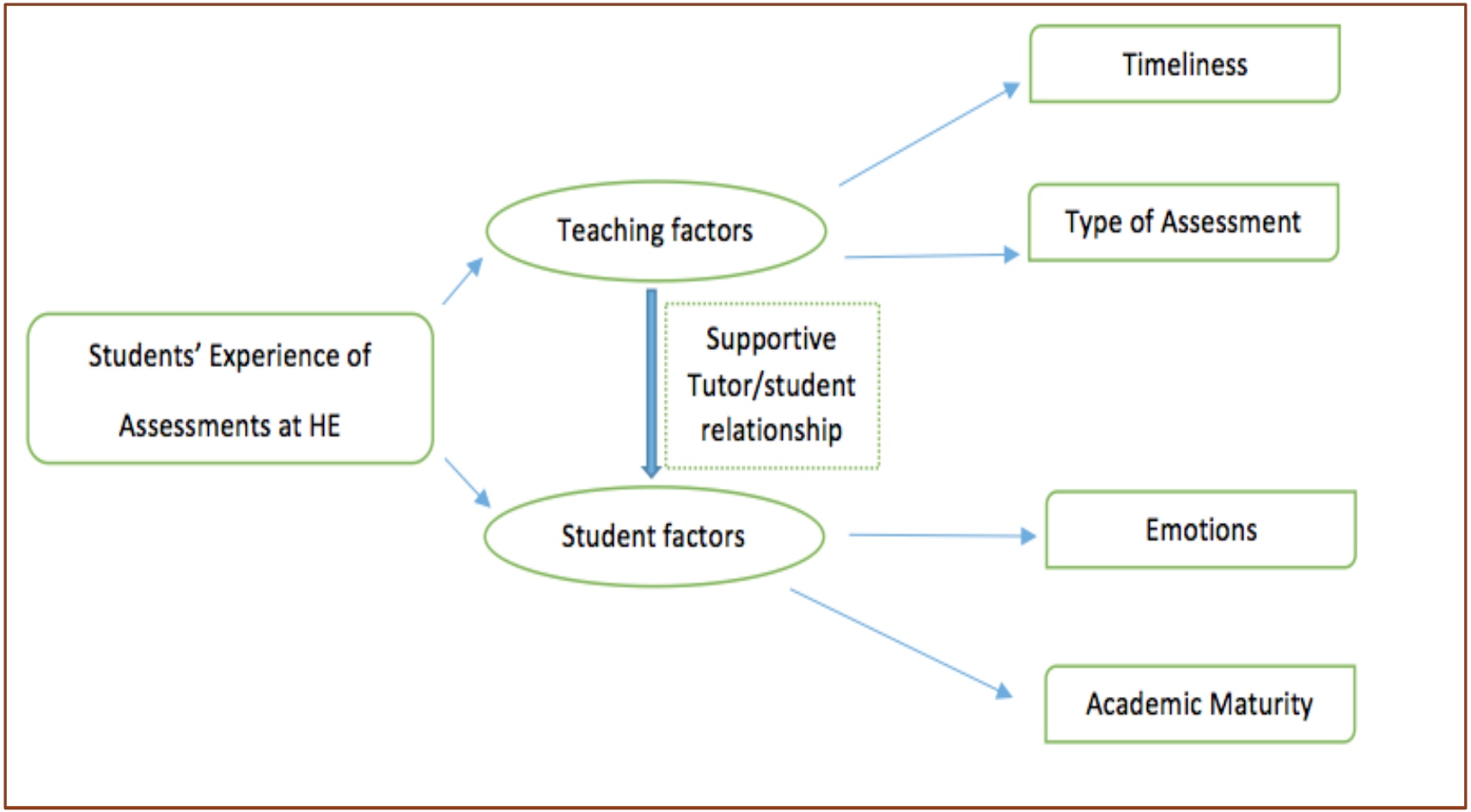
Semi-structured interview questions/card sort procedure were used; 2 psychology lecturers facilitated the focus groups;

Analysed using experiential inductive method of Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013);

Participants

- 23 psychology undergraduates (Level 5/6); Age Range: 20 – 46 years; 19 females (M: 24.3 years), 4 males: (M: 21.5 years)
- The students' grade average ranged from low second class (2:2) to first class. The mode grade of the participants was a high second class (2:1)

Analysis: Themes & Subthemes



Supporting tutor/student relationship

Balanced support valued by students

'I know a couple of people who have one seminar tutor and they are not too fond of them so they were not really learning much so they just moved group. I can't work in that class. You have to move to a tutor where you understand them better.' (Sam)

Consistent, good quality instruction and feedback

'I was forced to change my whole assignment a week before the deadline just because I got different opinions from different lecturers ... So it was quite rushed for me to change everything. So it was quite stressful.' (Jess)

Teaching factors: Timeliness

Timeliness of Assessments

'I found that the H&C essay helped me to write the Individual Differences essay and because of that it helped me a lot in the exam because it was a similar method we had to use..' (Alex)

Timeliness of Guidance

'The feedback for the Cognitive Poster was also excellent because of the fact that it felt like they took you, almost step-by-step into saying this is what you should have done here to improve the poster and it felt like they actually knew what they were looking for …' (Jane)

Teaching factors: Type of Assessment

Predictability (high/low)

Cue seeking

'…you have to learn every single lecture slide, because it all comes up. Whereas with the other ones they tell you, oh yeah, there's only two questions but if you learn 3 lectures to be on the safe side' (Marie)

Student focussed: Choice/ Creativity/Relevance/Workload

'I'm reminded why … this is like gonna be the real world one day for us ..and that's what I enjoyed the most out of the Poster, that it was just … it felt real, somehow and actually seeing how that skill was gonna be advantageous later' (Sally)

Student factors: Emotions

Positive emotions:

Excitement; Pride

'I think that's why you're so proud though, because it was so hard and we all did so well.' (Sarah)

Negative emotions:

Fear; Anxiety

'I still have that moment where I walk into an exam and everything just goes and I'm like, oh I can't do this, can't do that. What am I doing here? But that's like every exam that I've done in my life, so I don't really know' (Haiza)

Student factors: Academic Maturity

Self-evaluation

Academic Perceptiveness

'But if you have just memorised it you don't actually know it, you have just memorised it. You just forget it the next day.' (Chris)

Academic Motivation

' (in year 3) you keep saying applied, applied, applied, applied and that makes a difference, so then you do go away and think right this is the theory, this is how it applies to everyday life, and it just seems to come together more.' (Sarah)

Implications

Strategies to promote **academic maturity, reduce stress and maintain a balanced workload** could foster a more constructive approach to learning:

- Consolidated approach to setting assignments
- Time management training
- Stress management
- Strategies to promote intrinsic motivation

Appropriate assignments are a cost-effective way of improving student engagement and satisfaction

Implications for module and course leaders, exam and timetabling administrators and student support services

Assignment changes based on study outcome

Level 6 module: Psychology in the workplace

- Previous: assessment types were: Assessment 1 – Essay; Assessment 2 – exam (2 long essays)
- Current: Essay has been replaced by a business report: more applied (Topics: Training / Recruitment / Factors affecting Job Performance)
- Current: Exam has been replaced by a Case Study of an acquisition and merger of two organisations, which occurred in practice

Future research

Follow up with studies targeting other subject areas, and less successful students

What effect does study skills training (e.g. time management) have on student satisfaction and learning?

What factors determine insight into the role of assessments and how this insight effects learning?

How can academics foster personal development in terms of academic maturity and intrinsic motivation?

Thank you

Any questions or comments?

Lynam, S., & Cachia, M. (2018). '**Students' perceptions of the role of assessments at higher education**.' Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 43(2), 223-234. doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2017.1329928.