

Perceptions of Postgraduate Students regarding Assessment Practices at Mizoram University

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Abstract

The study explores postgraduate students' perception on assessment practices at Mizoram University, evaluating their perceptions regarding fairness, effectiveness, feedback quality, transparency and alignment with course objectives. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected among 100 final semester postgraduate students selected through stratified random sampling across ten academic schools. Descriptive statistical analysis using simple percentages revealed that traditional assessment methods – primarily written examinations and assignments continue to dominate departmental evaluations. While a majority of respondents perceived current assessment practices as fair and aligned with learning objectives, innovative, skill-oriented and reflective tools such as portfolios, case studies and peer/self-assessments remain underutilized. A high demand was reported for continuous, formative feedback and practical, application-driven evaluation methods. Furthermore, findings highlight gaps in the effective integration of ICT-based assessments and inconsistent transparency in communicating grading criteria and internal marks. The study recommends diversifying evaluation methods, standardizing rubric transparency, enhancing digital assessment infrastructure and institutionalizing continuous, dialogic feedback loops in alignment with the competency-based frameworks envisioned by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Keywords: Perception, postgraduate students, assessment practices, higher education.

Introduction

Education is associated with the development of a national economy, through the production of quality human capital that is resulting from a well-planned education. One of the important aspects in education that needs a careful planning is the process of assessment, since the assessment process will determine the quality of outcome. Generally, assessment plays an important role in any tasks that someone has to complete. It refers to the process of obtaining dimensions in a particular area or things according to predetermined objectives. Assessment is broadly defined in education context, which involves the process of getting to know students' development in a holistic manner. These processes require teachers to collect, translate, record and make use of information about students' response to the task of education (Lambert and Lines, 2000). Specifically, assessment in classroom context refers to

activities that involve the processes of designing, building, managing, examining and reporting by teachers in schools, which involve pupils, parents and external organizations.

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces a profound transformation in the way assessment is conducted in school education. National Curriculum Frameworks at different point of times, tried to translate significant recommendations of Committees, Commissions and policy documents into implementation strategies in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment for qualitative improvement in entire school education system. The New Education Policy (NEP) was introduced in India in 2020, since then much is talked about its implementation and assessment. It aims to address the essential developmental needs of our country. This policy aims to revise and revamp aspects of education structure that includes regulation and governance of the education system, create a new system that will align the goals of the 21st century education, that will be built upon India's value systems and traditions. It operates on the principle that education should develop not only cognitive abilities both the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy and the advanced higher order skills of critical thinking and problem-solving but also develop social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions (NEP, 2020). This policy envisions an educational system that is rooted in Indian ethos and contributes directly to transforming India into a vibrant and equitable knowledge society. Providing high quality education to everyone will help in making India a global knowledge superpower. Whereas implementation is much related to policy matter, assessment is more dynamic and open for all the stakeholders.

Postgraduate level of assessments is designed to cultivate independent, expert thinkers. They move beyond basic knowledge testing to evaluate advanced skills like critical analysis and research. It represents a complex and multifaceted approach to evaluating advanced learning, designed to cultivate independent scholars and practitioners capable of contributing significantly to their respective fields. Unlike undergraduate assessments, which often focus on foundational knowledge acquisition, postgraduate evaluations prioritize higher-order cognitive skills, including critical analysis, synthesis, evaluation and the generation of new knowledge. The cornerstone of postgraduate assessment often lies in original research methodologies, sophisticated data analysis and the ability to articulate complex ideas in a scholarly manner. The diverse nature of postgraduate programs necessitates a tailored approach to assessment.

In disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. Extended essays, seminar discussions and critical reviews of existing scholarship are common forms of evaluation. The integration of technology has also transformed postgraduate assessment practices. Online platforms facilitate peer review, collaborative project work and the creation of digital portfolios, enabling students to showcase their work to a wider audience. Faculty members serve as mentors, providing ongoing feedback and guidance to help students refine their research and analytical skills. This formative assessment, combined with summative evaluations creates a holistic approach that fosters intellectual growth and prepares students for successful careers in academia, industry or professional practice. The emphasis on independent learning, critical thinking and research skills ensures that postgraduates are equipped to tackle complex challenges and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge in their chosen fields.

Review of Related Literature

Sadler (2010) concluded that the effectiveness of assessment feedback depends not merely on the quality or detail of feedback but on creating learning environments that actively engage students in the learning process. He proposed purposeful peer assessment as an alternative to the conventional task–response–appraisal–feedback sequence, emphasizing its role as a pedagogical strategy. Similarly, Mtshali, Sithole, and Harerimana (2016) examined feedback practices among postgraduate nursing students and identified written, verbal, electronic, and peer feedback as commonly used approaches. Written feedback was the most frequently used, while peer feedback was perceived as the least useful and effective, suggesting the need for appropriate preparation and training for effective peer feedback.

Yigzaw (2013) and Ayalew (2016) examined teachers' and students' perceptions and practices of assessment in educational settings. Yigzaw (2013) found that continuous assessment was mainly used to evaluate students' intellectual achievement and that teachers did not adequately implement continuous assessment, highlighting the need for professional training. Likewise, Ayalew (2016) found that both teachers and students at Bahir Dar University had unfavorable perceptions of assessment practices, which were considered largely theoretical and lacking sufficient practical orientation. However, there was no significant difference between teachers' and students' perceptions.

Statement of the Problem

Assessment plays a crucial role in determining students' learning and achievement in higher education. With the shift towards competency-based and student-centered education, assessment is increasingly expected to go beyond traditional examinations and include continuous, formative, authentic, and varied assessment practices that promote higher-order thinking and meaningful learning. NEP 2020 also emphasizes a holistic and competency-based approach to assessment. However, the effectiveness of assessment practices largely depends on how students experience and perceive them in terms of fairness, transparency, relevance, feedback, and alignment with learning outcomes. In the context of Mizoram University, there is a need to understand how postgraduate students perceive the assessment practices followed in their programmes, particularly with regard to the methods used, fairness of evaluation, feedback provided, transparency, and their contribution to learning. Although assessment is an integral part of postgraduate education, limited empirical evidence is available on students' perceptions of these practices at Mizoram University. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the perceptions of postgraduate students regarding assessment practices at Mizoram University and to identify areas that may require improvement for making assessment more meaningful, transparent, and supportive of student learning.

Research Questions

1. What types of assessment practices are employed at the postgraduate level across various departments of Mizoram University?
2. What are the perceptions of postgraduate students regarding the assessment methods used in their academic programmes?

3. What is the nature of feedback provided by teachers on internal assessments at the postgraduate level?
4. What challenges do postgraduate students face in relation to internal assessment practices?

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify the types of assessment practices employed at the postgraduate level across various departments in Mizoram University.
2. To examine postgraduate students' perception of the current assessment methods used in their academic programs.
3. To analyse the nature of feedback provided by teachers on internal assessments.
4. To explore the challenges faced by postgraduate students in relation to internal assessment practices.
5. To propose suggestions for improving the assessment system based on student feedback.

Method of the study

Design

The present study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the perceptions of postgraduate students regarding assessment practices at Mizoram University. The design was considered appropriate as the study sought to describe students' perceptions, experiences, feedback practices, and challenges related to assessment.

Sample

The sample for the study was selected using the stratified random sampling technique. One department was randomly selected from each of the ten schools of Mizoram University. From each selected department, 10 postgraduate students were selected as respondents, resulting in a total sample of 100 postgraduate students.

Tools used in the Study

In the present study, the researcher developed a questionnaire titled "Perception of Postgraduate Students Regarding Assessment Practices at Mizoram University." The questionnaire was designed to collect information on postgraduate students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to assessment practices at Mizoram University.

Data Analysis

The collected data were systematically organized, tabulated, and analyzed using frequency and percentage analysis. The findings were presented in tables to facilitate clear interpretation of postgraduate students' perceptions regarding assessment practices.

Major Findings of the Study:

1. Types of Assessment Practices Used in Departments

The study revealed that written tests and assignments are the most commonly used methods of internal assessment at the postgraduate level. Nearly all students reported the use of written tests, while assignments and presentations/seminars were also widely practiced.

However, innovative and learner-centered assessment methods such as peer/self-assessment, portfolios, reflective journals, book reviews, and case-study-based assessments were rarely used. This indicates that most departments still rely heavily on conventional forms of assessment rather than diversified and competency-based approaches.

2. Students' Perception of Fairness and Effectiveness of Assessment

The majority of postgraduate students perceived the assessment methods used in their departments as fair and unbiased. Most students also agreed that the assessment methods reflected the learning objectives of their courses.

At the same time, a considerable percentage of students remained neutral regarding fairness and effectiveness, suggesting uncertainty or inconsistency in assessment practices across departments. A small number of students expressed dissatisfaction, indicating that some improvements are needed in ensuring transparency and consistency in evaluation.

3. Assessment Focus on Understanding and Application

More than half of the respondents believed that the assessment practices in their departments focused on understanding and application rather than rote memorization. This reflects a gradual shift toward outcome-based and conceptual learning.

Nevertheless, a significant proportion of students remained neutral, indicating that memorization-based assessment practices still continue in some departments. Therefore, there remains a need to strengthen analytical, critical-thinking, and application-oriented assessment practices.

4. Clarity of Assessment Purpose and Grading Criteria

The findings showed that many students were uncertain whether the purpose of each assessment was clearly explained beforehand. Responses indicated inadequate communication regarding assessment expectations, criteria, and grading procedures.

Students strongly emphasized the need for clear sharing of grading criteria and assessment standards. This finding highlights the importance of transparency in assessment practices to reduce confusion and anxiety among students.

5. Use of ICT-Based Assessment

The study revealed that ICT-based assessment practices are not fully integrated or effectively implemented in many departments. A large percentage of respondents remained neutral regarding the

effectiveness of ICT-based assessments, while only a limited number strongly agreed about its effective use.

This suggests that digital assessment methods, online evaluation tools, and technology-supported feedback systems are still underdeveloped at the postgraduate level.

6. Nature and Quality of Feedback

The findings indicated that feedback provided by teachers plays an important role in students' learning. Most students reported that feedback helps them identify mistakes, improve future performance, and motivates them to study better.

However, only a small percentage of students stated that they “always” receive effective feedback, which indicates inconsistency in feedback practices among departments and teachers.

The study also found that oral feedback is more commonly used than written feedback. Students appreciated opportunities to discuss their performance with teachers, particularly in presentations and assignments, reflecting a supportive teacher-student relationship.

7. Transparency in Internal Assessment

The findings showed inconsistency in displaying internal assessment marks before submission to the Controller of Examinations. While some departments regularly display marks, many students reported that this occurs only “sometimes.” This indicates that transparency in internal assessment procedures is not uniformly maintained across departments.

8. Teachers' Evaluation Practices

Most students perceived teachers' evaluation methods as “average” in terms of strictness and leniency. However, internal tests were viewed as comparatively stricter than assignments and seminars. The majority of teachers completed evaluation within one week, suggesting a reasonably efficient assessment process.

9. Students' Demand for Practical and Skill-Based Assessment

One of the most significant findings of the study is that a majority of students strongly preferred more practical, skill-based, and application-oriented assessment methods.

Students expressed the need for assessments that promote real-life application, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and active participation rather than relying only on theoretical written examinations.

10. Need for Continuous Feedback

A large majority of respondents believed that students should receive more continuous feedback throughout the semester. This finding supports the importance of formative assessment practices in improving learning outcomes and student engagement.

Discussion of results

The present study examined postgraduate students' opinions on assessment practices at Mizoram University and revealed important insights into the effectiveness, fairness, transparency, and quality of evaluation methods. The findings show that traditional assessment methods such as written examinations and assignments continue to dominate across departments, while alternative approaches like peer assessment, portfolios, reflective journals, and case-study evaluations are rarely used. Although presentations and seminars are gradually being introduced, the continued dependence on examination-oriented systems suggests that the university has not yet fully adopted the learner-centered and competency-based assessment practices promoted by the National Education Policy 2020. This reliance on conventional testing may limit students' opportunities to develop higher-order skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.

The study further found that most postgraduate students considered departmental assessment practices to be fair, unbiased, and generally aligned with course objectives. Many respondents also observed a growing emphasis on conceptual understanding and practical application rather than rote memorization, reflecting a gradual shift toward outcome-based education. These findings highlight the need for greater transparency, standardized rubrics, and more consistent communication of assessment expectations across departments.

In addition, the integration of ICT-based assessment practices was found to be uneven, with many students reporting limited effectiveness of digital evaluation tools due to infrastructural and implementation challenges. Feedback was identified as a highly valued component of learning, as students emphasized the importance of timely, constructive, and interactive feedback for academic improvement. While oral feedback was more common, only a small proportion of students consistently received detailed written feedback. Overall, the findings reveal a strong student preference for practical, skill-oriented, and application-based assessment methods over purely theoretical examinations.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and subsequent analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to improve assessment practices at the postgraduate level in Mizoram University:

1. Academic departments should adopt a wider variety of assessment techniques such as project work, case studies, portfolios, reflective journals, peer assessment, group discussions, field-based assignments, and problem-solving activities. Diversified assessment methods would help evaluate not only students' theoretical knowledge but also their practical skills, creativity, communication abilities, critical thinking, and collaborative learning.
2. Since the majority of students expressed the need for more practical and application-oriented assessments, universities should integrate skill-based evaluation into postgraduate programs. Assessment

activities should focus on real-life application of knowledge, analytical thinking, research skills, problem-solving ability, and professional competence.

3. Academic departments should maintain transparency in internal assessment procedures by displaying marks and feedback regularly before final submission to the Controller of Examinations. Students should also be given opportunities to clarify doubts regarding marks and evaluation. Transparent practices help reduce misunderstandings and promote fairness and accountability within the assessment system.

4. Assessment practices should be carefully aligned with course objectives and learning outcomes. Teachers should ensure that assessment tasks measure not only memorization but also higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, creativity, and research competence.

5. The university should periodically review and evaluate existing assessment systems by collecting feedback from students, teachers, and academic experts. Such reviews would help identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas requiring improvement.

Conclusion

The study's result shows a growing need to change postgraduate assessment methods to a more competency-based, clear and student-centered model. Students pointed out the importance of evaluations that measure practical skills, analytical thinking and the application of knowledge in real-world situations rather than simple memorization. The research highlights the need to clearly communicate assessment standards and methods to ensure fairness and build trust among students. Additionally, the emphasis on ongoing formative evaluation and consistent feedback shows that assessment should help with learning and improvement. The limited use of ICT-driven assessment methods suggests a need for broader adoption of digital tools to increase effectiveness and engagement in the evaluation process. Encouraging student involvement through self and peer evaluation can promote reflective learning, accountability and independence. Overall, these results suggest that assessment methods in higher education must evolve to support comprehensive growth, encourage active participation and create meaningful learning experiences that align with modern educational goals and the NEP 2020 vision.

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