

Student perception of lecturers' assessment practices at technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in South Africa

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ABSTRACT: The rate of unemployment in South Africa is high. The assessment practices at technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges should measure the knowledge and skills required by its graduates to be employable in industry. Investigated in this article are students' perceptions of classroom assessment and work integrated learning (WIL). Considered important is that classroom assessment and work integrated learning should reflect classroom learning and the skills required in the workplace. The quantitative research approach applied in this study was through questionnaires administered to students at four TVET college campuses in Limpopo province. The study findings revealed that the participants perceived negatively the fairness of classroom assessment, because they were unable to apply their learning to real-life situations. Therefore, it is imperative that TVET colleges administer assessments that measure relevant knowledge and skills useful for real-life situations and the marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

Most technical and vocational education and training (TVET) graduates are considered not employable, because most industries regard these graduates as not occupationally competent [1]. The TVET colleges should assess the quality of graduates by the skills expected by industry [2]. Student perceptions of lecturers' assessment practices are based on the impact of classroom assessment and work integrated learning (WIL), which assesses knowledge and skills acquired. The knowledge and skills learned in the classroom and workshops need to be considered against the requirements of the workplace [3]. Classroom assessment practice *trains* the level of knowledge, whereas WIL prepares students with employability skills for the labour force [4]. To gain more insight into students' perception of assessment practices in the classroom and the WIL programme, the purpose of the study was to investigate student perception of assessment practices at TVET colleges.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the students' perceptions of classroom assessment practice?
- What are the students' perceptions of the impact of work integrated learning (WIL)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background Preparation

Students participating in the study attended TVET colleges and were aged between 16 and 50 years. Therefore, their perceptions of assessment were regarded as providing a cross-section of individual experiences. Classroom assessment is applied to measure what is taught in the classroom. Classroom assessment has long been applied to measuring knowledge and skill, and it is still the case today, in the 21st Century [5]. A quality classroom assessment should be a fair assessment. The student's gauge whether the assessment practice is clear and relevant [6]. Classroom assessment can bring significant benefits to knowledge acquisition and academic achievement [7]. Furthermore, classroom assessment is regarded as a source of self-learning of theory in the related subject [8].

Further research is required to help identify the extent to which student perceptions could be applied to evaluating classroom assessment. Studies already have shown that student perceptions are valuable, especially of classroom assessment, which is an important assessment; this can support their learning experience [9][10]. Several studies have attested that students' perceptions can provide reliable evidence of the learning experience [10-12]. The belief is that

students' perceptions concerning classroom assessment may differ because of background, understanding and objectives. Students can share and provide information about any form of assessment [9].

Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

Apart from the discussion on students' perception of classroom assessment, in this article, the authors opine that work integrated learning (WIL) is an important component of TVET courses. However, Chinavare et al reported other components, such as job searching skills, education, work experience, job training, workforce and self-employment as also useful to satisfy work requirements [13]. The WIL programme was perceived to improve students' understanding of the importance of classroom assessment and attitude towards work readiness [14]. Furthermore, the programme is believed to positively impact academic performance, which adds value to students' achievements. However, worldwide students are still struggling to find employment [15].

South African TVET colleges all have the same structure, with WIL being one of the main employment skill components. Researchers regard WIL as a crucial programme to prepare students to enter the workplace; it is therefore relevant to the courses offered by TVET colleges [14-16]. The connection of classroom assessment and WIL are ascribed as employability skills, which every student needs to have when entering the workplace [17].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Quantitative Data

Quantitative methods were used on students' questionnaire data from four TVET college campuses in Limpopo province involving 194 students at level three. The instrument by which data were collected was a questionnaire administered to the students. The students' questionnaires were adapted from Mussawy [18]. For data collection, students were gathered in a classroom for one hour and the questionnaire administered. There were three sections on the questionnaire; the first part was biographical information; the second was Likert-type questions to answer the first research question, while the third part was to provide an answer to the second research question. Face validity was the means of validating the research questionnaires.

Questionnaire Procedure

Before the experiment, the questionnaires were given to engineering lecturers to check that the questionnaire was measuring classroom assessment practice and WIL. During the questionnaire session, for reasons of ethics the students were not allowed to write down their names. They were advised to carefully read the questions and to answer each item by filling in the space provided with a tick that applied according to their knowledge or opinion. Purposive sampling was used on the basis that the selected TVET colleges offer engineering subjects and their students were exposed to WIL. The analysis was based on the percentage result of students' answers on each item of the questionnaire. The difference in opinion, perception and experience of the questionnaire respondents was graphically displayed and the findings were used to determine students' perception of lecturers' assessment practices at TVET colleges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the students' biographical data.

Table 1: Students' biographical data.

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Female	89	46
Male	105	54
Age group		
16-19	41	
20-30	143	
31-40	9	
41-50	1	
Level	3	

Research questions 1 and 2 and items 1 to 9 are shown below. The results were analysed based on the two research questions and nine items (below):

Research Question 1: what are the students' perceptions of classroom assessment practice?

To answer this question, Figures 1 to 5 show the percentage of students' perceptions of classroom assessment practice in the questionnaire.

- Item 1: are classroom assessments fair?

The students were asked about the fairness of the classroom assessment. Figure 1 shows the response to the fairness of the classroom assessment.

The results indicated that 5% of students strongly agreed and 5% agreed that there is fairness in classroom assessment. However, 22% of students remained neutral, whereas 51% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed. That means a high percentage of the students disagreed that there is fairness of classroom assessment. This finding agrees with Andrade et al who maintain that the quality of assessment influenced students' views of the classroom, and different methods of classroom assessment can provide meaningful and fair assessment feedback to students [19].

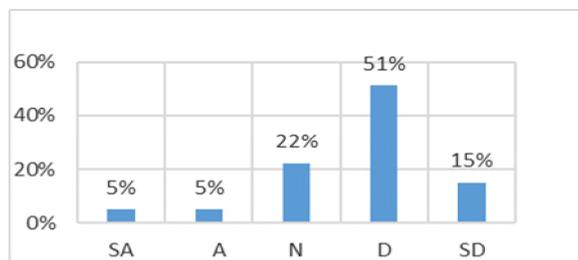


Figure 1: Assessments are fair.

- Item 2: does the lecturer assess the content students have been taught in class?

The students were asked whether classroom assessment did assess content that has been taught. Figure 2 shows the responses to assessing content taught.

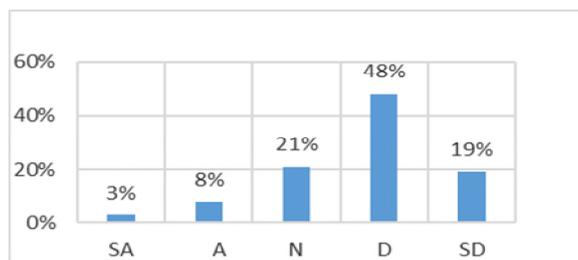


Figure 2: Taught content is assessed.

The results indicated that 3% of students strongly agreed and 8% agreed that classroom assessment did assess the content taught in class. However, 21% of students remained neutral, whereas 48% disagreed and 19% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of students disagreed that classroom assessment did assess content taught in class. Students' assessment should be applied to measuring knowledge and skills acquired during the teaching and learning process [5].

- Item 3: classroom assessment measures whether students can apply their learning to real-life situations.

The students were asked whether classroom assessment encouraged them to apply knowledge learned to a real-life situation. Figure 3 shows the response to the application of knowledge learned to a real-life situation.

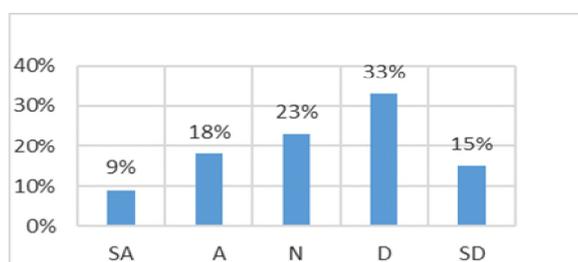


Figure 3: Classroom assessment measures whether students can apply their learning to real-life situations.

The results indicated that 9% of students strongly agreed and 18% agreed that classroom assessment measures whether students can apply their learning to real-life situations. However, 23% of students remained neutral, whereas 33% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of the student disagreed that classroom assessment measures whether students can apply their learning to real-life situations. According to Lowden et al classroom and WIL assessment should assess employability skills required in the labour force and achievement implies that students possess skills to find employment [4].

- Item 4: do you receive feedback on a regular basis of your assessment result?

The students were asked whether or not they regularly received assessment feedback. Figure 4 shows the response on whether or not they received regular assessment feedback.

The results indicated that 7% of students strongly agreed and 6% agreed that they received regular assessment feedback. However, 17% of students remained neutral, whereas 38% disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of the students disagreed that they received assessment feedback regularly. According to Andrade and Brookhart, a lack of assessment feedback to students will affect performance, whereas regular feedback could help students to plan for the next assessment [19].

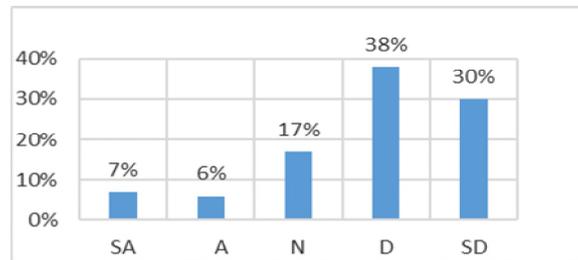


Figure 4: Receive regular assessment feedback.

- Item 5: do you know what assessment results are used for?

The students were asked how they know what the assessment results were used for. Figure 5 shows the response to the use of assessment results.

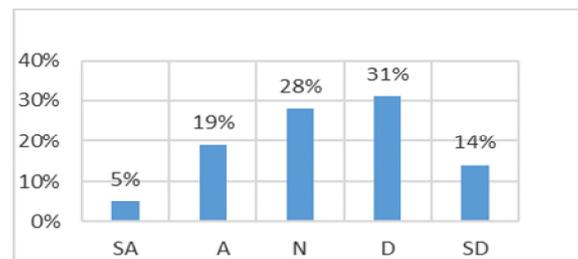


Figure 5: Know how assessment results are used.

The results indicated that 5% of students strongly agreed and 19% agreed that they knew what the assessment results were used for. However, 28% of students remained neutral, whereas 31% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of students disagreed that they knew what the assessment results were used for. It should be known by students that assessment results bring a significant benefit to academic achievement and also serve as evidence of student learning [7].

Research Question 2: what are the students' perceptions of the impact of work integrated learning (WIL)?

To answer this question, Figures 6 to 9 show the student perceptions of WIL.

- Item 6: does the WIL develop student's work-related knowledge and skills?

The students were asked whether or not WIL had an impact on student readiness for employment in the labour force. Figure 6 shows the response on whether WIL had an impact on student readiness for employment in the labour force.

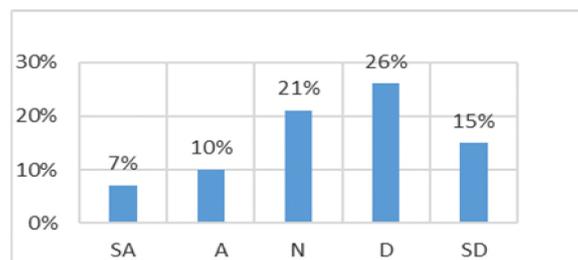


Figure 6: WIL develops students' work-related skills and knowledge.

The results indicated that 7% of students strongly agreed and 10% agreed that WIL develops students' work-related skills and knowledge. However, 21% of students remained neutral, whereas 26% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed

with the statement. That means a high percentage of the students disagreed that WIL develops students' work-related skills. However, WIL is a useful tool and an important programme with which to prepare the students for entering the workplace [16].

- Item 7: does WIL develop students' ability to apply knowledge in the workplace or other real-world situations?

The students were asked whether WIL developed students' ability to apply knowledge in the workplace or other real-world situations. Figure 7 shows the response.

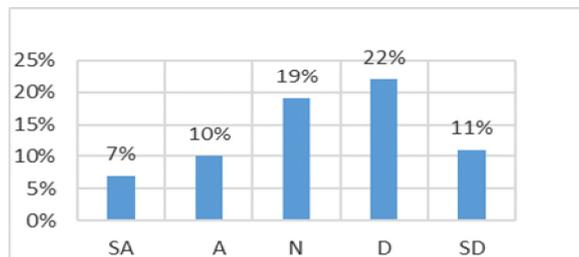


Figure 7: WIL develops students' ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations.

The results indicated that 7% of students strongly agreed and 10% agreed. However, 19% of students remained neutral, whereas 22% disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of the student disagreed that the WIL developed students' ability to apply knowledge to real-world situations. In support of the findings, a WIL assessment should assess the employability skills of graduate students in response to a real-world situation, such as job seeking [17].

- Item 8: is WIL assessment relevant to learning at the college?

The students were asked whether the WIL assessment is relevant to learning at the college. Figure 8 shows the responses.

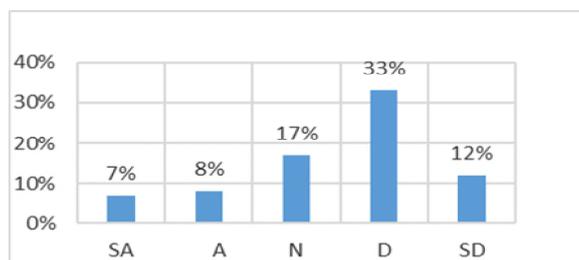


Figure 8: WIL assessment is relevant to learning at TVET colleges.

The results indicated that 7% of students strongly agreed and 8% agreed that the WIL assessment is relevant to learning at TVET colleges. However, 17% of students remained neutral, whereas 33% disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of the students disagreed that the WIL assessment is relevant to learning at the TVET colleges. While South Africa experiences a high number of unemployed people, WIL assessment is a way to assess the relevant skills needed for job creation and also required by the labour market [16].

- Item 9: does the work integrated learning (WIL) assessment have an impact on students' understanding in the classroom?

The students were asked whether or not the WIL assessment has an impact on students' understanding in the classroom. Figure 9 shows the responses.

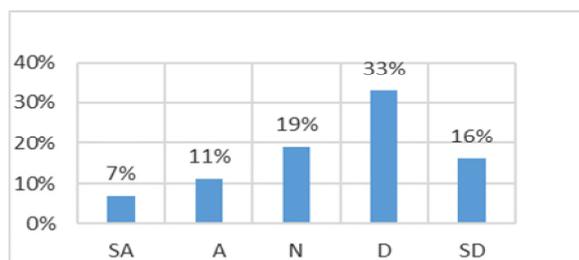


Figure 9: WIL assessment has an impact on students' understanding of classroom content.

The results indicated that 7% of students strongly agreed and 11% agreed that. However, 19% of students remained neutral, whereas 33% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed with the statement. That means a high percentage of the students disagreed that WIL assessment has an impact on students' understanding in the classroom. In harmony with the findings [15], the WIL programme is not a useful programme, because most graduates still struggle to find employment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of the effect of classroom assessment and WIL. From the students' perceptions on the impact of classroom assessment, it is concluded that students perceive no fairness in classroom assessment. Classroom assessments do not measure the knowledge and skills required in the workplace and in real-life situations. In addition, classroom assessment feedback is taking too long to reach students and the use of assessment results is not outlined to students.

A different form of assessment should be administered to cater for the variety of students. The impact of WIL is not positive, because graduate students are not ready to fit into the labour market; hence, the majority are unable to use the knowledge and skills learned to find jobs. The majority perceive WIL as less important in assessing the relevant skills needed to find jobs and that are required by the labour market; and many students are unable to integrate theory with practice. Therefore, the WIL programme should be partnered with industries to train and assess the relevant skills needed for job creation or job seeking, and for the labour market.

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