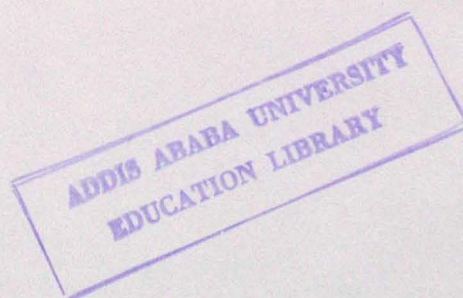


***STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIVERSITY
ASSESSMENT PRACTICES: THE CASE OF DILLA UNIVERSITY***

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Educational Research and Development

BY

BERHANU MEKONNEN



JUNE 2009

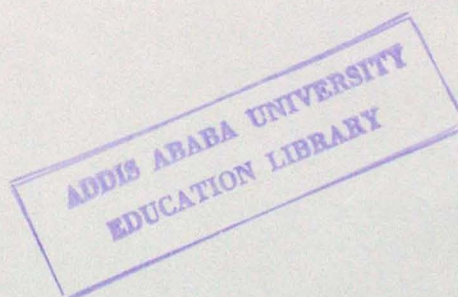
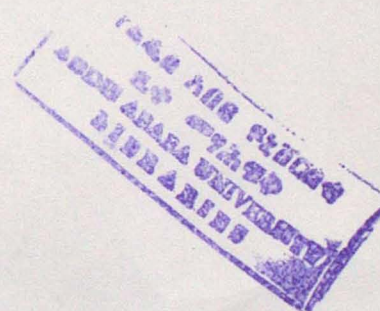
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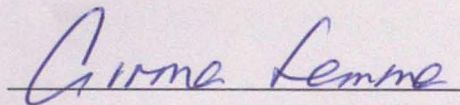
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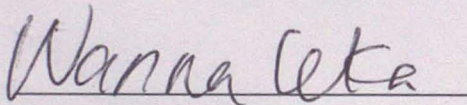
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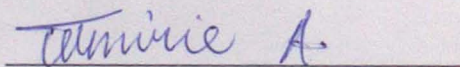
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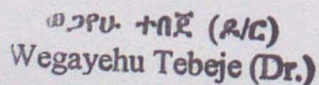
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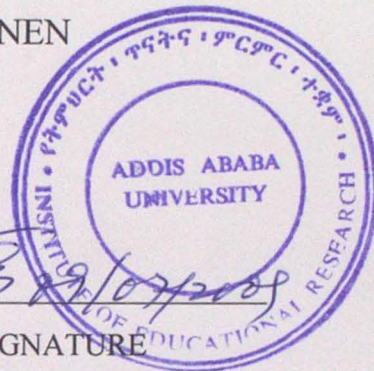
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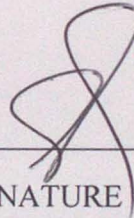
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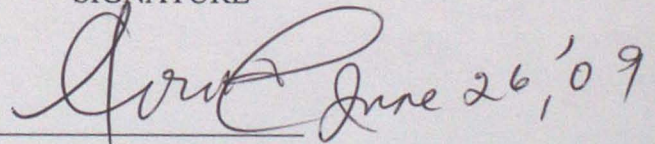
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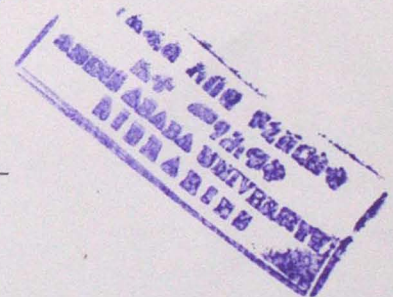
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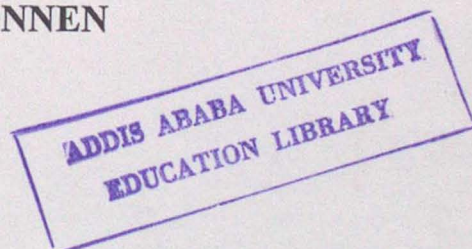
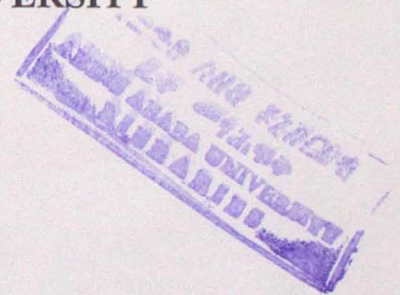
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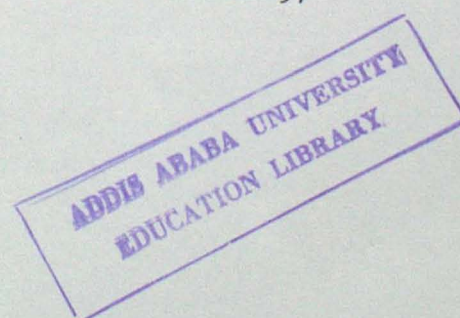
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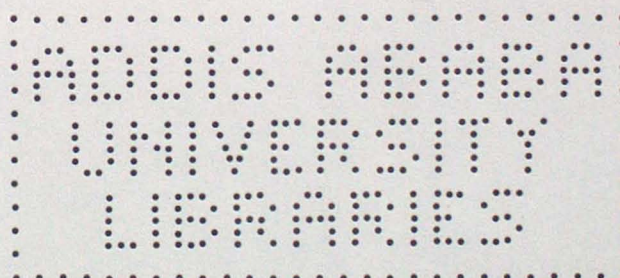


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ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS

CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
DU	Dilla University
FGDs	Focused Group Discussions
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
MoE	Ministry of Education
SNNPRS	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas



ABSTRACT

This study focuses on students' attitudes towards assessment practices in Dilla University. A questionnaire was developed to measure students' perceptions of and attitudes towards the educational assessment practices in the university. It relates to: (a) frequencies of use of assessment techniques, and (b) attitudes with regards to department admission procedures, assessment tasks, exams, feedback, and grading practices. The questionnaire was validated for its content and piloted for its reliability. As the result, most of the items were seen to be appropriate and every item was considered of important by most of the students. Moreover, the questionnaire resulted with good reliability of (0.70). And data were collected from 154 second and 149 third year students from three different faculties in the university. Approximately, 90% of the students (n=303) valid responses were obtained. In addition, two focused group discussions were held focusing on their evaluations to the practices in the university. Results indicated that students perceived examinations as the most often used methods to assess students in the university. Also the results showed that there are positive and negative students' attitudes to the practices. And Exams and grading practices were found to be the serious concerns for the students. Furthermore, results indicated that the most related problems to effective assessment practices in the university is lack of pedagogical training, lack of transparency and accountability, biases, and lack of assessment policies. However, students believe that the problems to effective assessment practices can be solved using certain interventions. Additional analyses indicated that there were no significant differences between subjects according to field of study, sex of respondents, and achievement in the university. On the other hand, the results showed significant differences between subjects according to students' year in the university ($t=12.34$, $p<.05$). Finally, conclusions were arrived based on the findings and the results are examined with a view of their implications for student learning and assessment in higher education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Education is a keystone to the development and social stability of a nation as it helps to develop crucial humanitarian values like equity, tolerance, and peace. These values lead to sustainable national development, environmental protection, and improved family health along with responsible participation in democratic, social, and political processes (BIGGS, 1996; Durodola & Olude, 2005). However, in order to achieve these goals, it depends on what is learned: knowledge, skills, values and attitude at different educational institutions and how well these are learned i.e., level of competence attained by students. Moreover, learners may not benefit much from a system of education unless there are assessments aimed at determining students' performance (Race et al., 2005; Pollard, 2003).

The system of evaluation is an integral part of the education system (Heaton, 1982 in Girma, 2001; Pollard, 2003). It is a broad term defined in different ways, has many forms, serves diverse purposes and involves a range of stakeholders who may hold quite different positions, expectations, and perspectives. According to BIGGS (1999), assessment has the following benefits it:

- Improves students learning.
- Identifies institutional, course, or assignment challenges.
- Improves instruction by identifying what instructional adjustments might be needed.
- Ensures grading is reflective of students learning towards course objectives.
- Makes grading more systematic and objective.

The assessment of students' learning is not well understood and, in most disciplines, an under researched aspect of higher education (Fry et al., 2004). However, it indicated that investigating student assessment practices in higher education has various importance. First; assessment is an integral component of the teaching and learning system. It may be used to explicitly to guide students in their study. But also, student perceptions of what is rewarded and what is ignored by more formal examination procedures will have a substantial importance upon their learning behavior and thus upon the outcomes of a course.

Second, for a variety of reasons, assessment needs to be accurate and if it is not itself examined, then we can't know how accurate it is. It needs to be accurate because it is pointless and unfair to students if it is otherwise. And also assessment needs to be accurate for internal and external quality purposes; and needs it to be accurate to defend the increasingly likely legal challenges from disaffected students who feel they have been unfairly judged, classified or even excluded.

On the other hand, studies proved that when student evaluations are not solid, educational programs suffer. Poor student evaluations victimize and harm students. When questionable evaluation practices are employed, the negative consequences are likely to draw attention. Hence, in addressing the effects of poorly conducted evaluation activities, educators need to be certain that they are conducting appropriate evaluations for each student and that their results given to the students and others are accurate. And if evaluations used by classroom teachers are conducted by outsiders, the teachers need to be good consumers and judges of these evaluators (Shepard, 1989).

In connection to this, educational assessment practice in Dilla University, like many others, has faced problems in its implementations. With regards to this, Daniel (2004) in his research indicated that the effectiveness of assessment practices in the Ethiopian HEIs is appeared to be questionable. And also Girma (2001) in his part stated that educational assessment practices in Ethiopian HEIs found to be ineffective. Besides, HERQA (2006) showed that current assessment practices in HEIs need improvement. Furthermore, Praksh (2007) argued that the present examination system was evolved in the middle nineteenth century for identification of children regarding their suitability for admission into colleges and university for higher education and latter for employment. Hence, it didn't have anything to test the life skills of learners. But it is oriented towards the selection for government jobs. Therefore, if any reform in education has to be brought about, it must first be brought about in the examination system. Accordingly, the crucial question, therefore, is not of the abolition of the system but making it a step in the process of teaching and learning and to streamline it by ensuring greater reliability as well as objectivity (Koul, 2006). Furthermore, Puch (1997) claimed that global influences affecting education such as changes in world economy, information revolution, and experimentalism and how educators assess students encouraged to move away from the heavy use of traditional and more judgmental approaches to assessment towards alternative and more inclusive means of determining what learners know and can do.

In addition, MoE (1994) indicated that a developing economy and a democratic society call for major shifts in the educational endeavor to which the evaluation system has to respond. Hence, the same source stated that there has to be a decisive shift from teaching and teacher centered to learning and learner oriented education. And also MoE (2005)

stated that quality of education in higher education can be ensured with the use of assessment reforms in the education system. Therefore, current thinking now aims to ensure that assessment practices and procedures are constructively aligned with learning outcomes we set for our students, requiring a more systematic approach to assessment design. New methods for reforming assessment systems that meet rigorous academic standards and the demands of the contemporary students who often have high expectations that their needs, preferences, and rights will be protected and assessment systems that are fair, valid, reliable, efficient, and effective are needed (Ashcroft, 2006; BIGGS, 1996; Race et al., 2005).

In connection to this, nowadays systematic students' evaluations of tertiary teaching including assessment practices in universities and colleges have been common (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986; Vandeyar & Killen, 2004; Keller, 2001). And findings in the developed countries universities and colleges about the phenomena indicated that there is a need to develop student evaluation standards to promote evaluations of high quality based on sound evaluation practices and procedures to meet the existing and emerging needs in the field of evaluation (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986). Moreover, it is found that policies and principles of student assessment that state assessment practices should be inclusive and support equity principles; the relationship of to course aims and objectives, and the criteria and standards by which performance is to be judged should be made clear to students (Flint, 1998).

Furthermore, the studies showed that better understanding of the best practices is required by the evaluators to avoid common errors that can be detrimental to students and consumers of students' evaluations (Anderson, 1985). In addition, it is pointed out that the standards should be designed to guide evaluation decisions about students, to develop



grading systems that reflect appropriate criteria, and to improve preparation of those who conduct and use evaluation.

On the other hand, in the Ethiopian case, even if there has been work done on assessment by government, educators, and researchers, it appears that student' perceptions and attitudes towards university educational assessment practices have not been investigated adequately. Therefore, this paper focuses on a particular group of students, namely, Dilla university students. It describes, analyzes, and investigates their experiences and their responses to them over a period of approximately two academic years. The concern of this paper is with students' response to both formative and summative assessment experiences in the university.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Student evaluation is the most important tool of ascertaining the achievement of the desired educational objectives. However, evaluation has its own short comings for the major reasons that all measurements are estimates and hence lack accuracy and the type of measurement we deal within education is an indirect measurement resulting in wider margin of error (Heaton, 1982 in Girma, 2001). For this reason, assessment has been and remains a controversial issue in education. However, it is a fast moving area in policy terms and receives much media attention (Pollard, 2003).

Research indicates that the ways in which learners are assessed and evaluated powerfully affect the ways they study and learn (Darge, 2001; Gullickson, 2000). And previous findings revealed that students' perceptions and attitudes about assessment significantly influence their approaches to learn and studying. Conversely, students' approaches to study influences the ways in which they perceive evaluation and assessment practices. And also

findings indicated that students' beliefs and attitudes influence their motivation to learn, their expectation, and their preferences of the kind of learning strategies they favor (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986; Vandeyar & Killen, 2004; Keller, 2001).

So, investigating one's attitude is very essential to obtain how the students feel, perceive, and behave about the assessment practices.

Even though there has been work done on assessment by government ,educators and researchers, it appears that students' attitudes on the educational assessment practices in the Ethiopian HEIs have not been adequately investigated (Daniel, 2004; Girma, 2001; Abiyot, 2001; HERQA, 2006; Shimeles, 2001). Yet, empirical studies in the areas of educational assessment practices of higher education showed that practices are not effective. In addition, formal and informal observations show that very little conscious efforts have been made to consider quality student assessment methods in HEIs. Besides, assessment as I have noted is often traditional and narrow in form. I think this doesn't allow to measure and show students cognitive growth. It is also hardly surprising that practices are seldom good at using assessment data for accurate decisions. And this provides the rationale for the prime focus of the present inquiry to be into students' perceptions and attitudes about evaluation practices and assessment methods in our current assessment system in Dilla University.

Taking these into account, this investigation aimed at studying the perceptions and attitudes of students towards HEIs assessment practices.

To do that, the study tried to answer the following basic research questions:

- ❖ What kind of assessment methods does the university use in assessing students' competence?
- ❖ What are the attitudes of students towards the assessment practices in the university under investigation?
- ❖ Are there any significant differences in attitudes of students toward the assessment practices due to gender, academic ability, year of study, and faculty of the respondents?
- ❖ What are the perceived challenges of effective assessment practices in Dilla University and the possible solutions to the challenges?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to explore students' experience of assessment practices in higher education and to examine ways in which the practice of student assessment would be more valid, reliable, and fair. In doing so, the study attempted to achieve the following objectives:

- To obtain a profile of Dilla University's assessment practice to students and its support practices.
- To determine students' attitudes about the current assessment practices.
- To identify the perceived challenges to effective assessment practices in the university.
- To provide suggestions as to how to improve the practice in the university.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is believed that assessment when handled carefully would be a powerful catalyst for learning. It is also an essential ingredient to strong educational programs. It is probably the most common and pervasive aspect of student instruction. It is the primary tool for guiding student development crossing all academic disciplines. Certainly, it occurs in classrooms and regularly confronts students and evaluators in a wide variety of decision situations that affect their educational development. Taking this into consideration, this study will be significant in showing the clear pictures of assessment practices in Dilla University and would also serve as a starting point into the study of educational assessment of higher education institutions. It is also believed that the study will be important to fill a gap in knowledge about how higher education has been implementing assessments of their students. Furthermore, students, teachers, and concerned bodies will be beneficiaries of the study. And the information gained from the study will have the potential to result in improvements to teaching and learning in the aforementioned university in particular and in other HEIs in general. With improvements to teaching and learning come many things including greater understanding, better relationships, greater levels of satisfaction and enjoyment on the part of staff and students. Finally, it is also believed that this research will be critical to policy and staff development endeavors in the field of assessment as it will identify the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of student assessment and provide solid guidelines for improvements.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In order to have more comprehensive information, it would have been good to take universities from all parts of the country and all stakeholders' views about the case. However, to make the study more manageable and to complete the study within the specified time and available resources it is confined to one government university students' experiences to assessment practices. Moreover, in order to get more reliable information first year students were not the subject of the study because it is believed that these students have not much assessment experience and they will not be reliable respondents. Finally, to form a broad understanding of the practice, the study was made to focus on five factors of student assessment subscale: Department allocation, assessment tasks, exams, feedback, and grading practices.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Although every effort was made to minimize the threats to the internal validity, this research includes a number of limitations. First, the study lacks previous research findings on the issues investigated for detailed comparisons. Lastly, threats to the external validity includes the limited geographic diversity of the student population (i.e., all participants lived in one institute), and the limited range of participants, though, this study included 303 participants. And the results of this investigation can't go beyond second and third year students learning in Dilla University.

1. 7 Organization of the Study

The paper is organized into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter two addresses both the theoretical and research reviews about the case under investigation. Chapter three presents the methodological issues used in the study to objectively measure and collect relevant data for the issues. Chapter four presents all the numerical and verbal data obtained through survey questionnaire and focused group discussions respectively. And also this chapter compares and contrasts the research findings with previous studies and review of related literatures. Finally, chapter five presents the summary of major findings of the study, the conclusions arrived and the recommendations forwarded.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This section of the review contains the general ideas about educational assessment: meaning and concept of educational assessment; its historical development; types, characteristics, purposes, and methods of assessment.

2.1.1 Meaning of Assessment

Assessment is a broad term defined in different ways, has many forms, serves diverse purposes and involves a range of stakeholders. In connection to this, Anderson (2003) viewed assessment as a process of gathering information to make informed decisions. And Derbessa (2004) expressed assessment as a process of investigating the status of an individual or group usually with reference to expected outcomes. Furthermore, Dessalegn (2004) stated that assessment is a way of observing, collecting information and making decisions based on information gathered.

Similarly, Nitko (1996) defined assessment as the process of collecting and interpreting information that can be used to inform students and their parents where applicable about the process they are making toward attaining the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to be learned or acquired; and to inform various personnel who make educational decisions: instructional, diagnostic, placement, promotion, graduation, curriculum planning, program development, and policy about students. As to Erwin (1991), assessment means a systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students. And is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting and using information to increase students' learning and development.

In addition to the above authors, Derbessa (2004, in Tesfaye, 2007) and Anderson (2003) argue that assessment is synonymous to evaluation. It involves measurement, judgment, and determination of worth of something. However, Dessalegn (2004) disagrees with the above idea that assessment and evaluation are the same. Rather he states that evaluation basis itself on the information gathered through assessment.

From the above discussions, it is noticed that there are many definitions of assessment depending on who is asking the question, the type of information sought, and the level of assessment being addressed. However, it is important to consider that all the above definitions assert that assessment is primarily about student learning. And is a systematic process of gathering and documenting students' learning, usually in measurable terms: knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. Finally, it is found that assessment involves decision making and the purpose of assessment defines the nature and process of the assessment system.

2.1.2 The History of Assessment

The field of assessment has been undergoing major changes since the introduction of the alternative assessment methods (Berlak et al., 1992). The earliest known written tests were administered by the ancient Chinese emperor in about 2200 B.C. (Lien, 1976). Unlike most other societies at that time, government officials were chosen based upon performance rather than a group of aristocrats. Each official was tested every three years and promoted or dismissed based on the results. At the beginning of Chan dynasty (1115 B. C.), formal procedures for examining political hopefuls were developed. Candidates were required to display proficiency in the "five basic arts": music, archery, horse riding, writing, and arithmetic. In addition, candidates had to display a working knowledge of the rites and

ceremonies of public life. Two areas of assessment had been distinguished: Proficiency and knowledge (Lien, 1976; Hashway, 1998).

Assessment gradually grew more elaborate. In 165 B.C., five additional "basic arts" were added: geography of the empire, civil law, military matters, agriculture, and finance. After 622 A.D., competitive tests were administered on three levels. Candidates first had to pass a local district assessment before they could complete at the provincial capital. Those who passed at the provincial level were honored with a twenty four hour exam. After which they went home to wait the official report on their place in the "scale of merit." (Hashway, 1998).

Assessment changed little in the following centuries until the rise of a technocratic civilization. In America, until about 1850, most examinations were limited to recitation and long, difficult essays (Davis, 1971; Lien, 1976). The lack of reliability, implicit in scores from these assessments, was apparent as early as 1845 when Horace Mann argued in favor of the "new examinations" because of their objectivity. However, it remained for researchers in the early 20th Century to empirically support Mann's point.

Accountability and standardized forms of evaluation quickly became issues in measurement and evaluation. Mann, who was to become a major influence in the development of assessment wanted to develop an instrument that would measure the progress of pupils in Boston School System (Davis, 1971). Principals were to be fired if their students didn't show satisfactory results on the tests.

In the late 19th century, many educators started to argue for the development and measurement of educational standards (Boten, 1932 in Hashway, 1977). Tests were

developed for spelling, language and arithmetic skills. The "new type of examinations" estimated a student's knowledge by the number of words spelled correctly or the number of problems completed successfully in a given period of time (Ebel, 1979).

Psychology at this time was developing into a "rational science", and mathematics as well as statistics began to invade what had been thought of a purely objective realm. Inevitably, calls for quantitative and content standards were voiced by well renowned educators (Thorndike, 1918 in Hashway, 1977). Around the turn of the century, two milestones in modern assessment occurred. In the late 1800's, Francis Galton established his laboratory in South Kensington, England. Galton measured and recorded individual differences in human physical characteristics and sensory and psychomotor responses. His results seemed surprising when published in 1869 and 1883. Individual differences were distributed according to a mathematical model called the "normal curve of error". Hence, if the results of an assessment were not normally distributed, educators started to infer that there was something wrong with the test as opposed to normal distribution scores.

The normal curve grading scheme gradually became common in different universities (Ruch, 1929 in Hashway, 1998). The belief that mental measurements needed to be distributed "normally" remarkably intensified in the field of assessment. Consequently, experiments were designed to furnish standards of performance in the execution of various mental tests so that ultimately compare the performance of the individual pupil in these tests with the normal performance for his age became a common exercise in the areas of assessment.

This was the beginning of norm referenced measurements, or as it is also called, normal curve scaling. Nevertheless, many prominent measurement specialists of the time argued against the trend with the wide spread development of intelligent tests. After 1900s, norm referenced methodology became dominant for many years (Thronrdike, 1911, 12, 18, all in Hashway, 1977). The second milestone in the modern assessment practice was developed in France by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon. They produced a series of tests to measure the mental development of young children (Binet and Simon, 1916 in Hashway, 1998). In World War I, norm referenced assessment was largely used to recruit and classify U.S army members into military services according to their levels of ability (Yerkes, 1921 in Hashway, 1998). According to measurement specialists, this was the first group assessment of intelligence produced and used in the field of assessment.

Since World War I, measurement specialists have developed a large variety of tests. Tests of ability were devised to predict how well a person would succeed at a particular task. Tests of attainment were developed to assess how well, relative to a calibration group, a student attained proficiency of a particular subject. Whether measuring ability or attainment, both kinds of tests were designed to discriminate between individuals (Matarazzo, 1972). Specialists have redefined these tests over the last century. Assessment item selection techniques were developed which assure a normal distribution of assessment scores (Lord and Novick, 1974). However, the basic assumption underlying all these techniques has remained the same: that "normal curve" holds true (Matarazzo, 1972; Lord and Novick, 1974).

Finally, modern electronic data processing equipment has had an impact on assessment. In 1950's and early 1960's, computers began to be used in the social sciences. And computer technology and software became available in the assessment methods. Recently, higher education recaptured the national interest. With its new found importance came a call for an accountability models such as outcome assessment and which is seen as vehicle for developing better students, better teachers, better courses, and better programs (Ewell, 1985). This recently developed model of assessment aims at finding procedures that are used to determine the extent to which individual students have met the curricular goals, mastered the prescribed subject matter, and acquired the skills, and characteristics that certify students as having the essential marks of an educated person and to the extent that help identify where things are done better (Manning, 1987).

From the historical development of educational assessment, it is deduced that assessment has had several historical changes throughout its development. It is found that assessment practices had been classified into two, namely, traditional and modern assessment practices. Traditional assessment practices have been aimed at identifying pupils' proficiency and knowledge. Whereas modern assessment practices were used to determine pupils' competencies using 'objective' measures. It is also noticed that psychology had a profound effect in the development of assessment. It contributed to the development of different standardized tests, mathematical models of assessment, and the most commonly used grading technique 'normal curve scaling'. However, the belief that normal distribution of mental scores was found to be the predominant assumption to the development of different assessment techniques.

Furthermore, it is indicated that assessments in higher education have recently got educators and national interests. Consequently, a new educational assessment model is being introduced into higher education. The model is found to be measurement driven and termed as process and outcome models. Finally, from the discussions made so far it is noted that assessment practices didn't evolve only from the theoretical or methodological concerns. It also emerges from the social and public interests. As a result, educational assessment practices and methodologies evolved to serve the prevalent social order.

2.1.3. Types of Assessment

Assessments can be classified in many different ways. However, the most important distinctions are: formative and summative; objective and subjective; criterion-referenced and norm-referenced; and informal and formal (Ediger, 1994; Birenbaum, 1994; Ramsden, 1992; Anderson, 2003; Brown and Knight, 2004; Race et al., 2005).

Summative and Formative Assessments

According to Brown and knight (2004), summative assessment includes end- of- course assessment and essentially means that this is assessment which produces a measure which sums up someone's achievement and which has no other real use except as a description of what has been achieved. Similarly, Anderson (2003) stated that summative assessment is generally carried out at the end of a course or project usually used to assign students a course grade. However, formative assessment is generally carried out throughout a course or project. Formative assessment is used to aid learning. In an educational setting, formative assessment might be a teacher, peer, or the learner, providing feedback on a student's work, and would not necessarily be used for grading purposes (Ediger, 1994).

Summative and formative assessments are referred to in a learning context as "assessment of learning" and "assessment for learning" respectively. A common form of formative assessment is diagnostic assessment. Diagnostic assessment measures a student's current knowledge and skills for the purpose of identifying a suitable program of learning. Self-assessment is a form of diagnostic assessment which involves students assessing themselves.

Objective and subjective assessment

Assessment either summative or formative can be objective or subjective. Objective assessment is a form of questioning which has a single correct answer. Subjective assessment is a form of questioning which may have more than one correct answer or more than one way of expressing the correct answer. There are various types of objective and subjective questions. Objective question types include true/false, multiple choice, multiple-response and matching questions. Subjective questions include extended-response questions and essays (Anderson, 2003; Kishor and Othun, 1994).

Criterion-referenced and Norm-referenced assessment

Criterion-referenced assessment, typically using a criterion-referenced test, as the name implies, occurs when candidates are measured against defined and objective criteria.

Criterion-referenced assessment is often, but not always, used to establish a person's competence whether she/he can do something. The best known example of criterion-referenced assessment is the driving test, when learner drivers are measured against a range of explicit criteria such as "Not endangering other road users" (Birenbaum, 1994; Race, Brown, and Smith., 2005; Brown and Knight, 2004). According to the above mentioned sources, norm-referenced assessment, colloquially known as "grading on the curve", is

typically using a norm- referenced test, and is not measured against defined criteria. This type of assessment is relative to the student body undertaking the assessment. It is effectively a way of comparing students. The IQ test is the best known example of norm-referenced assessment. Many entrance tests to prestigious schools or universities are norm-referenced, permitting a fixed proportion of students to pass "passing" in this context means being accepted into the school or university rather than an explicit level of ability. This means that standards may vary from year to year, depending on the quality of the cohort; criterion-referenced assessment does not vary from year to year unless the criteria change.

Informal and Formal Assessment

Assessment can be either formal or informal. Formal assessment is usually a written document, such as a test, quizzes, or paper (Ramsden, 1992; Anderson, 2003). Formal assessment is given a numerical score or grade based on student performance. Whereas informal assessment does not contribute to a student's final grade. It usually occurs in a more casual manner, including observation, inventories, participation, peer and self evaluation, and discussion (Fletcher, 1995; Race et al., 2005; Brown and knight, 2004).

2.1.4 Assessment Methods

A large number of assessment methods are available for use in higher education. Those most likely to confront new university teachers are large long essay questions, short answer questions, multiple choice questions of many varieties, the assessment of practical or laboratory exercises and possibly oral questions (Shye, 1978; Anderson, 2003; Fry et al., 2004). Moreover, Fletcher (1995) and Race, Brown, and Smith (2004) listed the assessment methods as:

- Observation of performance;
- Skill tests;
- Stimulating exercises;
- Project or assignment;
- Oral questioning;
- Written examinations;
- Multiple choice questions;
- Portfolios;
- Group work;
- Presentations;
- Work-based learning;
- Dissertations and theses ; and
- Reports.

As to the above authors, choosing the right assessment methods requires the considerations of the strengths, weaknesses, and issues related to each assessment methods (Brown and Knight, 2004). They claim that some of the methods are designed to provide evidence of performance and some others provide evidence of knowledge and understanding. Hence, classroom assessments need to be various so that they can accommodate students' assessment preferences (Prakash, 2007). Therefore, the methods may be varied by setting topics in advance. Moreover, the variations, drawbacks attached to each method and fair marking, and the choice of questions and impact of examiners usually yield in inaccurate information about students' performance (Wakeford and Roberts, 1984).

The literature revealed that carefully constructed assessment activities can help determine if students are acquiring the intended learning outcomes and achieving educational goals as compared to just assigning grades. However, it is found that choosing the appropriate method is no a simple task in the assessment process.

2.1.5 Purposes of Assessment

The purpose of assessment depends on the method of teaching we employ. In "teacher centered", method of teaching assessment is mainly used to grade students' achievements and, therefore, only few dimensional tests are given to this end. In "student centered" approaches, the purpose of assessment is for ongoing feedback and multidimensional products will be employed (Tesfaye, 2007). In general, as to Race et al., (2005) and Brown and knight (2004) assessment serves:

- to guide students' improvement;
- to help students to decide which potions to choose;
- to help students to learn from their mistakes or difficulties;
- to allow students to check out how well they are developing as learners;
- to classify or grade students;
- to set standards;
- to allow students to make realistic decisions about whether they are up to the demands of a course or module;
- to determine fitness for entry to a program;
- to give us feedback on how our teaching is going on;
- to cause students to get down to some serious learning;
- to translate intended learning outcomes into reality;

- to add variety to students' learning experience;
- to help us structure our teaching and constructively align learning outcomes to assessments;
- to allow students to place themselves in the overall class picture;
- to provide statistics for the course, or for the institution;
- to lead towards a license practices; and
- to lead to appropriate qualification.

The literature revealed that there are many reasons why assessment is important in the academic practice. Moreover, it is clear that our reasons for assessment help us to identify which particular methods are best suited for our purposes as well as helping to identify who is best placed to carry out the assessment, and when and where to do it.

Assessment for Placement Purpose

Placement is considering with assessing students' entry behaviors or performances (Airasian, 1997). It tries to determine students' knowledge and skills needed to begin the planned instruction and helps to evaluate to what extent students are ready to master the objectives of the planned instruction. In order to determine students' capabilities, potentials, and readiness to a certain academic program, readiness tests, aptitude tests, and pretests on course objectives are used (Heyneman, 1980 in Kishor and Othuon, 1994).

In connection to this, Henderson (1941 in Simachew, 1987) stresses that selection procedures play a major role in the quality and productivity of university education. In many countries, different procedures are used for further education and training. In the United States for instance, the selection procedure of students to different fields of study at colleges or university level vary from college to college. Some colleges take high school

graduation as a criterion. While others screen and select more rigorously on the basis of high school marks and psychological tests (King, 1979). Likewise, in many Western universities and colleges, entrance exams are given to applicants for admission to a specific course of study. They require a prescribed pattern of courses in high school before the students can be admitted and classified in various departments (Taylor, 1962; King, 1979). In addition, applicants are asked to fill out a form giving general information about themselves particularly on their interests and experience and the application forms then be handed at departmental levels for it has its own admission requirements additional to those requirements by the university generally (Taylor, 1962).

In Ethiopian situation, allocation of students to different colleges, universities, and faculties is done at the Ministry of Education. Students' grade point average and students' choice are the procedures used to allocate into different Universities and faculties. However, the assignment of students to different departments is made at different universities. The procedures of allocating students within institutions are almost similar to the procedures used by the Ministry of Education. Students will be made to fill an application form which contains their choices, grade point average in the school leaving examination, and other requirements. And students will be classified and admitted to different fields of study based on their grade point average, choice, and quota given to each department.

Monroe (1950 in Simachew, 1987) in this regard suggests that students need to be assisted in making an intelligent choice through counseling based on data relating to his personal qualification, and prior achievements to the occupational outlets available to him, and to the cultural knowledge and values that should seek. To do so, in several universities of developed countries the student personnel has an important role in preparing students for a

successful academic career. They help students right from the beginning of students entry to the last process of placement to different occupations (Monroe, 1950 in Simachew, 1987). Besides, there are educational and vocational counseling services given to college students in order to assist them to choose occupational goals, to make suitable educational plans and to progress toward the attainment of the goals given.

From the discussions, it is pointed out that assessment can be used to select students to different fields of study. Furthermore, it is found that students placement to different fields of study requires institutional support services. This will help them get the necessary information about their potentialities and limitations, interests, and abilities as well as the nature and content of different fields of study they are going to choose.

Assessment for Feedback Purpose

Feedback is oral or written developmental advice on performance so that the recipient has a better understanding of values, standards, and criteria (Nolet and Howell, 2000). Usually feedback comes after a student has done something. It contains information that tells what a student did right or wrong. The information may also be reinforcing, instructional, and correction. The role of feedback in the learning process is to inform the student of where and how their learning and performance can be improved. Feedback on learning can come from fellow students, lecturers; staffs supporting the learning process such as demonstrators or the student themselves.

Moreover, Rowntree (1987) states that feedback or knowledge of result is the life blood of learning. It contributes directly to the process of learning. Kingsley (1970) also sated that feedback enables students to realize about their performance and also permit them for

improvement. Therefore, it is useful to give feedback as often as possible. Moreover, the same source expresses that assessment is the engine that derives learning, then the ways in which we give feedback are important in gearing and lubricating the engine so that maximum effect is achieved from the effort put in by all concerned. Nolet and Howell (2000) in their part revealed that there is always an element of nervousness about giving and receiving feedback. No matter how experienced one is the feelings associated with feedback cannot be ignored. Hence, feedback giving and receiving requires a shared intent and awareness that it may be a creative process that leads to personal development by both sides.

In connection to this, Race, Brown, and Brown (2005) and Nolet and Howell (2000) forward the following guideline:

- Having got the observed to reflect first, the observer should start with the positive points- there are always positive elements. End on positive note too.
- Focus on the behavior that can be enhanced rather than the person.
- Tailor the amount of feedback to what the observed can make use of at that time.
- Be constructive by making positive suggestions for improvement.
- Avoid making value judgments.
- Use questions to guide the discussion and encourage the observed to reflect and practice and help develop an action plan.



Assessment for Grading Purpose

A grade represents the comparisons of students' performance with either some absolute or relative standards defined by the performance of specified group. An absolute standard is characterized as percentages grading. And relative standards are letter grading, numbering, or pass- fail grading (Dessalegn, 1992). Moreover, a grade represents quality of performance with respect to either the amount of effort expended or the amount of achievement demonstrated (Dessalegn, 1992). Grades also correspond to the amount of knowledge possessed at the end of instruction or the amount of learning attributable to the instructional program. According to (Gronlund, 1995 in Dessalegn, 1992), a grading system is primarily a method of communicating measurement of achievement. It involves the use of a set of specialized symbols where meanings ought to be clearly defined and uniformly understood by all concerned bodies.

The major function of grading is to indicate as accurately as possible the extent to which students have achieved instructional objectives. Besides, grades are used for self evaluative measures and for reporting students' status to parents, future teachers, and prospective employers (Dessalegn, 1992). Furthermore, grades provide an important means of stimulating, directing, and rewarding educational efforts of students.

In order to serve the above mentioned functions, grades need to be valid. The highest grades must go to those students who have done best in achieving the objectives of instruction in a course. So a grade system needs clear specification in terms of the expected outcome so that grades allocated to students are valid and reliable indicators of student's quality. In this regard, different educators have suggested different criteria for designing a

sound and defensible grading (Airasian, 1997; Gallagher, 1998). Three criteria are common to all: Meaningfulness, explicitness, and fairness.

Meaningfulness: It means that everyone concerned understands what the grades signify.

“A good grade means that I learned something.” “A good grades means that I have worked hared.” A good grade means that I didn’t cause trouble.”

Explicitness: Explicitness means that everyone concerned understands how the teacher arrives at the grades. What information was considered? How was the information combined? The criterion of explicitness pertains to be both grading criteria and procedures.

Fairness: The key to fairness is that each student has an equal opportunity to earn a grade.

Notice that fairness doesn’t mean that each student will receive a good grade or a high grade. Rather, it is possible that any given student can receive a good grade or a bad grade for that matter. In connection to this, Mc Millan (1997) forwards the following points to be taken into consideration while grading students’ performance:

- Do everything you can to grade fairly.
- Grade students based on their achievement of important objectives.
- Inform students and parents of grading procedures at the beginning of year or semester.
- Rely on most current information.
- Use sufficient number of assessments.
- Make informal professional judgments.

Furthermore, it is also pointed out that when teachers determine a course grade by combining scores from tests, papers, demonstrations, and projects. They must give each component the proper weight in the determination of the final grade (Dessalegn, 1992).

2.2. Theories of Assessment

Educational theory and practice has paralleled man's perceptions of the physical world and what was necessary to survive within it. The Platonic vs. Socratic approaches to human learning and educational theory parallels the distinction between a pragmatic existential reality and the concept of reality as social philosophy. The industrial and agrarian man needed to think about reality in certain ways and an educational system to promulgate those philosophies. That way of thinking has led to the production model of education (Hashway, 1998).

As man moved beyond the pragmatic, where robotics and other technologies have antiquated or redefined the concept of human labor and the skills needed to survive in the emerging new order, the concept of man and how he defines his world has changed. In addition to these emerging and changing views on knowledge, reality, the relationship between society and the individual, and the purpose of education in society, new understandings have also emerged of the different purposes assessment serves (Brown and Glasner, 1999).

In the previous section of this review, it is indicated that assessment has enormous values as a tool for learning. Therefore, it needs to be known how assessment is supposed to do. To explain how this will happen, we need a theory of assessment. Different assessment purposes require different theories. Brown and Knight (2004) classified the assessment

theories into two. These are the theory of summative assessment and the theory of formative assessment. The theory of summative assessment says that assessment represents a valid and reliable sampling of student achievement which leads to a meaningful statement of what they know, understand and can do. On the other hand, formative assessment is much more complicated and tentative. It depends upon assumptions about the student, the task and tutor. These assumptions clarify the type of learning environment which we should try to construct in order to make formative learning powerful. As to the same source, the implications of formative assessment theory are:

- Students need to have academic counselors who periodically meet them, review progress across the wide program, identify areas for further attention, while having in mind possible career paths and relevant personal circumstances
- Teaching has to be given greater priority, and with it training for teaching which is in harmony with formative assessment.

Furthermore, Grundy (1987 in Mckeller, 2002) classified the assessment perspectives into four: the technical, practical, emancipator, and post structural perspectives. The technical, which is also sometimes called the traditional, positivist or scientific view of the modern era draws on scientific concepts and beliefs, and applies these to social settings, such as educational and sociological contexts. Here the view of reality is that there are universal immutable truths and absolute facts, a single reality 'out there' which is the same for all people.

This view holds that knowledge is objective and value-free, i.e. it is neutral in that it does not have any significance or power beyond itself. Knowledge in this technical perspective consists of theories grounded in empirical observation and experience of the world. This conception is based on the premise that all have equal opportunity, so life is fair. Knowledge is regarded as fixed and measurable, and in a meritocratic society it is fair that each will be assessed, and will achieve according to his/her ability.

This view regards knowledge as an end product, which can be measured, as well as predicted and therefore controlled (Grundy, 1987 in McKeller, 2002). As the purpose of education in this perspective is to prepare the youth to contribute to the well-being of the society as a whole, the purpose of assessment is to determine the degree, to which the end product has been achieved, and to grade, rank and select according to achievement.

The focus of assessment is thus on the products of the learning - a limited range of relatively easy-to-measure competencies, such as discrete facts, content knowledge and basic skills. In this traditional perspective assessment methods - usually tests and examinations - are formal, externally imposed and summative. The student is regarded as a recipient of pre-existing knowledge transmitted by the expert. Student learning focuses on memorizing information in order to give it back under pressure in a year-end three-hour examination. The perspective encourages surface learning by letting students memorize without understanding and learn by rote memory (Ramsden, 1992).

The second perspective, the practical or hermeneutic perspective, emerged due to the limitations of the technical perspective and is largely reaction to the conceptions of the technical perspective. In the practical perspective, reality is not regarded as 'out there' but is

rather seen as individually constructed, and shared within an historical, social and political context. Humans are regarded as active creators of knowledge rather than the passive recipients envisaged in the technical perspective. In this perspective, students must actively construct their own understanding and deep learning is more likely to occur (Biggs and Entwistle, 1987 in Mckeller, 2002).

As to the same source, in the practical perspective there are multiple constructions of reality as each individual's understanding will be subjective and unique, colored and shaped by the individual's social, historical and personal contexts. Since objectivity is not possible, and educational practices are not value-free, individual assumptions and values need to be made explicit. This would lead to a two-directional flow of information between students and teachers, as students must construct their own understanding, aided by the teacher.

In the practical perspective, the purpose of action is to achieve harmony through mutual understanding of the institutional requirements, and appropriate action to achieve this is the aim (Connor, 1987). In such a view action that would be considered appropriate would include institutional provision of support structures to help students in need to meet institutional standards in assessment practices (Johns, 1990 in Mckeller, 2002). The assumption is that all have equal opportunity and life is fair if those who need it are given extra help in order to succeed.

In the practical/hermeneutic perspective, the role of the institution as the gatekeeper of assessment standards and practices is accepted without questioning, and is not brought under scrutiny. Students must be helped to achieve institutionally pre-determined standards. Since institutional practices are not questioned, traditional assessment practices

are likely to be retained with the result that while a proportion of student learning is likely to be deep learning, meeting the institutional assessment requirements will encourage students to engage in strategic learning, a combination of a certain amount of deep learning, with whatever surface learning is required for the particular context in which that student is placed (Johns, 1990 in McKeller, 2002).

In spite of the extra support provided in different forms, some students usually those who do not share the cultural capital of the institution continue to fail. This leads us to consider the third perspective, Critical Theory, which addresses itself to educational questions of vital concern in the on-going quest to make life fair. Such questions include searching for the reasons why some students persistently fail, the reasons for some being unmotivated or more difficult, the reasons for educational institutions being organized the way they are (Gibson, 1986 in McKeller, 2002).

Critical Theorists recognize a need to liberate people from what they regard as falsely held beliefs that society operates for the good of all. The focus of critical theorists is thus on the struggles of the oppressed, such as ethnic minorities, women and the working class. Critical theory contests the arbitrary use of power to maintain the status quo. Its intention is liberatory / emancipatory, and it has the practical intent of criticizing and subverting domination in all its forms, with an explicit interest in the abolition of social injustice (Jack, 2002). Critical theorists believe that diversity needs to be recognized, accommodated and celebrated by the system. They argue that there are no deficient students that institutions need to establish support services. However, institutions or educational systems must adapt themselves to accommodate the needs of the increasingly diverse student body.

Finally, the fourth perspective called post structural perspective sees everything as individual and temporal rather than as controlled by structures or forces larger than the individuals involved, and it prefers to look at what can be seen at one place and in anyone particular moment in time(Macleod,2002) . Post-structuralists do not reject the belief to which hermeneutics and critical theory subscribe, that everything occurs within the conditions of social relations. Nor do post-structuralists reject the moral, ethical and political commitments underlying social enquiry. For post-structuralists nothing is seen as independent of the conditions of the social relations in which they occur; rather everything is contextually, historically and socially embedded (Popkewitz, 1995). In this sense post-structuralism needs to be seen as existing on a continuum with hermeneutics and critical theory rather than in reaction or opposition to it.

From the above discussions, it is noticed that educational assessment practices have deep roots into the above mentioned perspectives. It is also observed that each of the four perspectives is not mutually exclusive; rather they are found to reinforce and help each other. Moreover, it is observed that the above mentioned perspectives will have direct impact on the assessment practices that lead to different types and attitudes towards student learning. Hence, familiarity with the rationale behind each assessment practice gives us a clearer understanding of what we are trying to achieve and, given our current practice, whether or not we are likely to succeed. Furthermore, understanding of the theory enables us to develop and justify how we assess our teachings and students' learning.

2.3 Issues in Students Assessment

Because assessment is linked to decision making, and because an increasingly number of decisions made about students have serious, longer term consequences, teachers must take assessment seriously. In this section, I will try to present three issues assessors should be aware of and must address in the assessment processes: (a) influences on assessment, (b) quality of assessment information, and (c) ethics of assessment.

2.3.1 Influences on Assessment

When planning assessment, assessors must be aware of various influences on the assessment process. All assessors can be influenced by a number of factors and it is helpful to be aware of the most common influences so that you can select to avoid. The following should be used as a general guidance (Fletcher, 1991a; Fletcher, 1991b).

A sense of Direction: This issue relates with what evidences an assessor is looking for that will lead him to accurate judgments.

An illusion of validity: This speaks about the validity of the evidences that the required standards are being met. Moreover, evidence can be of high quality but have nothing what so ever to do with the particular area of competence which you are assessing affects the assessments validity.

Stereotyping: This in one of the influences in student assessment. This reflects itself in the assessment process by categorizing people

Halo and Horns Effects: A very common source of inaccurate judgment is due to preconceived ideas about a person's performance. These ideas may be based on the fact that you actual like the person concerned -they have a halo, or that you don't like them they have horns - or that they usually do good or excellent work

Hawthorn Effect: people act differently when they know they are being assessed. Hence, this will affect the assessment process. This is called Hawthorn effect.

Contrast Effect: This is related with the effect of comparing or contrasting of how an individual performs in relation to the group of candidates.

2.3.2 Quality of Assessment information

Depending upon the assessment policies of an individual institution or department, effective assessment will truthfully reflect some combination of an individual's abilities, achievement, skills and potential. Ideally, it will permit predictions about future behavior. To be effective, assessment needs to reflect program content, valid, reliable, and fair (Wakeford and Southgate, 1992; Race et al., 2005)

Assessment needs to reflect course or program content accurately both at a general and detailed level. At a general level, the nature of assessment reflects the general objectives or intended outcomes of a teaching course or program. For example, a course designed to teach problem solving abilities, not knowledge recall; a course emphasizing cooperative activities and personal presentation skills would probably need using testing techniques other than written ones. At a more detailed level, the questions or items used within an assessment component need to be created according to some form of blue print.

In addition, effective assessment procedures need to be valid or appropriate. Validity refers to assessment in which the assessment and individual being assessed are clear on what is to be assessed and what evidence will be generated (Fletcher, 1991a). Moreover, validity of an assessment is seen as having these three aspects: face validity, construct validity, and impact validity. Face validity is to do with the appropriateness of the content of a test for audience and level use. Construct validity concerns with the nature of the broader

constructed tests- for example, recall of knowledge, demonstration of team works skills, oratorical persuasive powers. A successful blueprint test should have good face and construct validity. Impact validity is about the impact which an assessment procedure has upon the behavior of the learners, and is closely related to students' perceptions of what is rewarded by the examination.

Reliability relates to the consistency of an assessment. An assessment system is only of real value if assessors in different locations would make the same judgment about the same candidate based on the same evidence. A reliable assessment is one which consistently achieves the same results with the same or similar cohort of students. However, there are many factors that affect reliability of assessments. These include inadequate test length, nature of assessment methods, inconsistency of individual examiners-prior intra examiner reliability, inconsistencies across examiners- prior inter examiner reliability, inadequacies of individual test item used, ambiguous questions, too many options within a question paper, vague marking instructions, and poorly trained markers. A good assessment is valid and reliable. Note that an assessment may be reliable but invalid or unreliable and invalid, but an assessment can not be unreliable and valid. In practice, an assessment is rarely completely valid or entirely reliable.

Although validity and reliability are the main measures of an assessment, there are other considerations such as practicality which relates to the feasibility of the assessment, fairness which relates to its application across various cohorts - such as males and females and authenticity which relates to its realism, transparency which relates with assessment is open and clear to anyone who takes time to look at, sufficiency which relates with the

amount of evidences obtained to arrive at confident judgments, and objectivity which relates with the scores assigned by different people to students' responses to items included in assessment methods are highly similar.

2.3.3 The Ethics of Assessment

Ethics matters pertain to all types of assessment by virtue of the fact that information about individual students is collected. In fact, because teaching is partly amoral enterprise, ethics pertain to virtually every aspect of classroom life (Anderson, 2003). Hence, ethical standards for teachers' relations with their students are required. Accordingly, some of them which can be applicable to formal assessment are:

First, strive to obtain information that is highly valid, reliable, and objective before making important decisions that affect students. For example, a semester grade should be based on a student's performance on assessment tasks that are clearly linked with important learning objectives. Similarly, reflecting a student for additional testing or for placement in a particular program requires that assessment information is obtained in multiple situations and on several occasions.

Second, recognize the limitations inherent in making decisions based on information obtain from assessments. Despite all the efforts to secure the most valid, reliable, and objective information, errors occur and mistakes are made. Hence, multiple sources of information generally provide a more defensible basis for making important decisions about students. Corroboration, consistency, and concern for consequences are extremely useful in good decision making.

Third, don't use information obtained assessments to demean or ridicule students. Although this should go with out saying, it is important to keep in mind. In attempt to motivate a student to do better in the future, a teacher may make statements that can be constructed as demeaning by the students.

2.4 Research Findings

In recent years, student assessment has become more and more important in education. This is happened for two reasons. The first and the most significant have been the concerns of governments to introduce ways of 'measuring' educational out puts. And the second reason is for the growth of values of assessment in informing teaching and learning (Black& William, 1998). Thus, several universities and governments have collected assessment practices in their countries (Baldwin, 1993; Turner, 1993; Flint, 1998; Struyven et al., 2005).

In this part of the review, the researches on students' perceptions about assessment are reviewed. Students' views on the assessment practices in higher learning institutions are presented. Next, the effects of assessment formats and students' perceptions about different assessment formats are presented, and finally, barriers to effective assessment in higher learning are investigated.

2.4.1 Students' Views

Baldwin (1993) did a research about assessment in Lancaster University in 1993 on third year students. His research questions were: why do we have examinations? Why is the assessment formula as it? What skills am I being assessed on? The findings showed that students feel that assessment items to be about the right length, but there was criticism of

the bunching of items: like London buses, coursework pieces all come together. Moreover, the same was said about the examinations. Twenty two percent said that assessment is relevant to the goals of the course. 67 percent said that it was 'more or less' relevant and 11 percent denied any relevance to course goals. Yet one the most common comments was that course objectives were not always clear, that criteria for assessment were unclear, and there was a sense in open –ended responses that assessment was a game of giving tutors what they wanted and that tutors differed with the result that assessment was not so much about demonstrating commonly held competence but getting the measure of individual assessors.

Unsurprisingly, 87 percent said that marking varied from tutor to tutor. Six percent of students were clear about the marking criteria, 44 percent were vaguely aware of the criteria to be used and 50 percent were unclear. Exams were almost universally disliked; characterized as exercises in cramming of an invalid sort, scarcely, appropriate to a program of professional education. Their summative nature was criticized.

Turner (1993) interviewed some 20 undergraduates on the nature and quality of the feedback which they got from tutors. The findings confirm that written feedback to students were of negative quality. Furthermore, students' views were found to differ in what they want by way of feedback: not too much, said some; more, said others. On the other hand, HERQA (2006), Girma (2001), Shimeles (2001), and Daniel (2004), in their study in Ethiopian HEIs showed that measurement evaluation exercises in many programs are poor at least in terms of giving feedback and in motivating further learning.

A study made in Australia on tertiary students' perceptions of the fairness of educational assessment showed that there is a level of acceptance, or tolerance, by students that certain aspects of assessment are unfair. Moreover, students see their learning as being controlled by assessment items. Lecturers are viewed as being in a powerful position generally the discussions they make about and grades are discussed by students but not challenged (Flint, 1998). On the hand, Markos (2000) in his study indicated that informing students about their response to learning tasks and examinations become the tradition of Ethiopian University instructors. As the result, students viewed the practice positively.

In our case, previous research findings indicated that the types of exams given to the students are found to encourage students to memorize facts. As the result, students were found to stay long in reciting and recalling notes given by their instructors so that they can give it back to their teachers what they call it the "golden words" of the instructors (Abiyot, 2001; Daniel, 2004; Esayas, 2001; Shimeles, 2001; Solomon, 2001; Tekalign, 2001 Tarekegn, 2001). Besides, Daniel (2004) found that the grading system at colleges and university level became a serious source of worry for quite many students. Far more, Abiyot (2001) investigated the pedagogical challenges among fresh instructors in Mekell University and found that they lack to prepare pedagogically sound questions for their students. Hence, the source deduced that questions were challenging, difficult, and ambiguous. Moreover, Tarekegn (2001) showed that test items carry disproportional weights. Lastly, Esayas (2001) indicated that exams given to students are the worst. As the result, exam practices are universally disliked practices by the students.

Finally, studies on grading practices of Ethiopian HEIs showed that the grading system become a serious worry for majority of the students (Daniel, 2004; Girma, 2001; HERQA, 2006). And students complain about the fairness and appropriateness of grading of their performance in many different courses. Moreover, Girma (2001) indicated that grading of students performance is not done on a basis of established academic rules and regulation. Hence, teachers used the fixed scale rule which doesn't utilize statistical manipulations for further analysis.

According to the above research findings, it is clearly indicated that students do want to be assessed fairly and broadly; they want prompt feedback; and students do have different views to the practice.

2.4.2 The Effects of Assessment Formats

Assessment formats has been the focus of numerous studies (Struyven et al., 2005; Birenbaum, 1994). Different formats were compared with respect to various domains and from different perspectives. Response format comparisons addressed theoretical considerations of the cognitive processing requirements of the different formats; empirical investigations concerning the psychometric properties of the various formats, examinations of interaction effects of factors, such as gender, race/ethnicity, test anxiety, test wise ness, and examinees' attitudes toward the formats; and examination of the effects of format expectancy on test preparation and test performance (Birenbaum, 1994). The main findings with respect to the format effects are summarized as follows.

Studies comparing take home exams with conventional classroom tests indicated that scores on knowledge items were significantly higher in take home exams compared with conventional closed – and open- book tests (Zoller and Ben Chaim, 1988). And take home

exams were also found to reduce test anxiety. Other studies compared scores on two formats: multiple-choice and constructed responses. And it is found that scores on multiple choices to be higher than scores on constructed responses (Kumar, Rabisky, and Padey, 1979). Others studies indicated a higher mean score for the multiple choice than for constructed response format (Birenbaum 1994). Hence, it is impossible to arrive at a conclusion about the effects of these two formats on scores.

Wood (1991) noted that when multiple choice formats were introduced into examination, boys pass rate nearly always improves noticeably relative to girls' pass rate. Furthermore, Linn et al. (1987) reported that girls were reluctant to guess on multiple choice questions than boys. Similarly, Grady's (1987) findings indicated that women were more likely to leave items blank than men. In addition, (Fry et al., 2004) indicated that women and men students were found to differ in their test scores. Women students got higher scores in essay questions than men. But scored lower in multiple choice questions than men. Hence, it is concluded that the existing evidence about gender differences in assessment format is inconclusive (Traub and MacRury, 1990). However, the studies indicated that assessment formats have impacts on students' achievements. Therefore, it in order to get best out of the assessment, it is advisable to use different assessment methods. Moreover, Prakash (2007) and Nevo (1985) argued that students learning preferences affect the assessment methods, therefore, learners learning preferences and styles need to be taken into consideration so that assessment formats end with valid and justified results.

As to the assessment techniques in Ethiopian HEIs, Daniel (2004) showed that their diversity and availability vary from program to program. Besides, the same source indicated that assignments in the form of projects and term papers were found in very

limited programs. As the resulted, the evaluation practice in the HEIs become entirely summative and there by students' motivation for further learning is affected due to the absence of feedback to the students. Besides, Shimeles (2001), in his study showed that students performance is determined by single or two methods. On the other hand, Yusuf (2001) argued that even though exams can provide important information about student learning status, yet, sound decisions about a student requires more accurate and relevant evidences about the learning process.

2.4.3 Barriers to Effective Assessment Practices in Higher Education

Gullickson (2000) conducted a study to design student evaluation standards identified the importance of standards in student assessments as to provide guidance to the students; serving their educational achievement; and the information needs of others. The source also pointed out that standards in student assessment need to help education professions recognize and put into practice the important principles, theories, and issues in assessment. However, it is found that inadequate teacher preparation, changing demands, professional disagreement, inadequate technical support and lack of shared language; inadequate assessment policy, transitory interventions, and ineffective instructions were found to affect the assessment practices.

Besides, Rust (2004), notes that reasons for not adopting new assessment practices within HEIs include:

- Lack of belief in the need for change on the part of the lecturer, the students, or the institution.
- Inertia.
- Concerns about resources, including time.

- The feeling that any change will be too difficult to implement.
- Regulations blocking the change.

A study made by Shimels (2001), HERQA (2006), and Reda (2001) on the problems of student evaluation in the Ethiopian universities identified them as follows:

- Absence of continuous evaluation;
- Bias in evaluation by instructors on the basis of:

The group they teach

Sex

Religion

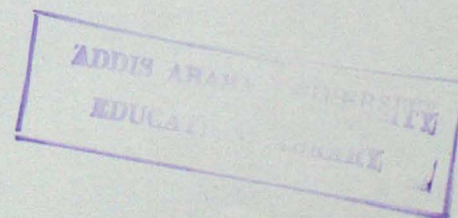
Ethnicity and others

- Inadequate planning
- Absence of feedback
- Not to provide the weight of questions on the examination papers
- Absence of validity and reliability.
- Lack of accountability and transparency.
- Lack of time

Furthermore, Daniel (2004) in his research indicated that lack of the necessary knowledge in designing, administering, and interpreting tests in the HEIs made the difficulty in ensuring good learning and desired decisions pertaining to certification. Furthermore, Yusuf (2001) explained that the absence or poor planning of a test resulted in a disproportionately heavy weighting of test items that only seek for factual recall. As to Tarekegn (2001), the other problem observed in HEIs evaluation and measurement practices is the lack of systematic and transparent marking procedures. Even though it is

stated that in the academic rules and regulations of the university that normative procedures should be followed in evaluating student competence, in practice only very few instructors found to follow the normative procedures. The same source further indicated that the problems observed in the assessment procedures are due to the lack of the know how of using the procedures or due to the influence of previous traditions or due to the ambiguity of the previous academic rules and regulations which may include that a grade below 50% is F irrespective of the peer performance.

Moreover, Abiyot (2001) found that the problems to effective assessment practices in some HEIs lie on the absence of pedagogical trainings by some staff members. And Girma (2001) argued that the problems in the assessment practices in HEIs mainly resulted in the lack of very established rules and regulations at faculty level that could be used in departments. Also Girma (2001) observed that lack of training in educational or psychological measurement on the side of the teachers was found to affect the assessment practices. On the other hand, studies indicated that it is ideal to expect institutions that effectively practices assessment for both improvement and accountability, yet certain measures can reduce the problems related to assessment practices. Accordingly, pedagogical training on assessment, an independent complaint system, establishing exam committee, establishing an assessment officer or committee, use of assessment policy that can ensure quality assessment practices in HEIs using transparency and accountability modes like double marking, coding of exams, and anonymous marking and clear marking , and timely feedback to students can reduce the problems related to assessment activities in HEIs(Brown and Knight, 2004; HERQA, 2006; Daniel, 2004; Shimeles, 2001, Tarekegn, 2001; Girma, 2001; MoE, 1994).



CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

This section presents the research designs, description of the setting, the sampling techniques and sample size, the procedures employed in the development of the instruments of data collection, administration and scoring, and the methods used to analyze the data.

3.1 Research Methods

The major aim of this study was to assess Dilla University students' attitudes towards educational assessment practices. The research questions required both numerical and non numerical data. To this effect, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology (mixed approach) was employed with the assertion that they can help to understand and describe better the existing attitudes, opinions, and experiences. Furthermore, it is well-known that when the administration of a quantitative data gathering instrument is followed by a small number of interviews or discussions (qualitative methods), the researcher will obtain deeper explanations of evidences or required data (Creswell, 2003; Koul, 2006; Kerlinger, 1986).

3.2 Participants and Setting of the Study

The subjects of the study were second and third year students from different faculties in the DU in the academic year of 2008/2009. The setting was selected due to the experience of the researcher as a student and a teacher in the university since his admission to this Institute. For this reason, the researcher chose the university by considering the collaboration he will get from the students in giving accurate and genuine information which is useful for the success of the study. DU is one of the government universities found

in the SNNPRS. It was established in 1996 as College of Teacher Education. Since then the Institute underwent different developmental stages. In 2006, the Institute has got a status of university. According to the registrar office of the university, the number of students who are registered in the first semester of 2008/2009 academic year is 2957. Of which 516(17.3%) are female students. And the remaining 2441(82.5%) are male students. The university has five different faculties, namely, Faculty of Teacher Education, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Agricultural and Rural development, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Humanities, and Faculty of Business and Economics. Moreover, there are 32 different departments in the university.

3.3. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The sampling procedure for the study was divided into two parts. First, there was stratification based on two strata: faculty and study year as stratification factors to carry out the survey questionnaire to generate data. However, first year students were not sampled because they would not have had much assessment experience in the university to draw on and are, therefore, not likely to be reliable respondents. Hence, sampling criteria are that subjects should be either second year or third year university students from the different faculties in the university. As the result, only three of the five faculties were found to have both second and third year students in their departments. So, the researcher believed that taking all the faculties as the subjects for the study would bring a significant difference within the samples. Thus, the two faculties were omitted from the sampling procedure.

As the result, approximately, 12% of second and third year students in each selected faculty were sampled. And the total number of students who participated in the study was 343 which are acceptable according to sample size for research activities (Krejcie and

Morgan, 1970). Finally, the selection of the students was done using simple random sampling technique.

Table 1. Distribution of population and samples of the study

Faculty	Year			
	II		III	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Teacher Education	893	107	859	103
Applied Sciences	241	30	203	24
Business and Economics	358	43	302	36
Total	1492	180	1364	163

Moreover, the study conducted two different focused group discussions with eight and seven members of students drawn from the population respectively. The students were selected purposively from the population. They included students of different fields of study, year, achievement, and sex.

3.4. Instruments of Data Collection

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. A questionnaire was used as a quantitative data gathering instrument (Appendix A) and focus group discussion was employed to complement and triangulate data gathered by the questionnaire (Appendix D).

The Questionnaire

Questionnaire was developed to collect data for this study. The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part of the questionnaire was intended to gather background information about respondents. The background information was divided into three, namely, students' field of study(Faculty), sex of the respondent, respondents' years , and students' achievement(CGPA 2.0-2.99 ,pass, CGPA 3.00-4.00, achievers, and CGPA less than 2.00, warning) in the university. The second part of the questionnaire dealt with

the assessment techniques. It was intended to find out the approaches used to assess students learning and development. On the other hand, the third part presented the assessment factors that are used to measure students' general attitudes towards the assessment practices. The assessment factors were prepared and drawn from review of literatures and researcher's personal experience about assessment. And they have direct relation with educational assessment practices.

In the third part of the questionnaire, it was tried to find out the extent to which students agree or disagree with the current assessment practices in order that inferences about their views can be made. To achieve this, a five point Likert Scale a continuum of "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), was adapted. The number of items in each factor was six. The scales involved a number of statements that help students express their degree of agreement/disagreement in the five Likert Scale. Moreover, in order the instrument resulted in accurate measure of the case, negative items had been put into and scored in opposite directions (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Finally, the total scores were calculated by adding up the respondents' answers to all items of the given attitudinal instrument. High total scores reflect agreement towards the practices (Baron and Grazian, 1911 in Henok, 2007). It should be noted that the study assumed students' attitudes and its components of the practice as a dependent variable for mathematical analysis and the independent variables were education system (study year and academic stream), gender, and achievement. The five assessment factors included in the opinionnaire were assessment related to procedures employed to allocate the students into different departments, factors related to quality and quantity of feedback, assessment tasks, exam related issues, and issues related to grading of students' competence.

The Focus Group Discussion

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, qualitative method of inquiry: the focus group discussion was employed to collect data complementary to the survey data gathered by the main instrument: the survey questionnaire. This method was employed because of its advantage of allowing the researcher to collect verbal data about students' feelings, views, opinions, and solutions to the issue under investigation from a large number of subjects in a relatively "easy to access" fashion (Frey & Fontana, 1993). And the focus group discussions were held with two purposefully formed groups from second and third year students. The group members were seven and eight respectively. Both groups were asked to respond to the three open ended questions which were related to the main research questions of the study (Appendix D). Each question had been made to prompt students to reflect their feelings, views, and opinions towards the case under investigation freely.

Ethical considerations have been crucial throughout the research and its presentation. Since the research used qualitative data that contain very personal experiences in or perceptions of sensitive issues, special attention has been given to informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and to minimizing harm but maximizing benefits (Borg & Gall, 1989). In the other words, the participants were informed of research purpose, procedures, the use of data, the possible risks and benefits of their learning experience, particularly in relation to feelings, were strictly kept anonymous; and the researcher – subject relationship was handled with great sensitivity.

3.5 Procedures of Item Development and Validation

The items included in the questionnaire were mainly based on the review of related literatures and researcher's personal experience about educational assessment practices.

The items were initially put in a five clusters and were forty. The selection of the relevant items and validation of the instrument for the main research work involved expert opinions, pilot test, and statistical methods of item analysis.

Expert Opinion

In this study, two experts were involved to validate the instrument. The two experts were lectures in Dilla University. They have MA in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The roles of the experts were to comment on construction, relevance, and appropriateness of each item based on their knowledge and to rate them into a three point Likert Scale ranging from highly (3), moderately(2), and poorly(1) relevant items according to the topic under investigation. Based on the overall assessment made by the two experts, from forty items only thirty items were retained for further screening and validation.

Pilot Test and Item Analysis

The purpose of the pilots test was to generate data for the statistical item analysis procedure. The items used for the pilot tests were thirty questions retained from the judgments made by the experts. The first test was about the readability of the items. In this case, the items were made to assume a five point Likert Scale: Very Easy to understand (5), Easy (4), Not clear (3), Difficult to Understand (2), and Very difficult to understand (1). The instrument was tried at randomly selected twenty students from the non selected faculties in the university.

Accordingly, the readability of the items were calculated and found to be between 65% and 95%. Therefore, this gave the researcher to proceed with the instrument for the determination of the internal consistency of the instrument. As a result, the instrument was again prepared in a five point Likert Scale point: Strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided

(3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) and randomly distributed to the aforementioned students. The reliability coefficient of the attitudinal scale was computed and found to be Cronbach alpha of 0.70 which was good for further data collection activities (Pawar, 1998). Finally, after the various methods of screening and validations, the instrument was considered satisfactory to be used for the main study.

3.6 Administration of the Instrument

The administration of the main instrument took place at Dilla University. And the subjects of the study were second and third year students of the university during the 2008/09 academic year. The questionnaire was administered with the help of two assistants. They were employees in the students' cafeteria. They were given orientations about the purpose of and the directions to be followed during the administration of the questionnaire. Moreover, the researcher gave additional instructions as to how to respond to each question to the students. A total of 338 students returned the questionnaire ($338/3443 \times 100 = 98.5\%$ rate of return). However, only 303 of questionnaires were found to be valid and reliable responses which represented a response rate of 90% ready for further analysis. Though the return rate was adequate, the missed questionnaires due to inconsistent responses by the respondents and missed items from the respondents may affect the results. Since, the participants were from different demographic backgrounds.

The scoring of the data gathered was made following the usual procedures employed in Likert Scales. The five Likert Scales were given the scale values in such away that strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree are 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Moreover, negatively formulated items were reversed in coding. The responses were given an ID code numbered from 001 to 303. Accordingly, data sheet entry using excel 2007

worksheet was done. And the composite score for each section and the survey as whole were then summed up.

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

This study was a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Therefore, descriptive statistics of the responses using percentages were employed. Furthermore, inferential statistics of the parametric t- test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to examine students' attitudes towards the practices due to gender, academic ability, study year, and faculty of the respondents using SPSS15. Unless noted otherwise all tests were made at $\alpha = 0.05$ levels. Analysis of the qualitative data was carried out for the purpose of meeting the objectives of the study and to compare and contrast with the findings obtained from the quantitative data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter summarizes data presentation, research findings, and discussion of the results. And it also presents and analyses the facts and figures obtained through data collection. The findings are presented sequentially. First, the assessment techniques are identified and described. Then, students' experiences of assessment practices, which are sub divided into five categories, are determined. Later, students' perceptions and evaluations of the practices are investigated and explored.

4.1 Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 303 students from different field of studies in DU completed and returned the questionnaire and a response of 90% was achieved. Profiles of the respondents showed that the students came from three faculties covering different departments. 186 students from Faculty of Teacher Education, 70 students from Faculty of Business and Economics, and 47 students from Faculty of Natural Sciences. Moreover, the respondents were both second and third year students. And students' years of study was categorized into two: 154 second year students and 149 third year students. Besides, 31 students were female participants and 272 were male students.

Finally, the researcher divided students' achievement into three: CGPA 2.0-2.99 pass, CGPA 3.00-4.00 achievers, and less than 2.00 warning. The data showed that 264 students were under the category of pass and 39 students were found to be achievers. However, the number of students indicated warning was only two. Thus, the researcher believed that this number would prevent him from reaching at solid decisions about the case and are omitted

from the study. Even so, the above profiles of the students indicate that survey has succeeded in sampling cross-sections of students' population.

4.2 Teachers' Practice and Assessment Methods

Eleven different types of assessment techniques were identified from various reviews of related literature on the topic under investigation and from researcher's experiences to assessment practices in the university. And students were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale about their assessment experience. Table 2 shows the frequency of responses (as percentage) to each method in the assessment techniques section of the questionnaire.

The results indicated that students perceived examinations (72.4%) as the commonest method used in the university to assess their competences which was followed by presentations (55.2%) and group work (65.5%) respectively. Third, students expressed portfolios (48.3%), practical (41.4%), reports (44.8%), Observation (34.8), and papers/reading tasks (48.3%) respectively as rarely practiced methods in the university. Lastly, projects (41.4%), oral questions (34.5%), and quizzes (55.2%) respectively were found to be uncommon in the assessment practices.

Table 2: Frequency of use (as percentage) of assessment techniques

Methods	Options				Frequency tendency
	1	2	3	4	
Exams	0	3.4	24.2	72.4	Often
Presentations	20.7	13.8	55.2	10.3	Sometimes
Group work	13.8	6.9	65.5	13.5	sometimes
Portfolios	10.3	48.3	37.9	3.5	Seldom
Practical	10.4	41.4	24.1	24.1	Seldom
Reports	17.2	44.8	24.2	13.8	Seldom
Projects	41.4	31	20.7	6.9	Not at all
Paper	17.2	48.3	27.6	6.9	Seldom
Oral	34.5	27.6	24.1	13.8	Not at all
Quizzes	55.2	20.7	17.2	6.9	Not at all
Observation	17.2	34.8	29.2	18.8	Seldom

1 Not at all; 2 seldom; 3 sometimes; 4 often

Further analysis from the group discussions held with the students revealed that their assessment experiences in the university showed with no exception that they all reported examinations: mid and final exams as the most frequently employed tools in their university years as far as their assessment experience is concerned. The following are typical responses prompted by the enquiry: 'methods of assessment?' A student explained the practice as:

"We think everybody experienced the same, mid and final exams. And we had exams of different types, essays, multiple choices, problems depending on our departments." (Main Campus, FDG1, 17/03/09).

Despite the strengths and weaknesses of exams, informants expressed their experiences differently. A student described the practices as:

"We worked so hard and suffered so much for the exams. In classes, we are told to solve as many questions as possible before we sit for the exams. Hence, we usually spend much of our time in search of questions that we think will appear in our exams both from different books and worksheets given by our instructors. As the result, we developed problem solving mechanisms." (Main Campus, FDG1, 17/03/09).

Moreover, the students stated that the exam dominated system made them to understand lots of theoretical thoughts. One of the participants explained this experience as:

"We can say the exams were good at helping us to understand theories of different subjects." (Main Campus, FDG1, 17/03/09).

On the other hand, the focused group discussions revealed that students perceived the exams as only suitable for specific group of students. A participant reported this as:

"In our side, we see the exams fit to "Chatt (Kat) chewers". Because these students can easily recite the notes with deep concentration and write good answers. As the result, they usually get better grades than others who don't chew." (New Campus, FDG2, 21/03/09).

Although, most of the participants explained that exams were the most frequently used techniques in the university to assess students' competence, discussions also showed that

there were additional techniques used in some other departments. Thus, participants explained the practices as helpful in developing their skills. A student explained this as:

"We had a few number of presentations and group works. And we had the chance to develop our speaking, reading, writing, and communicative skills." (Main Campus, FDG1, 17/03/ 09 and New Campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

Despite this, there was a consensus among all participants that the assessment *practice* should be diversified. A participant explained that:

"We think there should be various techniques in our departments. As a result, our knowledge will be practical." (New campus, FDG2, 21/03/09).

4.3 Students' Attitudes towards the practices

This section will try to answer basic research questions 2 and 3. First, general attitudes towards the practices using descriptive statistics will be presented. Next, attitudinal differences in the overall practices will be investigated using parametric inferential statistics: one way ANOVA and independent t- test.

Department Admission Procedures and Students' Attitudes

Knowledge and perceptions held by students on the department admission procedures play a significant role in determining students' success. And selection procedures also play a significant role in the quality and efficiency of universities. Therefore, current mechanisms employed to collect evidences about the capability of students for different departments in the university and the opportunity given for the students in determining their potentials to succeed will be investigated. Table 3 is a summary of data for each item in the first category (students' attitudes towards the department admission procedures in the university)

Table3: Frequency of responses (as percentage) to each option of department Admission procedures

Item: Paraphrase of question	Option				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Gained sufficient introduction	97(32)	141(46.6)	27(8.9)	27(8.9)	11(3.6)
Process was not accurate.	84(27.8)	68(22.4)	61(20.1)	52(17.2)	38(12.5)
Compatible with my interest.	51(16.8)	43(14.2)	116(38.3)	41(13.5)	52(17.2)
Department selection contains enough information.	57(18.8)	39(12.9)	106(35)	64(21.1)	37(12.2)
There should be a separate body	79(26.1)	92(30.4)	48(15.8)	43(14.2)	41(13.5)
Received appropriate information.	92(30.4)	100(33)	57(18.8)	16(5.3)	38(12.5)

SA Strongly agree; A Agree; U undecided; D Disagree; SD Strongly Disagree

Results indicated that majority of the students 32% and 46.6% students strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the adequacy of information about each department prior to department selection. And also 30.4% and 33% the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they have received appropriate information about each department, however, 26.1% and 30.4% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively about the need of a separate body that can provide support to the students in the department placement procedures. Contrary to these efforts made by the university, 27.8% and 22.4% of the students reported that they strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the process was not accurate. Finally, 38.3% and 35% of the students selected the undecided option to the adequacy of information in the department selection form and the compatibility of department placement procedures with their interest respectively.

Moreover, results from the focused group discussions revealed that students had series of introduction for each department. However, students believed that the orientations were not handled carefully.

A student explained the impact of this to his choice:

"I think we have received ample information about the departments. However, I found all the promises and speeches made there too exaggerated. So, it is better to introduce the departments in a very simple manner so that ever one will not be frustrated if the reality is not up to his expectations."(Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

In spite of the adequacy of the orientation, a student explained his experience about the practices:

"I was attentively following all the introductions about each department; however, no one talked about the minor and major subjects. Hence, due to lack of information about this, I am now learning in the field I never dreamed for in my school years. I know this experience is not only mine. I knew others who did this." (Main Campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

Although there were adequate orientations about each department as revealed by the discussion, students questioned about the roles of the orientations in the admission process.

A student explained this:

"I agree with my friends about the adequacy of the department orientations before we are allocated to different departments. But, I didn't see their roles in determining our choices. Because it is a common practice in our university to see students admitted to different departments which were their least liked choices. Therefore, what is the use of the orientations?" (Main Campus, FGD2, 21/03/09)

The Assessment tasks and Students' Attitudes

Perceptions on assessment tasks play an important role on students learning and motivation. Hence, knowledge about this is so important. Table 4 is a summary of percentage for each item in the second category (students' attitudes towards the assessment activities in Dilla University). Results showed that 18.8% and 37.3% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that assessment tasks need to take students learning styles into consideration. And 24% and 34.7% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that assessment tasks were reasonably assigned among students.

Table 4: Frequency of responses (as percentage) to each option of assessment activities

Item: Paraphrase of question	Option				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Tasks considered appropriate to course contents.	25(8.3)	81(26.7)	116(38.3)	49(16.2)	32(10.5)
Tasks considering learning styles.	57(18.8)	113(37.3)	62(20.5)	41(13.5)	30(9.9)
Tasks were not clear	67(22.1)	30(9.9)	117(38.6)	52(17.2)	37(12.2)
Tasks emphasized important parts.	63(20.8)	46(15.2)	133(43.9)	43(14.2)	18(5.9)
Tasks were assigned reasonably.	73(24)	105(34.7)	46(15.2)	59(19.5)	20(6.6)
Tasks were not very challenging.	17(5.6)	81(26.7)	70(23.1)	65(21.5)	70(23.1)

The other results in the second category indicated that 38.3%, 38.6%, and 43.9% of the students selected the undecided option that tasks were appropriate to course contents, lack proper instruction, and the emphasis of the important points by the activities respectively. Finally, analysis indicated that majority of the students 23.1% and 21.5% of the strongly disagree or disagreed respectively that activities were not challenging.

Furthermore, focused group discussions revealed that students hold different attitudes (perceptions) about the activities used to assess their competence in the university. And students explained the practice differently. One of the participants expressed his experience:

"We put a lot of energy and did the assessment tasks. But, they are ignored by some of our lecturers. It is a common practice to see our grades without considering some of the tasks done with a lot of time. So, it was a very disappointing experience to me to see my assignments not corrected and unmarked properly."(New Campus, FGD2, 21/03/09)

Others perceived that assessment tasks were very limited. A student reported this:

"The assessment tasks employed on most of our courses have been inadequate to satisfy our needs and help us to reach our potentials."(Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

Exams and Students' Attitudes

Tests and examinations are designed and constructed instruments to measure students' abilities and skills. In relation to this, table 5 is a summary of percentage for each item in the third category (students' attitudes towards the exams practices in Dilla University). Data showed that 25.1% and 32% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that exams were mainly requiring memorization. And also 17.2% and 27.7% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that examinations lack appropriate level of difficulty. The other results in the third category showed that 16.3% and 21.1% of the students selected strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that exams helped them to understand the courses. Moreover, 29.4% and 19.5% of the students selected strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that exams were good at contents coverage. Besides, 20.4% and 17.8% of the students strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that exams measured their true performance. Finally, 28.7% and 14.2% of the students selected strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that they considered exams as a further opportunity for their learning.

Table 5: Frequency of responses (as percentage) to each option of Examination practices

Item: Paraphrase of question	Option				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Examinations were of memorization.	76(25.1)	97(32)	41(13.5)	54(17.8)	35(11.6)
Exams didn't have appropriate level of difficulty.	57(17.2)	84(27.7)	73(24.1)	27(8.9)	62(20.5)
I understood courses due exams.	68(22.4)	38(12.5)	84(27.7)	64(21.1)	49(16.3)
Exams were good at content wise.	52(17.2)	49(16.2)	54(17.7)	59(19.5)	89(29.4)
Exams measure my performance.	54(17.8)	46(15.2)	87(28.8)	54(17.8)	62(20.4)
Considered exams opportunity for learning.	33(10.9)	59(19.5)	81(26.7)	43(14.2)	87(28.7)

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In addition, discussions showed that students had a sense of dissatisfaction on exams practices in the university. And the responses given by the students indicated that exams lacked planning and marking criteria. In this regard, a student explained his experience about the practices:

"What I can say about my exam experience in the university is just the use of tricks as to how to mislead students in the examinations using ambiguous terms, confusing words, misleading instructions, and disordered questions." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

On the other hand, the discussions revealed that students had concerns about the marking criteria in the exam practices. As the result, students reported that they couldn't predict their results.

A student expressed this experience as:

"As to me and as to most of my friends, the most serious issue with the exams is the assessment criteria used to correct our essays. What ever confident you are with what you wrote, no one is certain about the results." (New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09)

Moreover, a student explained his experience as:

"As far as the assessment criteria are concerned, the same is true in our cases. When problems are given in the exams, we are not sure about what we are going to get from our efforts we put to solve the problems. Most often, our instructors expect us to follow the steps they designed to correct the papers. Thus, if you missed anyone of the steps used to correct the problems by our instructors, you lose it. No compromises." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

Practices to Feedback and Students' Attitudes

Feedback is identified as a vital element in the learning and assessment process. It is one of the crucial parts of effective assessment practice. It determined learners' academic success. Hence, the practices of feedback to students need to be investigated. Table 6 is a summary of percentage for each item in the fourth category (students' attitudes towards feedback in

the university). Results indicated that 25.1% and 20.5% of the students strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that they got continuous feedback about their progresses. And also 24% and 22.1% of the students strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that they have received adequate guidance. However, 43.9% and 34.7% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they would learn better if received more feedback. And 39.3% of the students selected the undecided option that feedback helped them to understanding courses.

Finally, analysis indicated that 29.4% and 31.4% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that marks were explained and 22.4% and 17.8% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that feedback to students were criticisms.

Table 6: Frequency of responses (as percentage) to each option of Feedback practices

Item: Paraphrase of question	Option				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Got continuous feedback.	46(15.2)	67(22.1)	52(17.2)	62(20.5)	76(25.1)
Didn't get enough guidance.	73(24)	67(22.1)	54(17.8)	55(18.3)	54(17.8)
Would learn more If feedback given	133(43.9)	105(34.7)	38(12.5)	22(7.3)	5(1.6)
Feedback helped me much.	43(14.2)	25(8.3)	119(39.3)	70(23)	46(15.2)
Got enough explanation about performance.	89(29.4)	95(31.4)	43(14.2)	38(12.5)	38(12.5)
Criticized than corrected.	68(22.4)	54(17.8)	57(18.9)	43(14.2)	81(26.8)

And also focused group discussions about feedbacks to the students revealed that the practice vary among teachers. One of the students explained this as:

"In our department, many of our instructors encourage us to talk about anything we want to get support from them to the extent we can challenge the comments they gave. On the other hand, some of our teachers don't take time to discuss our problems. Simply teaching and going."(New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09)

On the other hand, students perceived that they never get feedback from the practice. A student expresses this as:

"We never get feedback about our progresses except grades of our performance." (New Campus, FGD2, 21/03/09)

Finally, a student explained reasons for the discrepancies as:

"I think the difference lays on the relationships between the students and instructors. If good relationship is there between us and our instructors, then we can go for feedback about our progress. Otherwise, we don't do." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

Grading Practices and Students' Attitudes

Grades are indicators of important educational achievements. They are used for self evaluative measures and for reporting students' status to parents, future teachers, and prospective employers. Therefore, the knowledge about the perceptions of students about this practice in higher education is so important. Table 7 is a summary of percentage for each item in the fifth category (students' attitudes towards grading practices in the university). Data indicated that 18.8% and 21.5% of students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that comments given to justify grades were adequate .On the other hand, 22.4% and 27.4% of the students strongly agreed and agreed respectively that there should be clear criteria in the grading system. Moreover, 26.1% and 25.1% the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that grading system was biased and 24.1% and 33% of the students indicated that they experienced grades to vary greatly across teachers respectively. Finally, results showed that 25.7% and 17.2% of the students strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that grading of their work was fair and 22.4% and 17.8% of the students strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that grades of the university can be considered as good measures of learning.

Table 7: Frequency of responses (as percentage) to each option of grading practices

Item: Paraphrase of question	Option				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Received detailed comments about grades.	57(18.8)	65(21.5)	65(21.5)	54(17.8)	62(20.5)
Grades should be predictable.	68(22.4)	83(27.4)	65(21.5)	46(15.2)	41(13.5)
Grading seemed fair and appropriate.	62(20.5)	49(16.1)	62(20.5)	52(17.2)	78(25.7)
Grading system is biased.	79(26.1)	76(25.1)	70(23)	35(11.6)	43(14.2)
Grades greatly vary among teachers.	73(24.1)	100(33)	54(17.8)	57(18.8)	19(6.3)
Grades are good learning measures.	40(13.2)	65(21.5)	76(25.1)	54(17.8)	68(22.4)

Moreover, focused group discussions revealed that students perceived the grading system differently. Some of the students explained that grades don't show their learning. A student expressed this:

"I don't think grades can indicate our learning. Because they are only telling the amount of our theoretical knowledge. But, the other aspects of education: attitudes and skills are not indicated in our grading system. So, grades can't be indicators of overall achievements and learning." (New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

Others are concerned with the ways how grades are allotted to learners. One of the participants explained this:

"As far as I know, grades are unfairly allotted to the students. There are cases in which we can get good grades with lesser marks. And there are also instances we received lower grades with relatively better marks. It is very inconsistent practice." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

Attitudinal Differences in the overall Practices

The second target of this study was studying the effects of the independent variables. In this study, there were four independent variables; students' field of study, year of study, sex, and achievement. And to address the case, the following basic research question was raised:

- ❖ Will there be a significance difference in subpopulation (Female/ Male, second/ third year, between faculties, and among students based on their achievements) on the total attitude scores?

A t- test comparing male and female students' attitudes towards assessment practices in the university, Table 8 revealed no significant difference between male and female students.

Table 8 *t*- test comparing male and female students on their attitudes towards assessment practices in Dilla University.

Sex	N	M	SD	DF	t	P
Male	272	85.2941	9.19178	301	.364	NS
Female	31	85.9355	10.16837			

An investigating the relationship between students' attitudes towards assessment practices in the university and filed of study, Table 9 a one- way analysis of variance revealed no significant differences on students' attitudes towards the assessment practices according to respondents' faculty.

Table 9 *One- way analysis of variance results for comparing students' attitudes according to the faculties*

Sources of Variance	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean square	F ratio	P
Between group	2	305.259	152.629	1.781	NS
Within group	300	25704.530	85.682		
Total	302	26009.789			

On the other hand, the data on students' overall assessment attitudes in the university according to respondents' years in the university, Table 10 revealed significant differences between second and third year students' attitudes towards the practices in the university. And it is statistically significant in favor of second year students.

Table 10 *t- test comparing second and third year students on their attitudes towards assessment practices in Dilla University.*

Year	N	M	SD	DF	t
Second	154	90.6429	6.78587	301	12.343 *
Third	149	79.8993	8.31130		

*P<.05

Finally, T-test used to compare students' attitudes towards assessment practices in Dilla University as a result of their achievement, Table11 revealed no significant difference between pass and achievers.

Table 11 *t- test comparing pass and achievers students on their attitudes towards assessment practices in Dilla University.*

Year	N	M	SD	DF	t	P
Pass	264	85.4015	8.93480	301	.204	NS
Achievers	39	85.0769	11.48313			

4.4 Barriers to effective assessment practices in the university

Focused group discussions were conducted with seven and eight students selected purposefully from different disciplines and study years. The main purposes of the discussions were to get into students' observations, reflections, and opinions about the practices. The discussions were held on March 17, 2009 at 1:30 to 3:20 PM in the main campus at physics laboratory and on March 21, 2009 from 2:00 to 3:30 PM in the new campus at a lecture hall respectively. Students were asked to discuss on the challenges or problems in the current assessment activities they have experienced in their departments in

particular and in the university in general. Discussions revealed that students had several concerns in the practices: Time management problems, limited number of assessment techniques, large classes, and lack of pedagogical and psychometric training, lack of working guidelines, lack of transparency and accountability, biases, and lack of follow ups have been mentioned as the barriers to the current assessment practices.

Analysis showed that students perceived time management problems in the teaching learning practices negatively affected the assessment practices. A student explained this as:

"Usually in the beginning of a semester there are delays. Therefore, at the end of the semester many assignments from different courses were given at the same time. Hence, we lack time to prepare good works." (Main campus, FDG1, 17/03/09).

Besides, a student made clear the impact of time wastages on the assessment practices as:

"Because of time wastages in the teaching and learning activities, most often we faced questions not covered in the classes and this has also affected our grades." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

Lastly, a student expressed the impact of lack of proper time management on the assessment activities as:

"Almost in the entire course outlines, we always read different activities to be done in the semester, however, due to lack of time we don't perform most of the activities planned in the course outlines. For this reason, we often take time to recite notes so that we can get good marks in the exams." (Main campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

As to the impact of the limited assessment techniques in the current assessment practices in the university, a student put its reflections as:

"When I joined in this university, I was thinking that there will be different activities. Actually, not true. I didn't get my expectations. Instead, we become exam oriented students. Hence, we often spend time in search of previous exam papers. Because we know that most examination questions repeat every year." (Main Campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

The third barrier to the current assessment practices pointed out by the students was the lack of pedagogical and psychometric trainings by some of the academics. As the result, students believed that assessment tasks were not of standardized. A student explained this:

"In the measurement and evaluation courses, we learnt that activities should have different level of difficulties so that a range of students would have the opportunity to try them, nevertheless, in our cases most of the questions have been very limited, very few , of one type, all challenging, and with big marks."(New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

The fourth barrier to the current assessment practices was the impact of large classes. Accordingly, they felt that they couldn't get good marks in their classroom activities.

A participant reported the impact of large cases in the assessment practices as:

"In our case, due to large number of students in a very small class rooms, it was very difficult to discuss freely on the issues raised by our teachers. For this reason, we don't get good marks for our participations." (New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

The fifth problem in the assessment practices as reported by the students was the absence of working guidelines in the assessment practice. As the result, they felt that they could not identify the grading system. As to this, a student pointed out that:

"No clear and agreed working guidelines in the assessment activities. Especially, this is very visibly clear in the grading of our performances. Neither fixed nor norm criterion scheme." (New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

Furthermore, a participant reported the impact of absence of working guidelines in the assessment activities as:

"We know that every department has grading committee. Yet, grades are unfair. Sometimes, grades start from C' . We also observed biases in the grading of our performance. Sometimes, teachers think that if a student got good grades in one of the semesters, they try to fix their grading scales on that student." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

The sixth barrier to the practice as identified by the students was lack of transparency and accountability. And one of the students expresses this:

"We know there are mistakes in the assessment practices. Some are intentional and others are simple mistakes in the grading system. But there is no way to find them. Because the system doesn't allow us to do so. We feel threaten to ask the problems. No one wants to take risks of complaining about his grades. So, I think this should be addressed if the assessment system is going to be changed." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

Lastly, the focused group discussions revealed that lack of follow-ups did put its negative impact on the assessment activities. As the result, students perceived that they are denied of guidance.

To this point, a student explained that:

"We don't receive timely and continuous feedback about our progresses. Therefore, we couldn't identify our weaknesses and strengths." (New campus, FGD2, 21/03/09).

On the other hand, the discussions revealed that students think that getting advices from their teachers is only for weak students. Here, a student noted that:

"I didn't go for help from my teachers. Because, I don't have questions to ask. So no need of going there." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09)

To the question "what should be done?" the focused group discussions revealed that the problems observed in the assessment practices can be reduced using certain strategies. Hence, the students mentioned the following strategies that they think will reduce the problems observed in the assessment practices. These are providing training to teachers; establishing an office that can check and control the assessment practices, and use of fixed scale grading system.

Analysis indicated that students believe that pedagogical trainings to some of the instructors will solve the problems observed in the assessment activities. A student noted that:

"In the teaching profession, the knowledge of pedagogy and psychology of learners is so vital. So, in order to have quality assessment practices in our university, trainings of such professional courses to some of our teachers are so critical." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

Another point raised by the students was the establishment of an office that can check and control the practice. A student elaborated this as:

"I think there must be a separate body both at the national and university levels that can check, regulate, and control the assessment activities. At the central level, we expect this body to prepare guidelines, trainings, workshops, and check the proper implementations of the university assessment practices." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

Moreover, a student emphasized the need of this body as:

"After our graduations, we are going to compete for different posts with other university students all over the country. Hence, we need the government to take in charge of this activity by establishing this body. We expect this body to assess the practices of each universities and disclose its findings about how fair they were; how effective they were; and so on. We believe this would help each university to see how others are handling the case. And we also believe that a uniform working principles as to how to assess students will prevail in each university. As the result, every graduate will have almost equal credentials to compete for the posts." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

As to the need of this office at the university level, a participant explained that:

"I think the university needs to establish this office so that quality assessment practices will exist in the university." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

Lastly, the possible solution suggested by the students was the introduction of fixed scale grading system into the assessment practices. A student explained how this grading system will solve the problems as:

"To be fair, we prefer fixed scale to the existing grading practices. Because, we believe this grading system will help us to predicate our grades a head of time. Moreover, we believe this practice will reduce the abnormal competitions among us. However, marking requirements should vary depending on field of studies." (Main campus, FGD1, 17/03/09).

4.5 Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' attitudes and perceptions of assessment practices in Dilla University. In doing so, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. Quantitative data were gathered through researcher' made questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated for content analysis by two instructors who are involved in the field of Educational Psychology at DU. The questionnaire was also piloted for its reliability.

The questionnaire had three parts. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with the frequency and diversity of the assessment techniques. The remaining part of the questionnaire which is containing 30 items related to altitudinal questions about the practice was further divided into five categories. The first category tried to address questions related to department admission procedures in the university. Here, the accuracy and validity of the procedures was tested using six items on a five point Likert scale. The second category of the questionnaire dealt with the assessment tasks employed in different field of study. The third category dealt with the exams. For this purpose six items were used. The fourth category dealt with the quality and quantity of feedback to students.

And the fifth category dealt with the perceptions about grading practices. In this case, a five point Likert scale containing six items about the fairness and educational values of grades were used.

Moreover, qualitative data were collected using focused group discussions. For this purpose, three questions were raised. The first questions dealt with the kind of assessment methods. The second question used for the discussions was about students' evaluations of the assessment techniques for learning. And the third question was about the problems in the practices and possible solutions.

In relation to this, four basic research questions were posed to this study. Therefore, this part discusses the findings in relation to the research questions.

Teachers' Practices and Assessment Methods

With respect to the first research question posed in this study, Table 2 indicated that most students in Dilla University expressed that examination: mid and final exams are the most often employed techniques in assessing their competence in the university. Though, a number of students reported that they sometimes experienced group work and presentations as techniques of assessments in their departments. Furthermore, results indicated that portfolios, practical, reports, observations, and paper works were used rarely in the university. Lastly, most of the students reported that projects, oral questions, and quizzes are uncommon in most of the departments. This showed that summative evaluation is the most common exercise in the university. To some extent, the results are similar with previous studies (Shimeles, 2000; Daniel, 2004). In which assessment techniques are concerned, most university students' performance is determined by a single or two assessment methods (Shimeles, 2000). Moreover, Daniel (2004) in his study showed that

assessment techniques in the forms of projects and term papers are limited in a quite many programs.

On the other hand, works from the previous research findings indicated that multiple assessment methods and quality assessment practices are not clearly and explicitly determined. And it is argumentative. In relation to this, Yusuf (2001) argued that even though exams can provide important information about a student regarding his learning status, however, sound decisions about a student requires more accurate and relevant evidences about the learning process.

On the other hand, Brown and Knight (2004) stated that there is no link between methods of assessment and the quality of assessment. However, multiple methods are necessary to assess multiple talents for multiple audiences. Hence, the researcher forwards this issue to be tested by educational researchers.

As to the reasons for the absence of multiple methods in the university, the explanations may be due to the view held by different bodies that multiple assessment techniques are not seen as a criterion of quality in higher education. Or the problems observed within the assessment techniques. Where multiple methods produce different messages about the same student (Brown and Knight, 2004; Wakeford and Roberts, 1984).

Though argumentative is, discussions held with the students revealed that most of the students demand various assessment techniques to be employed in the assessment practice in the university. This means that students hold positive attitudes towards assessment methods. Therefore, the researcher recommends various assessment methods to be used in the practices as revealed by the students. Furthermore, the researcher advises the fitness for

purpose as to the use of multiple methods for teachers. Therefore, when employing these methods it is necessary for departments to match assessment methods to goals as a basic exercise in checking the validity of what they ask students to do (Brown and Knight, 2004).

Attitudes towards the Assessment Practices

In this section, all the findings related to basic research questions 2 and 3 are discussed. First, the general attitudes towards the practices with the help of descriptive statistics are discussed. Next, overall attitudinal differences on the assessment practices due to field of study, sex of respondent, years in university, and achievement in the university are discussed.

Department admission policy has been the main discussion areas among teachers and those concerned with student admission and allocation. In relation to this, students' attitudes towards the department admission procedures in Dilla university indicated that majority of the students agreed that admission into each department in the university was done on adequate introduction and appropriate information about each department. However, students believed that procedures were not accurate and they are uncertain about the compatibility of the procedures with students' interest.

Moreover, results indicated that students agreed the need for a separate body to render extra support for students in the admission process and to oversight the process. According to Simachew (1987), procedures of allocating the students within the institutions depend on the philosophy of education followed in a particular country. However, students need to be assisted and informed in making intelligent decisions through student personnel. Furthermore, the source indicated that in order placement processes to be accurate,

information related to the capacity of accommodation, regulations, requirements, and future prospects should be addressed.

Concerning students' attitudes towards the assessment tasks, Table 4 indicates that majority of the students agreed to the use of students learning styles into the assessment activities. According to Prakash (2007), learning preferences affect the assessment practices. Moreover, Nevo (1985) claim that assessment preferences are considerably important and valuable source of evidences, therefore, attention to students' attitudes to, perceptions of and preferences for assessment is desirable. Furthermore, results indicated that students perceived that assessment tasks are challenging. This result is to some extent similar with previous study for Mekelle University students (Abiyot, 2001). One explanation for this may be lack of planning in the assessment tasks. Another, may be tasks were beyond the scope of the course or unrelated to what courses require.

As to students' attitudes towards exams practices in the university, results indicate that majority of students perceived the exams lack appropriate level of difficulty, require memorization, and lack appropriate content coverage. Hence, they don't consider them as opportunity for future learning. These findings have been reported in a variety of studies (Shimeles, 2001; Esayas, 2001; Abiyot, 2001; Solomon, 2001; Tarekegn, 2001; Tekalign, 2001). The results showed that exams were almost universally disliked. The explanations for this failure may be due to lack of the necessary knowledge in designing tests. Another may be lack of planning. So, efforts should be exerted to ensure the validity and quality of exams in the university. The researcher believes that establishing exam committee at each department can solve the problems related to exam problems.

With regards to students' attitudes towards feedback practices in the university, results indicated that majority of the students agreed that marks were explained by their instructors. This result is similar with previous study (Markos, 2000). Accordingly, informing students about their response to learning tasks and examinations appear to become the tradition of university instructors. On the other hand, results indicated that majority of the student believed that they don't receive continuous feedback and guidance about what to do. These findings have also been reported by previous studies (Daniel, 2004; HERQA, 2006; Girma, 2001). And these findings were also reported for Jimma students (Shimeles, 2001). However, according to educational psychologists feedbacks to learners improve learning and academic success (Kingsley, 1970). On the other hand, the results indicated that majority of the students agreed that they would learn better if more feedback were given. Hence, the absence of effective feedback to students in Dilla University may be due to large classes as mentioned by the students. Another may be lack of proper time management in the university as indicated by the student. Or lack of knowledge as to how to make effective feedback to students.

Finally, students' attitudes towards grading practices in Dilla University indicated that majority of the students perceived the practices negatively. As the result, majority of the student reported that grading of their work is unfair and inappropriate. And also majority of the students agreed that the grading practice is biased and vary greatly across teachers in the university. Therefore, they don't consider grades of the university as measures of good learning. In stead, they demand clear criteria to be used in the grading system. These findings have been reported by previous studies (Daniel, 2004; HERQA, 2006; Girma, 2001; Tarekegn, 2001). This means that Dilla university grading system was a serious

concern for the majority of the participants. Therefore, efforts should be made to make the grading system fair, transparent, and uniform across teachers.

Further analysis indicated that no significant differences between subjects according to field of study, sex of respondent, and achievement in the university towards the assessment practices. These results could be explained by the fact that the students have very similar views and attitudes towards the assessment practices in the university under investigation. Another explanation may be that all of the faculties in the university are similar in many aspects, particularly their assessment techniques, approaches and their practices. On the other hand, results showed a significant difference in students' attitudes towards assessment practices in the university according to students' year in the university. And third year students perceived the practices negatively than second year students. One explanation of these findings may be that students with longer experience in the university are adapted or fade up with the methods employed in the assessment system in the university. Another explanation may be that after 3 years of experience to the practices, students get exhausted and don't expect any change to happen to improve or change the assessment system. Hence, they may consider it business as usual and showed adaptation to it.

Barriers to the Assessment Practices

The main problems perceived related to effective assessment practices in Dilla University as revealed by the discussions were lack of transparency and accountability, time management problems, biases, lack of working guidelines, lack of pedagogical training, limited number of assessment tasks, and lack of follow-ups.

Lack of transparency and accountability in the assessment practices was one of the problems mentioned by the students. This is understandable because no assessment system can be effective without openness and understanding among the stake holders in the practices. This result has been similar with reported for Jimma University, and Debub University (Tarekegn, 2001; HERQA, 2006). The sources indicated that one of the biggest drawbacks to establishing effective assessment practices lays in the fact that assessment practices are not done on the basis of transparent and accountable modes.

Furthermore, Terekegn (2001) in his finding indicated that lack of systematic and transparent marking procedures were the most serious problems in the university assessment practices. As to the absence of these elements in the assessment practices, the researcher thinks that it may be due to lack of established and working academic rules and regulations related to assessment practices (Girma, 2001). Therefore, the researcher recommends the preparation and proper implementation of assessment policies by the university.

The results of the present study also revealed that other important issues related to the problems in the assessment practices in Dilla university is lack of fellow ups, limited assessment tasks, lack of pedagogical training, and large classless. These issues are recognizable from the point view that effective assessment requires the above mentioned issues. The results are similar with research findings reported by previous studies (Daniel, 2004, HERQA, 2006; Markos, 2000; Shimeles, 2001; Girma, 2001).

Finally, focused group discussions revealed that lack of proper time management, biases, and lack of working guidelines in the assessment practices have been found to affect the

assessment practices in the university. Again these issues are understandable because no assessment can be effective without proper use of time and assessment policies. Because assessment processes are time consuming involving students' in lengthy assessment activities. Moreover, Rust (2004) indicated that concerns about time and resources are one of the barriers in assessment practices. However, HERQA (2006) and Shimeles (2001) claim that lack of time in the assessment practices is due to time mismanagement in the teaching and learning processes. This explains why most students in the present study reported that "time lags" in the beginning of semesters contributed negative impacts on their results.

And also the focused group discussions showed that lack of working guidelines as to how to run the assessment practices in the DU were identified as one of the barriers to the assessment practices. It is sound to consider this case in the point view that effective assessment practices demand the use of guidelines in the assessment activities.

The result is also similar with previous researches (HERQA, 2006; Tarekegn, 2001). Moreover, Gullickson (2000) indicated that lack of shared language in the assessment systems can impede assessment practices. Furthermore, the discussions revealed that biases were one of the barriers to assessment practices in Dilla University. And the results indicated that assessment is done on the basis of labeling students according to their previous results. According to Fletcher (1991a) and Fletcher (1992b), halo and horn effects are the common problems that influence assessment practices.

On the other hand, discussions revealed that students believed that most of the problems observed in the assessment practices can be solved with certain interventions. According to

them, pedagogical training to some of the instructors can solve the problems observed in the assessment practices. Daniel (2004) in his research also indicated that pedagogical training can solve higher education measurement and evaluation practices.

Another important point raised by the students as to how to solve the problems observed in the practices in Dilla University was the establishment of separate and independent bodies both at the national and university levels that can check, control, and monitor evaluation practices. This means that students perceived assessment practices as a national and local concern. Actually, to some extent this result was mentioned for Debub University (HERQA, 2006). In order to ensure quality assessment practices in the university certain measures are necessary including a complaint system that is speedy and independent to control the practices (HERQA, 2006).

Lastly, students forwarded the introduction and use of fixed or criterion referenced assessment that can be used to solve the problems in the assessment activities. Moreover, the researcher believes that assessment is a fundamental to teaching. Therefore, trying to get the teaching right without tackling assessment seriously is an exercise of futility. Hence, the barriers observed in the assessment practices in Dilla University can be carefully dealt within that context. According to the present study exams and grading practices were found at the heart of the problems. Therefore, change in assessment should be directed towards the improvement of those practices.

For this reason, more emphasis needs to be placed on criterion- referenced assessment and quality control procedures through the development of assessment policy, assessment officers and administrative support to establish quality assessment standards in the

university. Therefore, university needs to put more effort in its interventions to improve the exams and grading practices. It is also important for teachers to be aware of the important of assessment tasks and feedback to students learning. So, timely, short, and continuous feedback may be helpful. Moreover, the need for adapting assessment to students' characteristics as well as to the particular purpose of course content may be useful.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

5.1 SUMMARY

This study was intended to investigate DU students' attitudes towards assessment practices in the University. In order to achieve the intended objectives of the study, the following basic research questions were raised:

- ❖ What kind of assessment methods does the university use in assessing students' competence?
- ❖ What are the attitudes of students towards the assessment practices?
- ❖ Are there any significant differences in attitudes of students towards the assessment practices due to gender, academic ability, year of study, and faculty of the respondents?
- ❖ What are the perceived challenges to effective assessment practices and the possible solutions to the challenges?

And the major findings of the study are summarized as follows:

- ❖ Findings showed that examinations were the most often employed techniques to assess students in DU. However, majority of the students want to be assessed broadly.
- ❖ Majority of the student strongly agreed that department placement procedures employed in the university were not accurate. Therefore, students want a separate office that can run the process and render support in the placement process.

- ❖ Quite many numbers of respondents were not sure about the assessment activities used to assess students about the emphasis of important course contents into the activities. However, majority of the students responded that tasks were challenging. And want the consideration of students' learning preferences and learning styles into the assessment activities.
- ❖ The respondents' evaluations of exams practices in Dilla University were negative. Hence, students don't consider exams as a further opportunity for learning. However, students want exams to be valid.
- ❖ Majority of the students believed that practice of feedback to the student is ineffective. And want prompt feedback about their progress.
- ❖ Majority of the students' evaluations and perceptions of grading practices in Dilla University were negative. As the result, students don't consider grades of the university indicators for good learning. However, students reported that they want to be assessed fairly and appropriately.
- ❖ The study also showed that assessment practices are students live concerns in the University. Hence, they identified a quite number of problems that affect the practice negatively. And they claim that unless the problems to ineffective assessment practices are solved, there will not be quality teaching and learning in the University.
- ❖ Finally, the study showed that respondents' attitudes and perceptions of the assessment practices in Dilla University vary according to respondents' year in the University. As the result, third year students perceived the practices negatively than second year students.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the researcher examined the attitudes and perceptions of Dilla university students towards the assessment practices and the factors that affect the assessment practices in the university. For this purpose, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaire and focused group discussions. And four basic research questions were posed into the study that is related to educational assessment in general and assessment practices in the university in particular. The first question deals with the frequency and types of assessment methods in the university. And results showed that Dilla university students have been assessed on assessment system that is featured as exam-oriented system. Though, the students reported that group work and presentations have sometimes been used to assess students in the university.

Though, there is a wide consensus about the merits of exams, there is still a long way to realize and make use of continuous assessment system in the university. And also it draws attention that assessment strategies or techniques, forms, and tools must be matched to purposes and must be conducted according to establishing quality standards.

The second basic research question was dealing with students' general attitudes and perceptions of assessment practices in the university. The results show that students seemed to have both negative and positive attitudes towards the current assessment practices in the university. Students tended to have moderately positive attitudes towards department placement procedures employed to select students into different departments in the university. This is clearly indicated that students reported that placement into different departments were done on adequate introduction and appropriate information about each department. On the other hand, students tended to have negative attitudes towards exams,

feedbacks, and grading practices in the university. Hence, it was clearly evident that students believed that the exams couldn't measure their true performance, lack appropriate level of difficulty, require memorization, and couldn't consider them as further opportunity for learning. And also students believed that feedbacks to the students are not adequate and continuous. Lastly, students agreed that grading practices greatly vary across instructors, are unfair and biased, and lack transparency and accountability. For this reason, they don't consider grades of the university as measures of good learning.

Overall, the findings suggest the presence of acute problems in the assessment practices in Dilla University. Lack of pedagogical training, lack of proper time management, limited assessment methods, biases, lack of transparency and accountability, and lack of working guidelines in the assessment practices have been the causes to ineffective assessment practices in the university. Despite the small but significant attitudinal differences among students according to years of the respondent in the university, the results indicate more similarities than differences in students' attitudes towards the assessment practices in the university across the students. Thus, measures to improve the practice should be directed towards ensuring quality control procedures.

Therefore, assessment policy, criterion referenced assessment, and diversification of assessment methods were some of the measures that the University needs to take into consideration in order to ensure quality assessment practices in the university. Finally, the researcher believes that comparative research works need to be done across the universities so that detail analysis about the case can be made.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are forwarded. And the recommendations proposed hereunder are mainly based on the findings of the researcher.

- The majority of the students in this study showed negative attitudes towards the practices. Therefore, the focus should be towards improving the assessment practices in the university. This could be done through the development of assessment policy, hiring assessment officers, and academic counselors.
- The majority of the students believed that assessment practices should be both a national and local concerns. Hence, the focus should be establishing uniform working principles across the universities. This could be done through the use of comparative researches on the issue of assessment in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutes by Ministry of Education. This effort will help to identify the differences, similarities, weaknesses, and strengths of each university on its assessment practices and be able the MoE prepare common assessment guidelines throughout the country.
- Majority of the students in this study indicated that lack of pedagogical training by some of the academics negatively impacted the assessment practices in Dilla University. Therefore, the focus should be staff development in the areas of assessment. This could be done with the use of short term training by Faculty of Education in the university.
- The majority of students also reported that biases were one of the barriers to effective assessment practices. Therefore, the focus should be solving these

problems. This could be done by each department with the use of anonymous marking system, double checking, and complaint system.

- Another problem mentioned by the students was lack of multiple assessment methods in the university. Therefore, the focus should be changing this practice. This could be done by each department that course outlines are prepared and worked out using multiple assessment methods.
- The researcher believes that an intensive research on Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions students' assessment preferences is necessary. This could be done by HERQA using assessment preferences inventory produced by educational psychologists.
- Finally, the study revealed that examinations practices were the worst experience reported by the students. Therefore, attention should be given to ensure the quality and appropriateness of exams. This could be done by the use of exam committee in each department that can check the validity, quality, and appropriateness of weights given to each item in the examinations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A -Final Questionnaire for Students

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

University Assessment Practices Questionnaire

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is designed to gather data about students' attitudes and teachers' practices of assessment in the university. As a respondent to this study, your genuine contribution greatly helps to the achievement of the objectives of the investigation. Please feel free to indicate your true experience about the case under investigation at your university. Be sure that your responses will be kept confidential. Kindly respond to all items on this instrument according to the instructions provided for each part of the questionnaire.

Please note the following definitions:

Department admission/selection procedures: This subscale focuses on how a student feels about the selection/placement procedures used to allocate students into different fields of studies (Departments) in the University.

Feedback/Advising practices: This subscale deals the quantity and quality of feedbacks to the students. This focuses on your attitudes towards the comments and suggestions given to you by your instructors.

Exams: This subscale deals with students attitudes towards exams. This focuses on how you feel with the existing examination systems in your university.

Assessment tasks/ Activities: This subscale focuses on one's attitudes towards the assessment tasks: group work, assignments, fieldworks, etc. used to assess students competences. It also addresses how you feel about the practice of assessing the assessment tasks.

Grading practices: It deals with the practices of assigning grades to the students. It also addresses how one feels about the grading system of the university.

Part I. Background Information

Faculty _____

Year _____

Sex _____

Achievement (CGPA): 2-2.99 _____
 1.5-1.99 _____
 3.0-4.0 _____

Part II. Assessment Methods (Tools)

1. Which kinds of the following assessment method(s) have you often experienced in your department? Please encircle the numbers according to their occurrence at your department.

Key: NA= Not at all
 SL= Seldom/rarely
 ST= Sometimes
 OF= Often

Methods	Options			
	NA	SL	ST	OF
Exams	1	2	3	4
Presentations	1	2	3	4
Group work	1	2	3	4
Portfolios	1	2	3	4
Practical	1	2	3	4
Reports	1	2	3	4
Projects	1	2	3	4
Paper	1	2	3	4
Oral	1	2	3	4
Quizzes	1	2	3	4
Observation	1	2	3	4
Others				

Part III. Attitude Questions

Direction: Indicate your degree of AGREEMENT or DISAGREEMENT to each item.

Please encircle the numbers depending on your attitude to each item.

Key- SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

U= Undecided/Uncertain

D= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

Sr	Questions	Choices/Options				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
A	Items related to Department Selection Procedures					
1	Before the placement into different departments, I gained sufficient introduction for each department.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I believe the department placement process was not accurate enough.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I feel the department placement was compatible with my interests.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I found the department selection form contains enough information that helps me to select my preferences.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I think there should be a separate body that helps students gets enough support for department selection.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel I have received appropriate information to select a department	5	4	3	2	1
B	Related to Assessment tasks/ Activities					
1	I feel the assessment tasks were appropriate to course contents.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I expect the assessment tasks to be given based on students' learning preferences.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I observed the assessment activities don't give very clear instructions about what I am expected to do.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I think the assessments tasks were emphasizing the important parts of the courses.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I believe the assessment activities are assigned reasonably.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel the assessment tasks are not very challenging.	5	4	3	2	1
C	Related to Examinations Practices					
1	I feel preparing for the examinations were mainly a matter of memorizing.	5	4	3	2	1
2	In my side, the exams that I took have not appropriate difficulty level.	5	4	3	2	1

3	I think I understand things better as a result of the exams.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I feel good in the exams content coverage of the learned subject.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I believe the contents in the exams didn't measure my true performance.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I considered the examinations as a further opportunity for learning.	5	4	3	2	1
D	Related to Feedback Practices					
1	In my department, I get continuous feedback on how I am doing.	5	4	3	2	1
2	When I get things wrong or misunderstand, I don't receive much guidance what to do about it from my teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I feel I would learn more if I received feedback.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I think the feedback helped me to understand things better.	5	4	3	2	1
5	In my department, all my marks are explained by my teachers in written formats.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel I am criticized than corrected by the feedback from my teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
E	Related to Grading Practices					
1	I feel I received detailed comments that justify the grade given.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I think there should be clear criteria that help students be able to predict their grades.	5	4	3	2	1
3	The grading of my work seemed fair and appropriate	5	4	3	2	1
4	I found the grading system full of biases.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I experienced grades of the university to vary greatly across teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I got grades of the university as good measures of learning.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you!

Appendix B - Questionnaire for Pilot Study

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

University Assessment Practices Questionnaire

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is designed to prepare data collection instrument that can measure students' attitudes and teachers' practices of assessment in the university. To do so, this pilot opinion poll is prepared to check the clarity of each item. The pilot questionnaire contains the five assessment factors. Hence, please rate each of the items according to their level of difficulty. Indicate your responses to each item by encircling the numbers in the table.

Key- VE= Very Easy
 E= Easy
 U= Undecided/Not clear
 D= Difficult
 VD= Very Difficult

Please note the following definitions:

Department admission/selection procedures: This subscale focuses on how a student feels about the selection/placement procedures used to allocate students into different field of studies (Departments) in the University.

Feedback/Advising practices: This subscale deals the quantity and quality of feedbacks to the students. This focuses on your attitudes towards the comments and suggestions given to you by your instructors.

Exams: This subscale deals with students attitudes towards exams. This focuses on how you feel with the existing examination systems in your university.

Assessment tasks/ Activities: This subscale focuses on one's attitudes towards the assessment tasks: group work, assignments, fieldworks, etc. used to assess students

competences. It also addresses how you feel about the practice of assessing the assessment tasks.

Grading practices: It deals with the practices of assigning grades to the students. It also addresses how one feels about the grading system of the university.

Attitude Questions for Readability test

Sr	Questions	Choices/Options				
		VE	E	U	D	VD
A	Items related to Department Selection Procedures					
1	Before the placement into different departments, I gained sufficient introduction for each department.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I believe the department placement process was not accurate enough.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I feel the department placement was compatible with my interests.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I found the department selection form contains enough information that helps me to select my preferences.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I think there should be a separate body that helps students gets enough support for department selection.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel I have received appropriate information to select a department	5	4	3	2	1
B	Related to Assessment tasks/ Activities					
1	I feel the assessment tasks were appropriate to course contents.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I expect the assessment tasks to be given based on students' learning preferences.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I observed the assessment activities don't give very clear instructions about what I am expected to do.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I think the assessments tasks were emphasizing the important parts of the courses.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I believe the assessment activities are assigned reasonably.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel the assessment tasks are not very challenging.	5	4	3	2	1
C	Related to Examinations Practices					
1	I feel preparing for the examinations were mainly a matter of memorizing.	5	4	3	2	1
2	In my side, the exams that I took have not appropriate difficulty level.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I think I understand things better as a result of the exams.	5	4	3	2	1

4	I feel good in the exams content coverage of the learned subject.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I believe the contents in the exams didn't measure my true performance.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I consider the examinations as a further opportunity for learning.	5	4	3	2	1
D	Related to Feedback Practices					
1	In my department, I get continuous feedback on how I am doing.	5	4	3	2	1
2	When I get things wrong or misunderstand, I don't receive much guidance what to do about it from my teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I feel I would learn more if I received feedback.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I think the feedback helped me to understand things better.	5	4	3	2	1
5	In my department, all my marks are explained by my teachers in written formats.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel I am criticized than corrected by the feedback from my teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
E	Related to Grading Practices					
1	I feel I received detailed comments that justify the grade given.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I think there should be clear criteria that help students be able to predict their grades.	5	4	3	2	1
3	The grading of my work seemed fair and appropriate	5	4	3	2	1
4	I found the grading system full of biases.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I experienced grades of the university to vary greatly across teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I got grades of the university as good measures of learning.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you!

Attitude Questions for internal consistency

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is designed to prepare data collection instrument that can measure students' attitudes and teachers' practices of assessment in the university. To do so, this pilot opinion poll is prepared to check the reliability of the instrument. The pilot questionnaire contains the five assessment factors. Hence, please rate each of the items according to your degree of AGREEMENT and DISAGREEMENT. Indicate your responses to each item by encircling the numbers in the table.

Key- SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

U= Undecided/Uncertain

D= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

Please note the following definitions:

Department admission/selection procedures: This subscale focuses on how a student feels about the selection/placement procedures used to allocate students into different field of studies (Departments) in the University.

Feedback/Advising practices: This subscale deals the quantity and quality of feedbacks to the students. This focuses on your attitudes towards the comments and suggestions given to you by your instructors.

Exams: This subscale deals with students attitudes towards exams. This focuses on how you feel with the existing examination systems in your university.

Assessment tasks/ Activities: This subscale focuses on one's attitudes towards the assessment tasks: group work, assignments, fieldworks, etc. used to assess students competences. It also addresses how you feel about the practice of assessing the assessment tasks.

Grading practices: It deals with the practices of assigning grades to the students. It also addresses how one feels about the grading system of the university.

Sr	Questions	Choices/Options				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
A	Items related to Department Selection Procedures					
1	Before the placement into different departments, I gained sufficient introduction for each department.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I believe the department placement process was not accurate enough.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I feel the department placement was compatible with my interests.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I found the department selection form contains enough information that helps me to select my preferences.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I think there should be a separate body that helps students gets enough support for department selection.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel I have received appropriate information to select a department	5	4	3	2	1
B	Related to Assessment tasks/ Activities					
1	I feel the assessment tasks were appropriate to course contents.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I expect the assessment tasks to be given based on students' learning preferences.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I observed the assessment activities don't give very clear instructions about what I am expected to do.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I think the assessments tasks were emphasizing the important parts of the courses.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I believe the assessment activities are assigned reasonably.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel the assessment tasks are not very challenging.	5	4	3	2	1
C	Related to Examinations Practices					
1	I feel preparing for the examinations were mainly a matter of memorizing.	5	4	3	2	1
2	In my side, the exams that I took have not appropriate difficulty level.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I think I understand things better as a result of the exams.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I feel good in the exams content coverage of the learned subject.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I believe the contents in the exams didn't measure my true performance.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I consider the examinations as a further opportunity for learning.	5	4	3	2	1

D	Related to Feedback Practices					
1	In my department, I get continuous feedback on how I am doing.	5	4	3	2	1
2	When I get things wrong or misunderstand, I don't receive much guidance what to do about it from my teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I feel I would learn more if I received feedback.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I think the feedback helped me to understand things better.	5	4	3	2	1
5	In my department, all my marks are explained by my teachers in written formats.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I feel I am criticized than corrected by the feedback from my teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
E	Related to Grading Practices					
1	I feel I received detailed comments that justify the grade given.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I think there should be clear criteria that help students be able to predict their grades.	5	4	3	2	1
3	The grading of my work seemed fair and appropriate	5	4	3	2	1
4	I found the grading system full of biases.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I experienced grades of the university to vary greatly across teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I got grades of the university as good measures of learning.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you!

Appendix C- Questionnaire for expert opinion

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Attitude Questionnaire; Submitted to Panel of Judges

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather data about the attitude of students towards educational assessment practices in Dilla University. The development of the questionnaire has not been finalized. Therefore, your involvement in the development of the questionnaire has been critical for the attainment of the intended objectives.

The items have been grouped into five categories: Department allocation procedures, assessment tasks, exams, feedback, and grading practices. Your task is to rate each item as highly (3), moderately (2), or poorly (1) constructed in response to the question. To what extent does the item measure the category in which it is grouped and its appropriateness to measure the attitude of students by putting a tick✓ mark in front of each item. Thank you for your cooperation!

Questions		To what extent does the item measure the category in which it is grouped?		
		Highly	Moderately	Poorly
Sr	Department allocation procedures			
1	Placement assessment is done on objective basis.			
2	Placement process is not valid and efficient			
3	Placement procedures are transparent.			
4	Students knew how to select a department			
5	I received adequate support in the placement process			
6	There is hardly any help during placement procedures.			
7	Placements into different departments were done on adequate information.			
8	Placement procedure is accurate.			
Sr	The Assessment tasks			
1	The assessment activities were interesting.			
2	I learned something useful from the assessment tasks.			
3	The assessment activities motivated students to discuss the subject with each other.			
4	The assessment activities didn't clarify the responsibilities and requirements of each student.			
5	Assessment activities resulted in disproportionate marking.			
6	Assessment activities were assigned reasonably.			

7	Assessment tasks should be better organized.			
8	I believe using assessment techniques are helpful to my college success in the university.			
Sr	The Exams			
1	Preparing the exams was mainly matter of memorizing.			
2	I learn new things while preparing for the exams.			
3	I understood things better as a result of the exams.			
4	Doing the exams brought things together for me.			
5	Relationship of exams to materials emphasized in the course was not good.			
6	I believe the contents in the exam didn't measure my true performance.			
7	In my side, the exams that I took have appropriate difficult level.			
8	I like taking exams in academic subjects.			
Sr	Feedback Practices			
1	In my department, I get plenty of feedback on how I m doing.			
2	When I get things wrong or misunderstand, I don't receive much guidance in what o about it.			
3	I would learn more, if received feedback.			
4	The feedback to learners timely.			
5	The feedback doesn't help me with any subsequent assignment.			
6	Students received detailed comments that justify the grade given.			
7	Feedback helped me to become efficient in most academic tasks.			
8	Feedbacks to the students were constructive.			
Sr	Grades			
1	Grades are assigned fairly.			
2	The marking distribution of each piece of work in many of the courses are known and considered in the final grades.			
3	I found the grading system free of biases.			
4	Grades vary significantly across teachers and departments.			
5	Grades indicate student learning.			
6	I am happy for the grades which I get after the exams.			
7	Grades are good indicators of learning in the university			
8	It is possible to predict course grades after the end of exams.			

Appendix D

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Focused Group Discussion Guides

The following questions were used as a guide to conduct the discussions with the students and the information gathered through these questions were used to substantiate the quantitative data obtained in this study.

1. What kinds of assessment methods have you experienced in DU?
2. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of these methods on your learning, emotional status, personal development, etc?
3. In your opinion, are there any challenges to effective assessment practices? If yes, what are they? And what do you think should be done to solve those problems observed in the assessment practices at your University?

