

**ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN A CAMBODIAN  
UNIVERSITY:  
THROUGH THE LENS OF LECTURERS AND  
STUDENTS**

**BY  
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## **Abstract**

Assessment is a key factor in enhancing student learning when appropriate assessment tasks are conducted. Assessments are used to grade students' achievement, check learning progress, reflect teaching performance, and support further learning. Perceptions and experiences that lecturers and students in Cambodian tertiary education have about assessment practices are an important aspect to understand the current assessment practices before considering possible changes and how to implement the changes. These perceptions and experiences are the focus of this study which uses a mixed-method design. Eighteen lecturers and ninety-three third and fourth year students completed a 35-item questionnaire on the conceptualisation of assessment practices. Six lecturers participated in semi-structured interviews and 11 students participated in focus group discussions. Seventeen course outlines were analysed for assessment criteria and modes.

Results revealed three main perceived purposes of assessment: the provision of marks to students, measurement of students' understanding, and satisfaction of university requirements. Furthermore, conventional assessment forms such as presentations, written assignments and examinations were found to be widely practiced in the faculty. Varying perceptions about explicit assessment criteria was also evident amongst lecturers and students. In addition the study identified that participants appear unfamiliar with the notion of innovative assessment practices, and that lecturers used a 'transmission process' type to provide feedback.

These findings are used to recommend ways of enhancing assessment practices in Cambodian tertiary education. Recommendations include activities to develop assessment practices and ensure the improvement of student learning, especially self-regulated learning. Further recommendations are the inclusion of alternative assessment, more clarity in assessment criteria, and the introduction of supportive and constructive feedback. Academic professional development and university support are also needed for enhancing assessment practices. Two avenues of further research are recommended to examine the impact of assessment practices on student learning: firstly, an investigation into the practices of innovative assessment and approaches to learning, and secondly a comparative study about assessment systems and learning careers between a developing country and a developed country.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

MoEYS= MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORT
ACC= THE ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE OF CAMBODIA
HEIs= HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
CDIR= CAMBODIA DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE INSTITUTE
OECD= ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
AFL= ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING
CDC: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

*Assessment is the single most powerful influence on learning in formal courses and, if not designed well, can easily undermine the positive features of an important strategy in the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches. (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999)*

### **1.1. Overview of the chapter**

As discussions on the roles of assessment emerged in higher education, assessment literature has identified the essential functions that assessment plays in educational contexts. Assessment is used to grade students and judge students' performance. More importantly, assessment can enhance student learning and determine students' approaches to learning. Assessment can also develop critical thinking and problem analysis skills when appropriate forms of assessment are used. Given the diverse role of assessment, stakeholders' perceptions of what assessment means seem significant. This study aims to investigate the perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students with regard to the current assessment practices in a Cambodian university. More specifically, it aims to explore their perspectives about the importance of assessment for student learning.

This chapter begins with a summary of the background of assessment, followed by a rationale for its investigation. It then explores the Cambodian higher education context before focusing on assessment in Cambodian tertiary institutions. Following this the chapter covers the research objectives and questions as well as the researcher's background. It ends with an outline of the thesis as a whole.

### **1.2. Assessment background**

Issues of assessment have been widely discussed in higher education. Many key writers who are interested in assessment have expressed concerns about assessment practices in tertiary education. Boud (2009) voices concerns that assessment in higher education is implemented in a traditional way; revolving around examinations, assignments and other kinds of tests. Cultural practices of assessment are rooted in the academic disciplines, and the classroom tradition of teachers 'marking students' work' is predominant in higher education. This assessment mode has been overlaid with external



examinations, the purpose of which is to judge students' performance (Boud, 2009). Boud and Falchikov (2006) assert "higher education has traditionally focused on preparing students for acquisition of knowledge rather than participation in learning" (p. 406). In addition, Boud (2000) warns that some current assessment practices in tertiary education are unlikely to help prepare students for lifelong learning.

Transparency of assessment practices is another challenge. As Rust, Price, and O'Donovan (2003) mention, there is growing acceptance of the need within higher education for greater transparency in assessment processes, and moves have been made to construct methods of assessment which are clearer to all participants. For example, the transfer of knowledge of the assessment process and criteria to students is still questionable. Another concern about the practice of assessment identifies an over-emphasis on grading assessment in higher education. Knight (2002) claims that summative assessment in higher education is in 'disarray'. In his view, current assessment practices have negative effects on students' learning due to an overemphasis on grades and learning outcomes, and it thus does not necessarily take learning processes into account.

Feedback, as part of assessment practice, may also hinder learning if it is not given on time. Carless (2006) expresses concerns about feedback occurring too late for students to use it to further their learning. Hounsell (cited in Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p.401) identifies "growing concern that the provision of feedback on assignments may be in decline". Similarly, Baty (cited in Boud & Falchikov, 2006) also voices concerns that a lack of constructive feedback along with late feedback does not allow students to benefit from it. It seems that constant feedback contributes to the promotion of a learning environment where students can take lessons from previous tasks and improve for later.

Discussion of assessment issues also emerges in the Asian educational context. Assessment in higher education in Malaysia is seen to take the traditional assessment approach. The practice of dominant summative assessment with norm-referenced assessment is common in many courses in Malaysian universities (see Fook & Sidhu 2011). Teachers in Hong Kong also still widely practise an examination-oriented system (Ka-man, 2004). In Hong Kong, this system is called assessment for selection, which is a major element within an assessment framework (see Ka-man, 2004). Similarly, in the

wider Chinese educational context, the education system has instilled a testing culture into teachers, students, and parents (Gao & Watkins, 2001; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Examinations and tests are common modes of assessment used to select and reward talent in Hong Kong as well as in mainland China (Cheung, 2008; Ye, 2007). Research indicated that high-stake examinations are evident in Hong Kong universities (see Brown & Wang, 2011). It seems that the practices of assessment in Asian higher education contexts are still questionable.

### **1.3. Rationale for investigation**

The prime reason for this study is the view that assessment can enhance student learning and develop self-regulated learning. Many writers claim that assessment can function beyond giving grades or ranking students' achievement (e.g., Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2005; Carless, 2009). Assessment can support further learning through the use of evidence gained from tests or assignments (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Newstead, 2003; Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011; Stiggins, 2002).

Forms of assessment seem to influence student learning. Differences in assessment modes can correspond to different approaches to learning (Struyven, Dochy, & Janssens, 2005). Research suggested that some practices of alternative assessment can enable deep learning (Eisner, 1999; Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002; Harlen & Crick, 2003; Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991). In addition, self-and peer assessment enable students to develop learning autonomy (Boud, 1995; Brown, Rust, & Gibbs, 1994; Carless, 2009; Davies, 2006; Morris, 2001; Yorke, 1998). A large body of research claims the benefits of these assessment methods in fostering self-regulated learning (see Ballantyne, Hughes, & Mylonas, 2002; Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2012).

Feedback is at the heart of assessment for learning as it can encourage further learning for students (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1998). As feedback has been a concern for students (Asghar, 2012; Ferguson, 2011; Fernandes, Flores, & Lima, 2012; Wren, Sparrow, Northcote, & Sharp, 2009), a model of good feedback can be a guiding practice to help students grow for their future learning (see Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Studies into the assessment practices in tertiary education have mostly been undertaken in Western countries (see Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2012;

McDowell, Wakelin, Montgomery, & King, 2011; Weurlander, Söderberge, Scheja, Hult, & Wernerson, 2012; Willis, 2011). A few studies investigating perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students have also been conducted in Asian tertiary education contexts (Brown & Wang, 2011; Fook & Sidhu 2011; Mussawy, 2009), though these studies may not be relevant to assessment practices in Cambodia. In Asian context, education system, assessment policy and practices may vary from one country to another, for example high stake exams are seen adopted in Cambodian education system. Therefore it is worth examining the assessment practices in Cambodian tertiary education as studies in either private or public tertiary institutions in this context are very limited (Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, 2009) . To address this gap the current study uses a mixed method design to investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students about current assessment practices in Cambodia.

#### **1.4. Context of the study**

Cambodia is a post-conflict country which requires both time and human capital to reconstruct its fragile infrastructure. The Royal Government of Cambodia strives constantly to develop human resources which contribute to social and economical development (UNESCO, 2010). It is argued that educational development in Cambodia is far behind other countries in the same region.

Higher education in Cambodia has grown remarkably in the last two decades, especially in private universities (Locard & Ang, 2011). There has been a significant growth of higher education institutions (HEIs) due to two dramatic changes of government policy (Cambodia Development Resource Institute, 2010). Firstly, the public HEIs were allowed to adopt a fee-paying scheme which was never practised before 1997. This means students are able to enrol and enter public universities by paying tuition fees determined by the universities. Next, the government has encouraged the privatisation of higher education. This means that private universities are allowed to set up and open for all students (CDRI, 2010). For example, Norton University, which was established in 1997, is the first private university in Cambodia.

According to a report by HRINC Cambodia (2010), private universities grew from two to forty six while public universities rose from 13 to 26 between 2001 and 2008; HEIs reached 72 in total by the end of 2008. In 2009, the total number of HEIs was 76, with

33 categorised as public and 43 known as private universities and institutes (CDRI, 2010).)

Despite this there have been concerns with regard to issues of access, quality and relevance of higher education due to the fast-growing numbers of HEIs. A report conducted by UNESCO (2010) indicates that private universities operate independently, so effective quality control is seen as a major problem. This suggests that some private universities are likely to adopt a profit-oriented operation rather than an academically-oriented operation. Chet (2009) warns that “without critical care, the system can be misled and become profit-oriented and lacking in social responsibility” (p.157). UNESCO (2010) highlighted the need for reform in academic programmes to meet social and labour market needs. These areas include a need for faculty and staff development, pay rises for highly qualified lecturers and staff and reform of financial and managerial structures in HEIs.

### **1.5. Assessment in Cambodian tertiary education**

Education quality has been widely debated in Cambodia. The assessment issue is just one of many major concerns in higher education. Assessment in Cambodia is largely an examination-based system. Students have experienced tests, quizzes, revision tests and semester exams from the beginning of their school life through to their university life. The assessment tasks commonly include course content and students normally prepare for their tests or exams by memorising and restating information. For example, each higher education institution sets an entrance examination to determine university entry. Since 2002, the results of grade 12 national examinations have been adopted for university admission instead of the entrance examination which was used for many years in the education system (Chen, Sok, & Sok, 2007). Each subject's grade and the overall ranking in grade 12 are used for the determination of university entry. This demonstrates how important grading is for academic learning in the Cambodian education system. In Cambodian tertiary education, there seems to be little evidence that assessment tasks are designed to promote critical thinking or self-regulated and lifelong learning.

Many universities in Cambodia are placed below national or regional standard requirements (UNESCO, 2010). A study conducted in a Cambodian higher institution indicated that the quality of Cambodian higher education is still poor in terms of

coherent academic curricula, qualified teachers with effective teaching methods, university funding, university facilities, and interactive networks (see Chen et al., 2007).

A report by the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) (2009) with regard to student learning assessment states that: (a) HEI shall rigorously determine each course programme and the students' assessment methods and carry out a transparent and effective assessment of student learning performance; (b) assessment of students' performance shall be conducted through various means by providing them with a continuing sense of achievement rather than overemphasis on the final exam. This aims to achieve and maintain a high quality of academic programmes. However, Chen et al. (2007) question the committee's ability to monitor the quality of education as this committee has only monitored and approved the quality of foundation year programmes. This committee may not yet be well equipped with expertise and resource (Chen et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2010).

In summary, assessment is practised in Cambodian higher education for summative purposes, and examination-oriented learning is now culturally embedded in the Cambodian education system. This exam-based culture is also found in Hong Kong (see Pong & Chow, cited in Carless, 2005; Gao & Watkins, 2001), as well as in other Confucian-heritage cultures (see Morrison & Tang, 2002 cited in Carless, 2005; Ye, 2007). Similarly, as Fook and Sidhu (2011) highlight, "assessment in the Malaysian landscape of higher education has been rather traditional" (p. 60). Stiggins (cited in Fook & Sidhu, 2011) points out that "such traditional assessment systems are still apparent in a number of institutions of higher education because of institutional failure to strike the right balance between summative and formative assessment procedures" (p.60).

## **1.6. Purpose of the Study**

As assessment is a part of quality strengthening, this study will investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students with regard to assessment practices in a private university in Cambodia. The main aims of this study are:

1. To identify the current assessment practices and purposes ;
2. To examine the perceived purposes of the current assessment tasks;

3. To examine student understandings of the process of assessment and assessment criteria;
4. To examine whether the assessment encourages students in self-and peer assessment;
5. To examine whether feedback provided to students promotes ongoing learning.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students about assessment in Cambodian tertiary education?

### **Sub-questions:**

2. What modes of assessment are being practised in a Cambodian university?
3. What are the perceived purposes of the current assessment tasks?
4. To what extent does assessment involve students in self-and peer assessment?
5. To what extent does feedback promote learning?

## **1.7. Significance of study**

This study will inform the key stakeholders—lecturers, educational leaders, and policy makers—about the impact of current assessment practice. This study will also provide lecturers with essential insights into how current assessment practice impacts student learning and offer guidance for further development of assessment in Cambodian tertiary education. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the literature on assessment practices and purposes, and may encourage lecturers and educational leaders to reconsider current assessment practices. The findings of this study may be important to leaders of higher education institutions as well as policy makers in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). It can offer them considerations for the further evolution of assessment practices in Cambodia. The results of this study may also inform the construction of assessment frameworks which can then be used to guide assessment policies in institutions.

## **1.8. Researcher background**

I have been involved with teaching for approximately 10 years in Cambodia. After graduating from Royal University of Phnom Penh, with a Bachelor of Education in English (TEFL) in the year 2000, I began to work as a teacher in one local non-government organisation where I taught English to the orphans for about one year. I then spent about another year teaching general English at a private institute. In 2003 I started work at a private university teaching an undergraduate programme where I remained until coming to New Zealand.

I have been interested in assessment since I took a paper in ‘Assessment and Evaluation in Action’ with the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Discussions and the issues around the topic introduced me to some ideas and made me reflect on my previous teaching experience and the Cambodian educational context. Questions were often raised in my mind regarding the quality of assessment practices in my context: what was the difference in quality of assessment practices between Cambodian and New Zealand and other Western universities? Who could share some ideas which contribute to the development of assessment practices in Cambodia? What should be done to transfer good practices of assessment to the Cambodian context?

Assessment practices have been used from early childhood education through to tertiary education elsewhere. However, the purpose of assessment and the format of assessment can vary from one culture to another. Assessment is often used to check the progress of student learning, to provide grades to students, and premise certification after the completion of a course. More importantly, assessment can be used to enhance student learning and foster lifelong learning.

My reflection on assessment practices in Cambodia poses open questions about whether or not the purpose of assessment and current modes of assessment stimulate student learning. As I experienced practices of assessment in my context I could say that a limited range of modes of assessment were used, and the quality of assessment needed to improve with regard to innovative assessment. This raised the possibility of better quality education in Cambodia.

My study in Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand expanded my horizons and brought knowledge that may allow me to bring positive changes to Cambodian

assessment. My perspective is that assessment extends beyond the measurement of student learning, assessment can be used to develop critical thinking skills and foster students to adopt self-regulated learning. Hopefully, my knowledge may make a positive contribution to the scholarship around assessment in Cambodia.

## **1.9. The outline of the chapters**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the issues of assessment discussed in the literature, and explores the important role of assessment in stimulating student learning. This chapter ends with the outline of research objectives and research questions. Chapter 2 gives the study a theoretical framework by reviewing current literature on assessment in tertiary education including empirical research in the field. The notion of assessment is discussed and the functions of assessment in education are also presented. The purposes of assessment are then critically discussed with an eye to informing the construction of assessment frameworks and ideas for designing assessment tasks.

Chapter 3 explains the methods used for undertaking the research and analysis of data used in this study. It describes the selection of participants and the instruments of data collection for this study. The chapter ends with a discussion of trustworthiness and also addresses the ethical considerations of this study. Chapter 4 reports on the results of data analysis based on the following themes: the purposes of assessment, the content of assessment, assessment approaches, timing of assessment, modes of assessment, assessment criteria, and the value of feedback.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study in relation to research questions and with reference to theoretical frameworks of assessment. This chapter draws some conclusions, and indicates some implications for practice and policy. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research in this field are also considered.



## **CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

*Many current assessment practices are incompatible with the goals of independence, thoughtfulness and critical analysis to which most academics would subscribe. (Boud, 1990)*

### **2.1. Overview of the chapter**

This chapter reviews some of the key issues in assessment literature. The first part will examine the purposes of assessment. This examination covers key concepts including: assessment of learning/summative assessment, assessment for learning/formative assessment, norm-referenced and criterion assessment, assessment as learning and learning-oriented assessment, and sustainable assessment. In the second part reports the findings of a systematic review of past studies on perceptions and experiences of academics and students about assessment practices in higher education context.

### **2.2. Conceptualisation of assessment**

#### **2.2.1. Definitions**

Definitions of assessment used by a number of researchers relate to judgements and measurements of student learning, improvements of student learning and determining student learning progress. Assessment is defined as the formation of judgements on the quality of students' achievement (Knight, 2006). In addition, assessment is seen to inform students about their learning performance and how they can improve their learning (Carless, Joughin, & Mok, 2006; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Assessment determines the progress of student learning towards qualifications, and measures their performance in attaining graduate profiles (Banta & Associates, 2002; Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 1997). According to Falchikov (2005), assessment is considered to be fundamental for learning and teaching getting students involved in learning. Assessments have been defined in varied ways with different purposes. Here are some examples of various assessment definitions:

Assessment refers to a judgement which can be justified according to specific weighted set goals, yielding either comparative or numerical ratings. (Taras, 2005, p. 467)

Assessment is any act of interpreting information about student performance, collected through any of a multitude of means or practices. (Brown, 2004, p.304)

Assessment refers to the process of forming a judgment about the quality and extent of student achievement or performance, and therefore by inference a judgment about the learning that has taken place. (Sadler, 2005, p. 177)

Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when the assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. (Huba & Free, cited in Jones, 2007, p.69)

The above authors can be seen to define assessment differently because of their different conceptions. According to their definitions, assessment can serve two key purposes—summative and formative. Taras and Brown's (2005) definition tends to imply a judgement of student performance, which is consistent with a summative purpose. This purpose seems to focus on the evaluation of student learning. On the contrary, Huba and Freed (2007) prefer assessment that supports further learning. Sadler (2005) and Huba and Freed's (2007) definitions imply the formative purpose which is intended to enhance student learning. For example, as Leathwood (2005) asserts students have been assessed in their academic lives to gain qualifications or 'good grades'; teachers have assessed students' work; government or its agencies have assessed courses, programmes and institutions; and managers have assessed their employees.

On top of these purposes and perhaps more importantly, assessment can also be a fundamental tool to support student learning. Brown (2004) emphasises that assessment methods or tasks should promote and foster student learning rather than simply measure student learning. Similarly, Boud and Falchikov (2005) claim that assessment does not only grade and certify students but it also functions to support further learning. Boud (2000) further suggests that assessment should not only aim to fulfil the immediate goals of a course or program, but also build a foundation for students to adopt their own assessment within their academic life and for their lifetime.

As literature about assessment indicates, the phrase ‘assessment of learning’ is equated with summative assessment while ‘assessment for learning’ equates to formative assessment (McDowell et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2002; Yorke, 2003). These phrases and terms will be used interchangeably in the remainder of this thesis.

### **2.2.2. Assessment of learning versus assessment for learning**

Assessment literature indicates that assessment can serve a wide range of purposes in relation to student learning. Assessment can be used to check the progress of student learning and provide feedback to enhance their learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Newstead, 2003; Price et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2002). Assessment activities can also be designed to develop students’ critical thinking, problem-solving skills and foster self-evaluation (Carless, 2007; Boud & Falchikov, 2005; Earl, 2003; Hall & Jones, 2009). Therefore, when intending for students to adopt life-long learning (Boud, 2000), assessment tasks can be designed with the future-oriented notion of sustainable assessment (see next section).

Many studies identified that assessment systems have a significant impact on learning identities and dispositions as children become young adults and then adults (see Bloomer; Grenfell & James; Reay & Wiliam; Pollard & Filer; Osborn & Triggs, cited in Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003). The impacts of assessment can continue through a student’s life of formal learning. For instance, research evidence has indicated that summative testing shapes learner’ strategies for surviving assessment in the future (see Reay & Wiliam; Ecclestone, cited in Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003). Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) conclude that if summative assessment influences learning identities, then formative assessment also contributes to learners’ identities. This implies that assessment systems may instil learning strategies into students.

Assessment discussed in the literature indicates two main purposes for conducting assessment (Boud, 1990; Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Falchikov, 2005; Harlen, 2005; Sadler, 1989; So & Lee, 2011; Yorke, 2003). In this review, the focus is on two aspects of assessment, namely, assessment of learning/summative assessment and assessment for learning/formative assessment. Assessment serves not only to give grades or measure student learning, but it also functions to help students mature as learners. The first purpose, assessment of learning, leans towards giving grades to students and providing certificates of achievement. Assessment of learning is used to

report evidence of students' achievement (Stiggins, 2002). Such assessment enables students to complete their programmes with a validated record of their learning performance (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). It generally serves as a key function when the transmission of knowledge and skills are considered the main aim of education. Summative assessment evaluate students' learning progress through the provision of tests, assignments within the course; and that evidence of students' performance is used to certify achievement. Certification is seen as evidence of achievement in academic studies that can then be used to enter employment or further study (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Nonetheless, concern about summative assessment has been widely discussed in the assessment literature. According to Knight (2002) summative assessment is in 'disarray' due to its negative effects on student learning. In Knight's (2002) view, this purpose of assessment may create a learning environment with too much emphasis on grades and learning outcomes that does not take the learning process into account. When the goal of assessment is to provide students with certification, summative assessment alone may not be sufficient, and can be regarded as counterproductive in supporting ongoing student learning.

A widespread public expectation of assessment tends to correspond with summative assessment that certifies student achievement after the completion of a course or programme. Boud and Falchikov (2006) argue this negates future-oriented learning as it is difficult to mount a case for shifting well-established perceptions of assessment. According to Barnet (2007), summative assessment can control, categorise students illogically, and restrict their educational development. This purpose seems to focus on the measurement of student learning rather than enhancing their future learning. Consequently, it may result in short-term goals and priorities in learning. This is consistent with the measurement model that aims to rank student achievement and compare students against each other. (Newstead, 2003; Biggs & Taylor cited in Maclellan, 2001).

Despite these concerns, it can be argued that summative assessment may enable student learning when assessment tasks emphasise the analytical and applicable content. For example, alternative assessment such as journal writing, portfolio, problem-based

learning can be used as summative purposes. Assessment tasks designed in such ways can make a positive difference for a more wholesome learning process.

The second purpose of assessment, assessment for learning (AfL) focuses on improving of student learning. AfL's primary intention is to generate feedback on performance for supporting and accelerating learning (Sadler, 1998). Formative assessment and feedback should be used to empower students to adopt self-regulated learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Thus it can be seen that a key objective of AfL is to provide constant feedback and reduce gaps between current performances and desired learning objectives, rather than allocating grades.

Similarly, many authors argue that assessment for learning aims to provide students with feedback on the current learning through observation, discussion, and evidence gained from assessment tasks (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Newstead, 2003; Price et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2002). This implies that an aspect of formative assessment is to facilitate learning. This is consistent with the standard model of assessment as its purpose is to ensure the acquisition of knowledge (Newstead, 2003; Biggs & Taylor cited in Maclellan, 2001). Boud and Falchikov (2005) argue that formative assessment can lose effectiveness if insufficient time is allowed for its proper practice. This means that timing for feedback is considerably important if effective feedback is to happen. Students need to receive feedback with enough time to incorporate its lessons and suggestions into future work.

Assessment for learning is a common education policy discourse that reflects a positive shift in the purpose of assessment from a measurement to a learning focus (Willis, 2011). Gipps (2002) adds that sharing learning goals and criteria enables students to experience self-assessment and guides them with feedback; this can foster more self-regulating and autonomous lifelong learners. Arguably, assessment for learning is any assessment designed to serve the purpose of promoting student learning.

As Chalmers (2007) claims, even though summative assessment dominates many students' attention due to its significance towards qualifications, many higher education institutions are incorporating requirements for formative assessment opportunities in their assessment policies. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has supported formative assessment as an effective learning tool:

Teacher using formative assessment approaches guide students toward development of their own learning to learn skills that are increasingly necessary as knowledge is quickly outdated in the information society.  
(OECD, 2005, p. 22).

OECD is not an education agency, but it is an economic agency. So as an economic agency it understands better than most the centrality of learning to economic growth and development (Kennedy, Chan, Fok, & Yu, 2008). From economic points-of-view, formative assessment is related to constructs such as 'the knowledge society' and 'lifelong learning' because it appears to promise longer-term learning gains not just for some students, but for all (Black & Wiliam, 1998). With this aspect of formative assessment, many educational agencies find considerable support for formative assessment (see Kennedy et al., 2008).

Empirical studies indicated that assessment for learning or formative assessment is a powerful tool to enhance learning (see McDowell et al., 2011; Weurlander, Söderberg, Scheja, Hult, & Wernerson, 2012; Willis, 2011). For example, one study into students' experience of different methods of formative assessment suggested formative assessment motivates students to learn and helps them know what they have learnt and what they need to improve (Weurlander et al., 2012). In Willis' (2011) study about formative practices in classrooms, participants viewed assessment for learning as patterns of participation that develop expertise and learner autonomy. Further empirical research into student experiences of assessment through a number of years identified several aspects of formative assessment that enhance student learning (McDowell & Sambell; Sambell & McDowell; Sambell, McDowell & Brown, cited in McDowell et al., 2011). These studies tell us formative assessment has the following qualities:

- Is rich in formal feedback (e.g., tutor comment; self-assessment systems);
- Is rich in informal feedback through dialogic teaching and peer interaction;
- Provides opportunities to try out and practise knowledge, skills and understanding;
- Uses assessment tasks which are authentic or relevant;
- Assists students to develop independence and autonomy, and
- Has an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment.

(p.750)

A research study indicated that the overall student experiences were more positive in modules where assessment for learning approaches were implemented, and students were more inclined to take a deep approach to learning (see McDowell et al., 2011). This study is consistent with Sambell's and McDowell's (1998) study indicating that different forms of assessment influence students' approaches to learning in different ways. It seems that assessment practices focusing on factual knowledge are more likely to guide students to surface approaches to learning while assessment tasks requiring application and comprehension tend to support deeper approaches to learning (Weurlander et al., 2012). The results gained from summative assessment can be used in a formative way to provide students feedback, aiming to enhance their learning (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009; Taras, 2005).

In conclusion, while assessment for learning or formative assessment seems promising in theory it still presents challenges for implementation. For example a case in Hong Kong indicated some barriers to the implementation of assessment for learning. Carless (2005) identifies some of these obstacles which include:

- The dominance of competitive examinations, allied to a simplistic view of assessment as testing amongst many stakeholders;
- An associated lack of deep understanding of assessment issues by principals, teachers and parents;
- Lack of time, capacity and the will to engage with myriad issues in teaching, schooling an educational reform in which AfL is just one strand. (p.50)

In responses to these challenges, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) (2001) offered some guidance for addressing the dominance of summative tests and examinations, in favour of greater integration of assessment with teaching and learning, and a focus on learning processes as well as outcomes. The Council suggested a number of practices including the following which it claims will encourage AfL:

- The development of school assessment policies, including more diversified modes of assessment and a reduction in tests and examinations;
- A focus on feedback to inform students of their strengths or weaknesses and how to address the weaknesses;
- Opportunities to do assessment collaboratively with students or to allow students to carry out peer or self-assessment;

- Sharing with students the goals of learning, so that they can recognise the standards they are aiming for;
  - The use of assessment that probes higher-order thinking skills, creativities and understanding rather than rote memorization of facts.
- (CDC, 2001, pp.80-83)

Boud (2000) argues that the assessment activities should perform ‘double duty’:

- They have to encompass formative assessment for learning and summative for certificate;
- They have to have a focus on the immediate tasks and on implications for equipping students for lifelong learning in an unknown future;
- And they have to attend to both the learning process and the substantive content domain. (p.160)

### **2.2.3. Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment**

The questions of standards should be intensively considered when designing assessment tasks, whether for summative or formative purposes (Knight, 2001). Norm-referenced assessment intends to compare students’ performances with each other (Knight, 2001; Tanner, 2001). The design of criterion-referenced assessment tasks, on the other hand, is to compare students’ performance with learning task standards.

Criterion-based standards are considered essential to maintain authenticity (Tanner, 2001). As Hall (2006) claims, criterion-referencing is clear in that:

Students receive in advance information that helps them to understand what is expected of them; as far as is practical students are judged on their own merits; and no assumptions are made about an underlying grade distribution. (p.10)

Boud (2000) remarks that either a criterion or standards framework is necessary for assessment. Without a standards framework, students might not know if their achievements meet the standards or expectations of their educators. Boud (2000) describes norm-referencing as an obstacle to enhancing the quality of learning because its main focus is dependent on discrimination between students’ achievement and it does not compare students’ levels of achievement against learning standards. It seems that criterion-referenced assessment can be a stimulating learning tool whereby students



can check their learning performance against the criteria, rather than each other. Therefore, we can argue that assessment which encourages students to learn should be criterion-referenced assessment.

#### **2.2.4. Assessment as learning and learning-oriented assessment**

Assessment as learning can let students engage in learning activities and develop themselves as self-evaluators. Earl (cited in McDowell et al., 2011) takes the phrase ‘assessment as learning’ to describe students engaging in self-assessment and getting actively involved in learning in order to direct their own growth. Similarly, in Hall and Jones (2009) view, ‘assessment as learning’ refers to the design of assessment tasks that develop critical thinking and improve student understandings. Boud and Falchikov (2005, p.35) draw from Mentkowski and Associates’s philosophy to suggest that “assessment as learning represents an attempt to create, in the phrase they have adopted as an indicator for their approach, ‘learning that lasts’ ”. Mentkowski et al. (cited in Boud & Falchikov, 2005) suggest that learning is deemed to be integrative and lasting when teaching, learning and assessment are coherent throughout courses and programmes. This creates a critical need to design assessment tools that enable students to get involved in learning and develop learning autonomy.

Carless (2007) has proposed the new concept of ‘learning-oriented assessment’ to build the concept of AfL. Working on Joughin’s (2004) conceptual framework, Carless (2009) suggests that a key purpose of all assessments whether predominantly summative or formative is to promote ‘productive student learning’. In Joughin’s (2004) proposed framework for learning-oriented assessment there are three main factors which indicate the important link between learning and assessment. These are assessment tasks, characteristics of feedback, and students’ involvement in assessment (Joughin, cited in Carless, 2007). Each of these factors is discussed in more detail over the next few paragraphs.

Firstly, assessment task design is an essential element of learning-oriented assessment which is commonly called “assessment tasks as learning tasks” (Carless, 2007; p. 59). This conceptualisation implies that students are primed to adopt deep learning approaches to achievement when assessment tasks are constructively aligned with curriculum objectives and content (Biggs & Tang, cited in Carless, 2009). In addition, the key elements of task design should mainly consider the link between assessment

tasks and more authentic real world tasks; task design should aim for co-operative work rather than competitive settings (Keppell & Carless, 2006).

As assessment practices have come to play a key role in the development of higher education, the theory and practice of assessment have undergone changes leading to new approaches in terms of aims and purposes (Levine, 2002). Wiggins (1990) who is a widely-known advocate of authentic assessment in education claimed that assessment is authentic when we directly examine student performance on worthy intellectual tasks. For example:

Authentic assessments present the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities: conducting research; writing, revising and discussing papers; providing an engaging oral analysis of a recent political event; collaborating with others on a debate, etc. (Wiggins, 1990, p.2)

Authentic tasks involve "ill-structured" challenges and roles that help students rehearse for the complex ambiguities of the "game" of adult and professional life. (Wiggins, 1990, p.3)

Authentic assessment, as defined by Gulikers, Bastiaens, Kirschner, and Kester (2008), means assessment that requires students to use the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that they are able to apply these in professional life. These definitions seem to focus on the design of assessment tasks that allow students to use their reflections and their thoughts in relation to real world scenarios and issues. Brown (2004) and Carless (2007) argue that task design should be practice-orientated to promote students engagement in active learning dispositions, and should reflect real-life situations linked to the subject learnt. Thus, assessment methods should empower students as learners and critical thinkers so that they demonstrate employability upon graduation. Many authors advocate the practices of alternative assessment as they enhance deep learning, foster high critical thinking, and develop students to adopt self-regulated learning (e.g. Cummings, Maddux, & Richmond, 2008; Eisner, 1999; Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002; Harlen, 2005; Sambell, Brown, & McDowell, 1997; Segers & Dochy, 2001; Slater, 1996; Struyven et al., 2005; Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991). These alternative assessment forms include performances, portfolios, cooperative learning, self-evaluations, journals, simulations, exhibitions, problem-based learning, posters,

reflective commentaries, review and case studies, project-based learning and peer/cooperative learning. Many of these have been introduced in different courses with a wide range of levels of education (Brown, 2004; Frank & Barzilai, 2004; Norton, 2004; Libman, 2010). Libman (2010) concludes that “the point of alternative assessments, however, they are labelled, is not that they are ends in themselves but that they are designed to foster powerful, productive learning for students” (p. 63).

The second component of learning-oriented assessment is student involvement in assessment. In this assessment framework, students should be encouraged to engage in assessment process as much as possible. Dialogues with students with regard to assessment processes help to build trust between lecturers and students and facilitate transparency (Carless, 2009). As Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling (2002) claim, students are able to gain a better understanding of learning objectives and get involved with criteria and standards more actively when they are encouraged to engage in the assessment process.

Peer feedback is deemed an interactive key in which different ideas can be exchanged amongst students and students are able to reflect on their performance, so that self-regulation of their own learning can be developed (Liu & Carless, 2006). Boud (cited in Carless, 2009) explains that peer feedback and self-assessment can be intertwined to get students to understand the assessment criteria and apply them to exemplars, their own work and that of their peers. It is important that students can be supported to develop their self-evaluation abilities. Boud (2000) asserts that self-assessment is a potent component of ‘sustainable assessment’ which means that assessment practices do not only focus on a current purpose, but also engage students with ongoing involvement in the assessment process. In other words, current assignments should develop students’ self-evaluation as a skill they can carry to real-life situations after graduating.

Thirdly, the link between feedback and student learning is considered important. As Carless (2007) points out, assessment promotes learning when appropriate feedback is provided to students, which they can use to ‘feed-forward’ into future work.

Despite this, Wiliam (cited in Carless, 2009) claims that the provision of information to students is not considered feedback if it does not result in student learning support. As Gibbs and Simpson (2004) add, feedback in itself may not enhance student learning, unless students engage with it and act upon it. Carless (2007) emphasizes that timeliness

and getting students engaged with feedback are key aspects. In addition, Falchikov (cited in Carless, 2007) still values the feedback from peers even though it is common for feedback to come from lecturers. Therefore, the framework of learning-oriented assessment is summarised by three deceptively simple principles (Carless, 2009, p.83):

Principle 1: Assessment tasks should be designed to stimulate productive learning practices amongst students;

Principle 2: Assessment should involve students actively in engaging with criteria, quality, their own and/or peers' performance;

Principle 3: Feedback should be timely and forward-looking so as to support current and future student learning.

To conclude, learning-oriented assessment seems to provide essential assessment principles that can be used as guiding practices to support student learning. With the integration of the so-called 'potential mixture of assessment elements'—appropriate task design, the involvement of students in the assessment process, and effective feedback, it is hoped this can improve student learning in current and/or future assignments.

#### **2.2.5. Sustainable assessment**

As mentioned in the previous section, Boud (2000) has developed an assessment concept known as 'sustainable assessment'. Sustainable assessment can be defined as "assessment that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs" (Boud, 2000, p.151). He argues that current assessment tasks are not preparing students for lifelong learning. Most arguments emphasise the effect on learning within a course, not on learning-oriented employment after graduation. He suggests that assessment should foster learning through life. He also insists that methods and techniques of assessment should cover a new conception of sustainable assessment that requires lifelong learning. More importantly, students should be encouraged to get involved with feedback from their peers, other practitioners, and from written and other sources to enhance their learning more effectively (Boud, 2000). Assessment should not just mark students' work but should also promote their understanding.

Boud has developed this term ‘sustainable assessment’ which was conceptualised with the other writers concerned about the notion of assessment for learning.

According to Boud (2000), some fundamental points have been suggested to construct a framework for sustainable assessment: (1) a criterion or standards framework is necessary; (2) a belief that all students can succeed is needed; (3) learners’ beliefs about their own capacity as learners can affect achievement; (4) the separation of feedback from grading should be considered; (5) the focus of assessment should be on learning rather than performance; (6) the development of self-assessment is vital; (7) reflective assessment with peer should be encouraged; for assessment to be formative, it has to be used; (8) formative assessment requires changing teaching and learning practices. These suggestions may not be implemented due to the time constraints, school culture, school policy, and many other hidden factors in different educational settings (Carless, 2005). Boud (2000) concludes that to achieve sustainable assessment, it is necessary to pay more attention to the effects of summative assessment and seek ways to reform it. The aim of sustainable assessment is not to replace other purposes of assessment; it can still integrate assessment for certificates and assessment for immediate learning.

To sum up, this section has discussed the fundamental roles of assessment in education. Assessment tasks can influence approaches to learning, so the design of appropriate assessment should cover content that is applicable to real life situations in which students can transfer the knowledge gained into their professional lives.

### **2.3. Review of studies**

This section presents a systematic review of the literature pertaining to perceptions and experiences of academics and students in tertiary education. Lecturer and student perceptions and experiences of assessment provide insights into the current practices of assessment. For example, they can speak to the purposes of assessment, current modes of assessment, assessment practice and its impact on learning strategies, and the characteristics of feedback. This review will identify the gaps in the literature in relation to assessment practices and extend the researcher’s understandings in the field of assessment.

### 2.3.1. Methodology for the review

Articles for the systematic review were conducted through three main sources: Google Scholar and Google Search, Education Research Complete, and Victoria University's Journal Finder. Within Journal Finder some journals related to tertiary education were retrieved, such as *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, *Studies in Higher Education*, *Higher Education*, and the *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. The search was limited to empirical studies and research studies published in English between the year 2000 and 2012. This limitation ensured a focus on contemporary literature. In addition, only studies related to assessment practices at higher education institutions were chosen. With this in mind the following search terms were entered in databases—perceptions, experiences, assessment, practices, lecturers, teachers, students, tertiary education, higher education, and university. To be included in this systematic review, articles had to meet the following the pre-determined inclusion criteria:

1. "The article is closely related to either academics' perceptions or/and students' perceptions of assessment or its related concepts including the beliefs, experiences, and practices of assessment in tertiary education."
2. "Researchers carried out qualitative or/and quantitative investigations about assessment practices."
3. "The studies were conducted in higher educational settings between the year 2000 and 2012 and were reported in English."

Relevant documents were sought and selected while the searches were carried out. The thirteen most relevant studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the literature review and summary. Eleven of these studies were undertaken in Western contexts such as England, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Portugal and South Africa. Two of the studies were carried out in Asian contexts, Malaysia and Hong Kong, with another from Afghanistan. Drawing on these studies, the review reported on the perceptions and experiences of academics and/or students about assessment in higher education. The results of the review will be reported in the following order: studies that investigate perceptions of academics only, students only and both academics and students about assessment. All of the studies in this review are summarised in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1: A summary of review of studies**

Studies	Authors/Year	Research Design	Context	Students	Lecturers	Key findings
1. Identifying academics' orientations to assessment practice	Samuelowicz and Bain (2002)	Qualitative	Australia		20	Enable student learning, give grades, and other purposes was to assess students' ability to integrate, transform, and use information.
2. Authenticity in assessment tasks: a heuristic exploration of academics' perceptions	Maclellan (2004)	Qualitative	Scotland		12	Ranking and grading students and a need of explicit criteria. This study identified that interviewees' conceptualisation was incomplete.
3. The lived experience of formative assessment practice in a British university	Asghar (2012)	Qualitative	England		9	This study highlights constraints of time and differing opinions of formative assessment practice.
4. Higher education students' perceptions of effective assessment	Wren, Sparrow, Northcote and Sharp (2009)	Action research	Australia	182		Summative assessment seems not to support student learning as they concern about the fairness of assessment.
5. Student perceptions of quality feedback in teacher education	Ferguson (2011)	Questionnaire	Australia	566		The findings of this study identified problems with assessment feedback quality and quantity.
6. Illustrating assessment: how Hong Kong university students conceive of the purposes of assessment	Brown and Wang (2011)	Qualitative (Drawings/ focus group)	Hong Kong	26		This study revealed that the most frequent images for assessment were drawings of negative emotions, being monitored and competition.
7. Students' perceptions about assessment procedures and processes	Fernandes, Flores and Lima (2012)	Survey Focus group	Portugal	102		Assessment in PLE focused on deep-level learning and critical thinking even though many students still prefer traditional teaching and assessment methods.

**Table 2.1: (Cont.) A summary of review of studies**

Studies	Authors/Year	Research Design	Context	Students	Lecturers	Key findings
8. Assessment for learning: the differing perceptions of tutors and students	Maclellan (2001)	Survey	England	130	80	Staff declared a commitment to the formative purposes of assessment but engaged in practices that militated against formative assessment being fully realised.
9. The perceptions of academic staff and students about the purpose of assessment and their actual practices	Gossmann (2008)	Survey Interview	South Africa	114	30	The findings showed that academic staff and students perceived the main purpose of assessment as developmental or formative.
10. Students' and teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment	Mussawy (2009)	Mixed method	Afghanistan	203	13	Students had more positive perceptions about assessment practices and their learning in quantitative method while they perceived that the current assessment practices limited their learning in qualitative method.
11. Comparing the perceptions of first year students, course coordinators, and academic leaders about assessment	Goos and Gannaway and Hughes (2011)	Survey Focus group Interviews	Australia	30	308 and 6 associate deans	First year students are identified as a disadvantages group due to perceptions of the role of feedback and formative assessment that may be influenced by their secondary school assessment experiences.
12. Faculty and students conceptions of assessment in higher education	Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston and Rees (2012)	Survey	New Zealand	1,224	877	Faculty were likely to view assessment as a trustworthy process aiding teaching and learning, whereas students viewed assessment as focussed primarily on accountability and perceived assessment as irrelevant or even ignored in the teaching and learning process.
13. Assessment preferences and practices in Malaysian higher education	Fook and Sidhu (2011)	Survey Interviews	Malaysia	69	47	The respondents indicated a greater preference to alternative formative assessment in comparison to traditional summative assessments.



### **2.3.2. Academics' perceptions about assessment**

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) undertook a study into assessment practices employed in undergraduate classes. This study used a qualitative approach by conducting interviews with twenty academics from five disciplines: chemistry, physiology, physiotherapy, nursing, and architecture. The participants were volunteers from three universities in Brisbane, Australia. The interviews focused upon their beliefs about the nature and function of their assessments relative to what they had taught. According to the findings, respondents viewed assessment in different ways. Some perceived that assessment enabled student learning while others placed emphasis on the importance of giving feedback on students' work where further help was needed. Others perceived that the main purpose of assessment was to grade students. Some lecturers perceived the purpose of assessment was to assess students' abilities in reproducing information, while others considered the purpose of assessment was to assess students' ability to integrate, transform and use information.

Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) placed lecturers into three main categories: (1) assessing students' ability to reproduce information presented in lectures and textbooks; (2) assessing students' ability to reproduce structured knowledge and apply it to modified solutions; (3) assessing students' ability to integrate, transform and use knowledge purposefully. However, according to their study "assessment practice evident in this study did not constitute assessment as requiring students to restructure or transform the knowledge they had been given" (p.198).

An investigation into the perceptions of lecturers about assessment practices was undertaken in one Scottish university. Maclellan (2004) used a qualitative approach to explore lecturers' perceptions of authentic assessment. Twelve academics from a representative group such as heads of department, module leaders/course directors, and lecturers/part-time tutors participated in in-depth interviews. They came from a range of different disciplines such as history, psychology and art. The interviews focused on their conceptions of desirable assessment. In other words, the study focused on both existing assessment practices and also what future assessment practices should be.

The findings of this study revealed five key themes: the purposes of assessment, assessment approaches, the types of learning to assess and the modes of assessment, and the use of criteria. Each of these themes can be considered in more detail. Firstly, the

purpose of assessment was to rank student achievement. In this respect Maclellan (2004) found similar results to Samuelowicz and Bain's (2002) study. In both of these studies, ranking students' achievement and the provision of grades were seen as the dominant perceptions of academics regarding the purposes of assessment. Secondly, the assessment of content knowledge was held to be useful, important and necessary. Thirdly, modes of assessment included oral assessment such as presentations and group discussion, practical assessment such as fieldwork experience, case studies and the creation of artefacts/materials, and mixed oral-practical assessment such as reporting on practical tasks, poster sessions and group projects. Finally, respondents thought students should be provided with explicit assessment criteria with the issued tasks.

Despite this Maclellan (2004) argues that even though the suggested results of assessment should focus on real life situations, analysis of the interviews based on Newmann's criteria (cited in Maclellan, 2004) for authentic assessment demonstrated that "interviewees' conceptualisation of authenticity was incomplete". (p.19). She concludes that a considerable need exists for curricula development if academics are to realise authentic assessment as intended by Wiggins (cited in Maclellan, 2004).

A study by Asghar (2012) that's similar to Maclellan (2004), and Samuelowicz and Bain (2002), employs a qualitative approach to investigate academics' perceptions, but only nine academics for interviews. This study investigating perceptions and opinions pertaining to formative assessment practice was undertaken at a British post-92 university. In this study, Asghar (2012) used a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to gather qualitative data from a group of nine academics teaching in different disciplines who volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews. The range of subjects was psychology, pharmacology, English and teacher education, sports science, biomedical science, travel and tourism, staff development, and teacher education. Asghar (2012) identified three main themes of this study: (1) conceptions of formative assessment; (2) making learning happen through assessment; and (3) the challenge of engaging students (p. 205). The findings of this study highlighted constraints of time and different perspectives of formative assessment practice.

Asghar's (2012) respondents viewed the purpose of formative assessment as 'developmental' and suggested that the provision of feedback should further student learning. Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) found a similar result regarding academics'

perceptions of assessment practices. According to Samuelowicz and Bain's study, academics reported that assessment supported student learning and feedback which helped students grow.

Asghar (2012) pointed out that "formative assessment was felt to have the power to enlighten students to new ways of learning" (p.214). Asghar (2012), however, was concerned about inequality in the amount and quality of feedback provided to students. Despite this, respondents recognised that students who were engaged in formative assessment tending to have more productive results. Asghar (2012) suggested that the engagement of dialogic feedback with students should be done with a focus on how to move forward. In this study, Asghar (2012) found that academics acknowledged the value of formative assessment, but suggested the size of classes and time were challenges. In relation to assessment culture and understandings of formative assessment, Asghar (2012) suggests "it is important to review how assessment culture influences how students think and act, and that, by being better informed, academics would understand how using formative assessment strategically can influence student learning in a positive and holistic manner" (p.221).

With these studies in mind, the review identifies that assessment can enable student learning, and feedback can support student growth. However, the review can highlight that practices of assessment do not always require students to transform their knowledge since the actual practices of assessment did not reflect the corresponding theoretical frameworks of assessment. The review also highlighted the need for effective feedback which used to support student learning.

### **2.3.3. Students' perceptions of assessment**

To gain more insight into assessment practices, the perceptions of students need to be explored. As students have experienced assessment practices in academic studies, their practices and perceptions are deemed important.

Wren, Sparrow, Northcote and Sharp (2009) used action research to investigate experiences, perceptions and beliefs of two cohorts of pre-service teachers about the assessment practices they encountered in their teacher education with Edith Cowan University, Australia. Action research was used because this study placed a high value on reflective practice (Wren et al., 2009).

Three main methods of data collection (self-directed focus groups, written responses, and online discussions) were used for this study. Students in five 4<sup>th</sup> year tutorial groups (122 students in total) volunteered to participate in self-directed student focus groups. They represented the course demographics of age, gender, experience, ability, and engagement with study. Fifty-two students from focus groups were invited to complete an individual short written response. Eight third year students out of 100 completed online discussions about assessment beliefs.

According to the findings, students were concerned with the fairness of assessment. Examples can be found in the weighting of assessments and marking procedures. These students perceived “feedback to be unjust in some cases” and could not always “trust that the markers had read the assignment carefully” (p.15). In this study, students perceived that summative purposes of assessment were less important and they were less supportive of the inclusion of assessments that judged their performance. Many expressed a view that ‘there should be no exams’.

Wren et al. (2009) stressed that negative perceptions and beliefs about assessment in university contexts held by many students may reflect problems of effective implementation in good practice and also reflect differences in thinking regarding the nature and purpose of assessment. Differing perceptions have been found between academics and students with regards to the importance of feedback in relation to student enhancement. According to studies by Samuelowicz and Bain (2002) and Asghar (2012), academics acknowledged the value of feedback that supports student learning. On the other hand, according to Wren et al. (2009) students reported that feedback given was too brief and unlikely to help them grow.

It can be argued that both academics and students place an importance of feedback; however, the effectiveness of feedback is perceived differently and seen as a challenge by students. Time constraints and numbers of students are seen as challenges in academic studies. Lecturers’ knowledge is seen as another factor regarding the provision of effective feedback. As Wren et al.’s study focused on one educational course within a university along with only eight third year students out of a hundred participating in online discussion, the results of this study cannot be generalised to other disciplines.

Research showed the importance of assessment feedback in relation to enhancing student learning. A study investigating perceptions of students about effective, quality feedback from their extensive experiences in higher education was undertaken by Ferguson (2011) in a major Australian university. This study used a questionnaire with a mix of open and closed questions. Participants in this study were from three different pre-service education programmes within the university, a four-year undergraduate programme (BEd), a one year-graduate programme (DipEd), and a two-year graduate programme (BTch). Four hundred and sixty-five (80%) graduate students and 101 (72%) undergraduate students out of a total sample of 750 completed the questionnaire voluntarily.

This study found that a large number of students needed feedback containing constructive comments to give them confidence and motivation. It is argued that “the most important factor in ‘good’ feedback was a clear link between assessment tasks and guidelines, assessment frameworks and criteria and feedback offered”(Ferguson, 2011, p. 60). However, most students reported that unclear or brief feedback could demotivate their future learning. This finding was consistent with a study by Wren et al. (2009) showing that it was unhelpful of lecturers to give feedback through brief comments.

In the same year as Ferguson’s study, Brown and Wang (2011) undertook a study exploring students’ conception of the purposes of assessment in Hong Kong universities. In this non-experimental study, students were asked to draw pictures of assessment and what assessment meant to them. They then discussed their drawings for about an hour in focus groups. Each group consisted of four to six people, who were from the same institution. In total, six focus groups comprising 26 Hong Kong university students participated in the drawing and focus group discussions. The students were enrolled in three major types of university education programmes: pre-degree, bachelor’s degree and post-graduate study in a wide variety of disciplines such as architecture, engineering, science, business, education, social science, art, communication and theology. This study aimed to illustrate the assessment careers and conceptions of students enrolled at university rather than reflect current practices of assessment in higher education.

The key findings drawn from the images indicated that assessments were negative emotions such as feeling monitored and pressured to complete work. Brown and Wang suggested that students saw assessment as a negative and oppressive process. Furthermore, they found that students actively resisted the assessment system. Brown and Wang (2011) identified that “the drawings reflect a rational response to the pressures higher education students face from society, education and families through the examination system for selection in Hong Kong” (p. 15). This implies that the context of education may influence students’ culture of assessment. For example, students in Brown’s and Wang’s study showed feelings of anxiety about assessment and the sense of being closely monitored. They also felt pressures of competition with peers in assessment.

A recent study by Fernandes, Flores and Lima (2012) exploring students’ perceptions about assessment practices was conducted at a university located in northern Portugal. It focused on project-led education (PLE) approaches and their impact on students’ learning processes and outcomes. This qualitative case study used surveys based on a set of open questions and a focus group. Students involved in PLE experiences in a first-year engineering programme from the academic years 2005/2006 to 2007/2008 participated in this study. There were approximately 40 students enrolling in each academic year of this first-year engineering programme. Students from the academic years 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 participated in the individual survey and 22 students from the academic year 2007/2008 volunteered to participate in the focus group. This study carried out two stages of data collection. Surveys were carried out at the beginning and end of each PLE edition and the focus group was done after a period of six months.

Findings from this study revealed key patterns in students’ perspectives of learning and assessment, as well as the role of formative and summative assessment in PLE. Some students reported that assessment emphasised deep-level learning and critical learning and allowed them to understand and link course context to real-life situations. In relation to this Fernandes et al. (2012, p. 170) describes how “students were able to relate their work to broader and professional situations outside the academic world”. However, according to the findings from their survey, many students still preferred traditional teaching and assessment methods in which students played a more passive role in the learning process.

Students reported the importance of giving feedback in tutorial sessions, group presentations and midterm reports. These students recognised they could improve their performance and were able to set new strategies to achieve learning outcomes. The finding of this study was consistent with Ferguson's (2011) view that feedback was needed to motivate student learning. In addition, the findings from the study by Wren et al. (2009) are in line with that of Fernandes et al. (2012) as students placed less emphasis on summative assessment and suggested formative assessment or 'thought formative assessment' was more important. They also perceived that feedback is important to furthering their learning. Fernandes et al. (2012) found assessment practices in PLE support students in deep learning and link course content to real-life situations. Their concern, however, was added student workload and time management issues resulting from continuous assessment of student learning in PLE.

In conclusion, the emerging themes of four studies about students' perceptions regarding assessment were the fairness of assessment, summative purposes, and the importance of feedback that supports students learning. Despite this, the review identified that some students preferred traditional lectures and assessment procedures because they exclusively focused on gaining high marks.

#### **2.3.4. Academics and students' perceptions about assessment**

As this study aims to compare perceptions of lecturers and students with regard to assessment, it is important to review past studies investigating perceptions held by both lecturers and students in the university level.

Maclellan (2001) conducted a survey research in one UK university. This study focused on the differences in perceptions and practices held by lecturers and third-year students in a BEd (Hons) Programme. The study used a 40-item questionnaire to find lecturers' beliefs and students' experiences with the theory and practice of assessment. Eighty lecturers and 130 third-year undergraduates participated in this study. According to the findings, lecturers and students had different perspectives towards assessment. Lecturers were likely to adopt formative assessment for developmental purposes such as motivating students, diagnosing learning and evaluating teaching and this enabled further learning. Students, however, perceived that assessment was commonly summative and that ranking and grading their achievements was the dominant focus of the university. Students considered that assessment was not authentic in practice.

In this study, Maclellan (2001) commented that “the staff view of assessment did not fully espouse the philosophy of the standards model, thereby presenting a somewhat confusing picture of assessment” (p.317). Maclellan pointed out that staff declared the use of formative purposes of assessment, but their actual practices of assessment were not consistent with a standards model. Maclellan’s study used only a survey questionnaire to investigate lecturers’ and students’ beliefs and practices of assessment in a university. It can be argued that interviews or a focus group with the key stakeholders could have enabled a deeper understanding.

Gossmann (2008) conducted a case study investigating the perceptions of academic staff and students about the purposes of assessment and actual assessment practices. This study was undertaken in the Baccalaureus Education (BEd), Early Childhood Development, Foundation Phase Programme in the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa. This study employed a survey questionnaire and follow-up interviews. Thirty academic staff and 114 third-year students completed the questionnaire, and three academic staff and three students participated in interviews.

The key findings revealed that academic staff and students perceived the main purpose of assessment as ‘developmental or formative’. According to the study, however, it was confirmed that the purpose of formative assessment was not evident in the practice of academic staff. Also, academic staff reported that class size was the major issue in implementing effective assessment practice. Students, on the other hand, reported that the main issues were the reliability of assessment. The results of this study were similar to Maclellan’s (2001) study. While academic staff declared their focus on formative assessment, their practices of assessment did not follow the standards model. Gossmann (2008) argued the standards model is needed in tertiary education because it can be used to reflect what has been learnt in criterion-referenced assessment. The follow-up interviews of Gossmann’s study invited only three academics and three students, so their views are not considered to represent the views of the faculty as the whole.

Mussawy (2009) undertook a study in three departments in an Afghanistan university. This study used mixed methods to explore students and teachers’ perceptions of classroom assessment. Two hundred and three third-and fourth-year students completed the questionnaire (Students’ Perception of Assessment Questionnaire). The students were from three departments (social science, natural science, and languages) at the



Baghlan Higher Education Institution. Thirteen faculty lecturers drawn from the three departments and 28 students from third and fourth year volunteered for interviews. This study showed differences between the survey and interview findings. In the questionnaire students had more positive perceptions about assessment practices and their learning. In the interview, on the other hand, students reported that the current assessment practices limited their learning. The study also found that the current dynamics had a negative impact on assessment practice in this institute. Teachers and students, however, were aware of the importance of assessment in relation to student learning.

In addition, this study revealed that while current assessment practices focused on exams, classroom discussion, classroom assignments, projects, and seminars, teachers were willing to include a combination of alternative approaches with traditional methods. In the study, faculty teachers recognised the weaknesses in the dominant traditional assessment approaches implemented in this institute. According to the findings, Mussawy (2009) suggested that alternative assessment approaches—performance-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment and peer-assessment, cooperative group assessment, reflective journal writing, and scaffolded essays—were needed for this institute.

Interestingly, three key stakeholders—students, course coordinators, and Associate Deans—participated in study by Goos, Gannaway, and Hughes (2011). Their study investigated assessment perceptions of students, course coordinators, and faculty Associate Deans responsible for teaching and learning at the University of Queensland, Australia. Their data was drawn from two institutional research projects conducted at the University of Queensland. Three main data gathering tools—focus group, a survey, and interviews—were used. Three focus groups of 10 students with each group representing a different GPA range were selected on the basis of a stratified random sampling in the Bachelor of Science programme. An online survey was used to investigate assessment perceptions of course coordinators; responses were received from 308 people (about a 33% response rate) out of 930 academic coordinators. Six of the seven Associate Deans participated in semi-structured interviews. The strength of this study was that a wide range of data collection methods were used to answer the research question.

Their key findings relate to different perceptions of assessment. First year students were dissatisfied with the helpfulness and timeliness of feedback on the learning tasks they undertook during classes. This finding was in line with studies by Wren et al. (2009), Ferguson (2011), and Fernandes et al. (2012). Students valued the importance of feedback because they believed that it can further their learning, but they felt it was easily devalued by bad timing and content of feedback from academics. According to the study, course coordinators were concerned with the preparation of assessment tasks and their interactions with students. They were also concerned about bureaucratic assessment requirements and workload issues. They confirmed that the strongest influences on assessment practice are a school or programme's culture as well as students' personal professional knowledge and experience. Associate Deans identified feedback as a priority issue that needed addressing.

According to the findings, Goos et al. (2011) concluded that the main stakeholders in assessment—Associate Deans, course coordinators and students—did not share a common understanding of the purposes of feedback and assessment in general. Therefore, they pointed out that “efforts to improve the quality of feedback and assessment may be misdirected when these differences remained unexamined” (p.105).

While studies by Maclellan (2001), Gossmann (2008) and Goos et al., (2011) were conducted within one university, a study by Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees (2012) investigating faculty and students' attitudes with regards to aspects of assessment was conducted at four tertiary institutions in New Zealand. This study employed parallel surveys of conceptions of assessment in which a six-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to investigate the differences between faculties' and students' conceptions of assessment. Faculties teaching undergraduate programme and first year undergraduate students at four New Zealand tertiary institutes participated in this study. The tertiary institutions consisted of two universities, one polytechnic institute, and a wananga. This study used a convenience sample, so participation was voluntary and confidential. There were 877 faculty teaching staff (males=441; females=436) and 1,224 first year undergraduates (males=379; females=845) completed questionnaires.

The findings of this study revealed that teaching staff perceived assessment as a tool to improve student learning and reflect their teaching practices, whereas students

perceived assessment as irrelevant and unfair in the teaching and learning process. This finding lends support to previous empirical work in the context of higher education, particularly those findings where staff and students held different perceptions of current assessment tasks (Asghar, 2012; Gossman, 2008; Maclellan, 2001; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002). Students also viewed assessment as having a main focus on accountability both at the student and institutional level. The differing perceptions held by faculty and students raise key issues for higher education. In this study, Fletcher et al. (2012) point out that “an absence of clear institutional policy, an empirical base, and lack of transparency around assessment practices can contribute to these differences, particularly for students who are on the receiving end of assessment” (p.12). According to the study, Fletcher et al. (2012) further emphasize that assessment policy and practices should be ‘*fit for purpose*’.

In the Asian context, there are very few studies in the area of assessment practices in higher education. One study about assessment preferences, practices and alternative forms of assessment was conducted in a public university in Malaysia. Fook and Sidhu (2011) conducted this study to explore the perspectives of undergraduates, postgraduates and lecturers with regard to assessment preferences and practices. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Two sets of questionnaires were used for faculty lecturers, and undergraduate and postgraduate students. Follow-up interviews were also used to investigate assessment preferences and practices by lecturers, undergraduates, and postgraduates. Thirty lecturers, 27 postgraduates, and 42 undergraduates were selected to participate in this study. Three lecturers, three postgraduates and three undergraduates were drawn from the sample group participated in interviews. The aim of the interviews was to gain more insight into the assessment practices in higher education.

Fook and Sidhu’s study (2011) found that respondents preferred alternative assessment to traditional summative assessments. The findings highlighted the need for alternative assessment and practices of formative assessment which were deemed to transform knowledge among the students in higher education. This finding has also been confirmed by other studies carried out in the context of higher education (Wren et al., 2009; Asghar, 2012). With the empirical evidence from this study, Fook and Sidhu (2011, p. 70) highlighted that “institutions of higher learning need to revisit their assessment procedures to include more formative assessment procedures that would

encourage more student participation”. The study also suggested that issues of validity and reliability in formative assessment should be extensively considered because these two are the most important characteristics of good assessment criteria. The study concluded that the assessment tasks should range from comprehension to problem solving, explaining, drawing conclusions and critical thinking (Fook & Sidhu, 2011).

It can be concluded that two key findings about academics and students with regard to assessment practices in higher education have emerged in the previous empirical studies. These studies have demonstrated that academics considered the purpose of assessment practices is to further student learning and support them to grow with provided formative feedback while students seemed to believe that the dominant focus of assessment in the institutes had a summative purpose. Importantly, students seemed to need more alternative assessment methods, authentic assessment tasks with timely and quality feedback to enhance their learning. Some students were in favour of traditional methods of assessment since they needed marks rather than the types of assessment that support their learning.

## **2.4. Chapter summary**

This chapter reviewed conceptualisations of assessment and the purposes of assessment as discussed in the literature. Assessment drives student learning and it is a key to foster student learning. The purpose of assessment is not only to measure student learning, but more importantly to enhance their learning and engage them in assessment dialogue. Therefore, the design of assessment tasks is of considerable importance regardless of assessment purposes. In addition, constructive and timely feedback is seen as a positive factor for student learning. Assessment related dialogue between students and lecturers should be built because it enhances student learning and fosters a common understanding around the purposes of assessment.

The systematic review indicates that despite differences in studies conducted in different countries, there is one theme that the studies have in common: the involved stakeholders perceive that assessment enhances student learning and feedback is a key to supporting learning. As the review indicated, there are two main purposes of assessment in education: the giving of summative marks, and the improvement of student learning. Also, research indicated that assessment formats can influence the ways students learn. Feedback is central to supporting further learning. However, results

of the systematic review raised concerns with regard to the practice of assessment and the provision of feedback. In the review, for example, academic staff particularly acknowledged the use of formative assessment purposes in their course. Meanwhile, and in contrast, the findings of the review also revealed the residual dominance of summative assessment practices. This indicates that some staff may not be well equipped with knowledge of formative assessment (see Maclellan, 2001, 2004). Therefore, teacher professional development in this field is needed if we want students to grow in their thinking skills and self-assessment.

The results of the review suggest the need to investigate students' and lecturers' perceptions and experiences of assessment before the further development of assessment practices can be made. Previous studies have been done in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland and Malaysia. Those studies have been done only in developed countries. There is no study of perceptions of lecturers and students about assessment practices in higher education in Cambodia. Therefore, investigating students' and lecturers' perceptions and experiences in relation to assessment practices seems particularly relevant in the context of Cambodia. This is indicated by the review that revealed little evidence to describe perceptions and experiences of stakeholders in Cambodian universities.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

A body of literature on assessment in higher education has indicated the essential role of assessment methods or tasks that foster student learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2005; Brown, 2004). This study aimed to investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students about current assessment in a Cambodian university. The study focused on five particular aims (1) to identify current assessment practices and purposes; (2) to examine the perceived purposes of the current assessment tasks; (3) to examine student understandings of the process of assessment and assessment criteria; (4) to examine whether the assessment encourages students in self-assessment; (5) to examine whether feedback provided to students promotes learning.

Data was collected for this study to indicate perspectives of lecturers and students about the conceptualisation of assessment in this particular university. The perceptions and practices of assessment by lecturers and students were obtained through a questionnaire method. Furthermore, individual interviews and focus groups were undertaken to complement the surveys and provide participants with opportunities to expand on the questionnaire topics.

This chapter firstly describes the interpretive paradigm and descriptive study method employed for this research. Secondly, it provides a detailed account of the specific research methods adopted, sampling procedures, questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, and data analysis techniques. Finally, it outlines the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of this study.

### **3.2. Research paradigm**

As this study aims to gain more insight into the views of both lecturers and students about assessment, it thus employs the interpretive paradigm. Many key writers (see Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Neil, Mark, & Marion, 2008) discuss the selection of research paradigms in educational research.

Two models of inquiry (paradigms)—positivistic/scientific and interpretive are frequently associated with educational research. A positivistic researcher seeks to

generalize findings with hard quantitative figures, employing a scientific approach while an interpretive researcher tends to explore perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of phenomena in the social world (Neil et al., 2008).

The interpretive paradigm is mainly concerned with the understanding of individual experiences and viewpoints. The main focus in the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, interpretive paradigm was deemed appropriate since it sought to reveal the participants' viewpoints and experiences about assessment practices.

Even though research approaches and methods are inclined to be used in either the positivistic or the interpretive paradigm, there is overlap in the way that methods are employed within specific paradigms (Neil et al., 2008). A mixed methodology is often employed with the combination of quantitative and qualitative data. A mixed method of data collection, combining quantitative with qualitative was adopted in this study to investigate the lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences in relation to current assessment practices.

### **3.3. Research design**

As there have been few studies carried out in Cambodia, a descriptive study is a valuable approach to identifying the current situation of assessment and to provide a basis for understanding the perceptions of assessment practices. Descriptive research, according to Best (cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000), is concerned with:

Conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of views, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing. At times, descriptive research is concerned with how *what is* or *what exists* is related to some preceding event that has influenced or affected a present condition or event. (p.169)

Descriptive studies are typically concerned with the understanding of people's attitudes, opinions, demographic information, conditions, and procedures (Anderson, 1998; Gay, 1992). Johnson and Christensen (2008, p. 377) emphasize that "descriptive research focused on providing an accurate description or picture of the status or characteristics of situation or phenomenon". Therefore this study used descriptive research as its aim is to identify current assessment practices and as the nature of descriptive research aimed to

learn about the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, behaviours, and demographics of people. This approach was adopted to disclose the participants' opinions or beliefs about the current assessment (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

This study used a cross-sectional survey, aimed at gaining data about people's views, attitudes or beliefs. Many studies adopt cross-sectional surveys in the field of education (Creswell, 2005). According to Creswell (2005), cross-sectional design has five purposes: (1) to examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions or practices ; (2) to compare two or more educational groups in relation to attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices; (3) to measure community needs of educational services which relate to programmes, courses, school facilities projects, or involvement in the schools ; (4) to evaluate a programme such as a survey that provides useful information to decision makers; (5) in a large-scale assessment of students or teachers such as a state-wide study or a national survey involving thousands of participants.

This study used a cross-sectional survey design for the second of Creswell's purposes because two groups of respondents were surveyed for their views about current assessment practices. More specifically, data obtained from this survey aimed to compare lecturers' and students' perceptions with regard to the assessment practices. Cross-sectional research has an advantage in that data can be collected from different kinds of people regardless of gender, socioeconomic classes, age groups, and different abilities in a short period of time (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). As the participants have varying backgrounds, and the time constraints were also a challenge, the selection of cross-sectional study was a deemed suitable approach for this study. To this end, the study employed mixed-methods—questionnaires, semi-interviews, and focus groups.

Brewer and Hunter (cited in Creswell, 2005) define “a mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research question” (p.510). Combining quantitative and qualitative data provides a better understanding of a research problem than one type of data, and mixed research helps improve the quality of research (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In this study, questionnaires provided the respondents' reported experiences and practices of assessment and qualitative interview data from lecturers and students provided further information as oral response to confirm or contest the survey findings.



Self-report questionnaires with a predetermined range of responses do not allow respondents to give in-depth expressions of their conceptualisation of assessment. For this reason, interviews and focus groups enable issues from the questionnaires to be investigated in more depth and also for other ideas not covered in the questionnaire to be introduced by participants. Thus, adopting mixed methods enabled the study to integrate the data from survey, interview and focus group about the assessment practices and to gain a better understanding of the current situation of assessment practices.

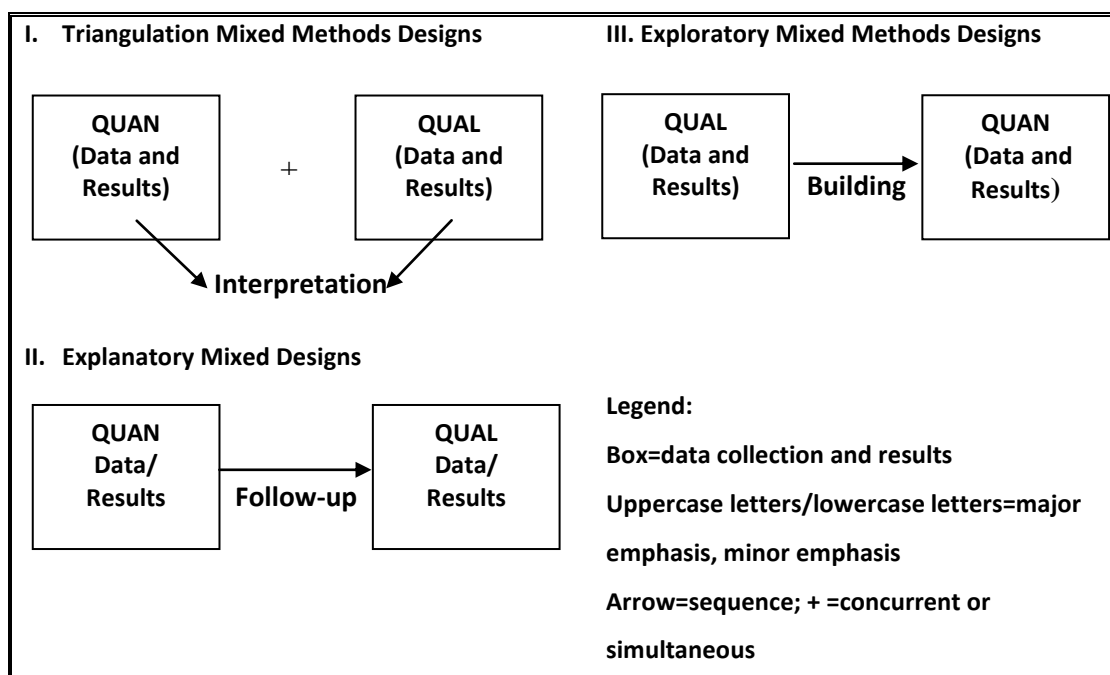
Three major types of mixed method designs—the triangulation design, the explanatory design, and the exploratory design—can be employed in mixed research (Creswell, 2005). Creswell (2005, pp. 514-516) explains the following that:

(1) the purpose of a triangulation mixed methods design is to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand a research problem; (2) an explanatory mixed methods design consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results; (3) the purpose of an exploratory mixed methods design is the procedure of first gathering qualitative data to explore a phenomenon, and then collecting quantitative data to explain relationships found in the qualitative data.

This study adopted the explanatory design for data gathering procedure as the survey was conducted with lecturers and students in the first stage; then with the result from initial data analysis, further in-depth interviews with lecturers and focus groups with students were conducted to gain a further understanding about current assessment practices within the faculty.

In the data analysis stage, survey data and qualitative interview data were integrated. This aims to broaden the understandings of current assessment practices. As Creswell (2005) explained, triangulation means collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the data, and using the combined data to answer the research problem. In this study, triangulation was adopted because it can significantly enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of a research finding (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

**Table 3.1: Types of Mixed Method Designs (Creswell, 2005, p. 514)**



### 3.4. Setting

This study was undertaken with the Faculty of Education in one of the many the private universities in Cambodia. This university was established about 12 years ago as a private university. The university has eight study centres throughout the country. The main study centre is situated in Phnom Penh, Cambodia where this study was undertaken. The university comprises of seven faculties, namely (1) Faculty of Economics; (2) Faculty of Business Management; (3) Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality; (4) Faculty of Science and Technology; (5) Faculty of Engineering & Architecture; (6) Faculty of Education; (7) Faculty of Law and Social Science.

In addition, this university has five graduate schools which offer a range of master and PhD programmes. The courses offered are research-based teaching. Overall, this university offers various qualifications which rank from associate degrees, bachelor degrees, master degrees, and doctoral degrees. Approximately 10,000 students have enrolled in several degrees since 2000. At the moment more than 12,000 students are enrolled in different courses in the seven faculties.

The Faculty of Education in particular offers four main programmes which include a Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English as Foreign Languages (TEFL), a Bachelor of Arts

in Translation and Interpretation, a Bachelor of Education in Administration, and a Bachelor of English and Hospitality Management. The faculty has twenty five teaching staff whose educational qualifications rank from bachelors degree to PhDs.

As universities are required to follow the ACC in terms of quality improvement measures - and with assessment being part of that quality improvement - this university itself adopts the assessment procedure requirements of the committee to assess student learning. The assessment methods of this Faculty follow a general pattern, with on-going assessment normally worth 60% of marks and 40% of marks allocated to final examinations. The common modes of assessment include revision tests, quizzes, presentations, written assignments, mid-term exams, and final examinations.

### **3.5. Participants**

The participants of this study were lecturers and students of The Faculty of Education. There were twenty five teaching staff in the faculty and eighteen of them participated in the survey. A hundred and two students participated in the survey. The fourth and third year students and lecturers in the BA/TEFL programme were selected because: (1) they had a wide range of assessment practices and experiences in the faculty; (2) they are considered a representative group in the teaching programme of the faculty (3) they are a collectively accessible sample and suitable for the scope of this study. Table 3.2 indicated the number of questionnaires distributed to lecturers and students and the number of questionnaires received.

**Table 3.2: Questionnaire distribution and the response rate from the respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Questionnaires distributed</b>	<b>Questionnaires received</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>
<b>Lecturers</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>81.81%</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>91.17%</b>

#### **3.5.1. Demographic characteristic of participants**

Demographic characteristics of the lecturers collected were age, gender, subject taught, educational qualification, and teaching experience. Table 3.3 provides statistics for the lecturers' characteristics.

**Table 3.3: Demographic information of lecturers**

Characteristics		% Total
Gender	Male	83.3
	Female	16.7
Educational qualification	PhD	5.6
	Master	72.2
	Bachelor	22.2
Teaching experience	3-5 years	22.2
	6-10 years	55.6
	11 or above	22.2

The table shows that male lecturers outweigh female lecturers in this faculty. The number of male lecturers is about five times that of the female lecturers (83.3% male and 16.7% female). As indicated in the table, the majority of lecturers (72.2%) had a masters' degree while 22% had a bachelor degree, and only 5% PhD.

The table also indicates that participants had a wide range of teaching experience from at least 3 years to about 11 years of teaching experience. More than half of the lecturers (55.6%) had been teaching for more than six years, 22.2% had been teaching for 3-5 years, and 22.2% had been teaching for more than 11 years. They taught a wide range of subjects such as Core English, Academic Writing, Cultural Studies, Literature Studies, Communication Studies, Teaching Methodology, Course Design, Educational Psychology, and Language Assessment.

Table 3.4 further illustrates that male students outnumber female students. The number of male students is almost twice that of the female students (60.5% male and 39.5% female). The table also indicates that more than half of the students surveyed (52.7%) were fourth year students while 47.3% of students were third year students.

**Table 3.4: Demographic information of students**

Characteristics		% Total
Gender	Male	60.5
	Female	39.5
Year of studying	Fourth year	52.7
	Third year	47.3

### **3.5.2. Participant recruitment**

The forms of non-random sampling techniques are convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Convenience sampling was selected for this study because participants are easily accessible and they are the representative group in the faculty.

Convenience sampling is a method for participant selection because participants can be easily recruited and they were willing to participate in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Since participants are composed of volunteers, the results of this study are not generalisable to the entire population (Gay, 1992; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). However, Creswell (2005) points out that convenience sampling is able to provide valuable information for research questions and hypotheses. As time and practical constraints were challenges, convenience sampling was an appropriate tool for this study.

As this study used convenience sampling, selection interview criteria for lecturer participants were based on teaching experiences, educational qualifications and their interests in this study. In this study, three lecturers holding bachelor degree who have taught more than six years were invited to participate in the interview. Also, three of the lecturers with more than six years teaching experiences and master degree were invited to participate in interviews. In total, a sample of six lecturers participating in the survey volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Two groups of students were invited to participate in focus group discussions. Their class lecturer was asked to help nominate six students for each group. The selection criteria for focus group discussions were based on self-confidence in discussions and their interests in the study. In total, six of the fourth year students were invited to participate in the focus groups. One student from this group withdrew due to personal reasons. Another six third year students were also invited for the focus group discussions. A summary of characteristics of participants in this study is illustrated in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5: Characteristics of participants who participated in interview and focus group**

In-depth interviews		Focus group discussion	
Six lecturers	Qualifications	Focus group 1	Focus group 2
Lecturer A	M.Ed	Group A (5 students of year four group)	Group B (6 students of year three group)
Lecturer B	B.Ed		
Lecturer C	B.Ed		
Lecturer D	M.Ed		
Lecturer E	B.Ed		
Lecturer F	M.Ed		

### 3.6. Data gathering methods

This study used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and course outlines to investigate the research questions. Questionnaires were conducted aiming to gain and compare the lecturers' and students' perspectives about assessment. Interviews and focus groups were undertaken to gain more understandings about current assessment practices. The course outlines were also scrutinised for information about assessment marking.

#### 3.6.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Maclellan (2001). Questionnaire items in Maclellan's study were developed by Maclellan and influenced by the theoretical ideas of Biggs (1999), Bowden and Marton (1998) and Prosser and Trigwell (1999) together with McDowell's (1998) account of old and new assessment practices (see Maclellan, 2001). A 40-item questionnaire on the experiences of assessment was undertaken in one U.K higher education establishment. Questionnaire items reflected the range of assessment issues that were documented in the literature (Maclellan, 2001).

This study used Maclellan's questionnaire because it is considered a comprehensive tool for comparing perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students in the faculty where this study was undertaken. An adaptation of Maclellan's (2001) questionnaire was made to meet the purposes of study and the research questions. More specifically, the moderation section was replaced by items related to assessment criteria. The assessment

criteria section sought respondents' views about understandings of assessment and marking criteria. In this study the questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale is based on seven main themes: purpose of assessment, content of assessment, assessment approach, timing of assessment, modes of assessment, assessment criteria, and value of feedback. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study—one for lecturers (see Appendix A) and another for students (see Appendix B). Table 3.6 summarises the items that are components of the conceptualisation of assessment practices.

**Table 3.6: The conceptualisation of assessment practices underlying the questionnaire**

<b>Conceptualisation of assessment practices</b>	<b>Number of items</b>
<b>Purpose of assessment</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Content of assessment</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Assessment approach</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Timing of assessment</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Modes of assessment</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Assessment criteria</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Value of feedback</b>	<b>7</b>

Items were scored on the 4-point Likert scale; the respondents selected the response that reflected their perceptions and experiences of the current assessment practices. Likert scale was illustrated below:

Frequently	=	4
Sometimes	=	3
Never	=	2
Don't know	=	1

Questionnaires can be used in quantitative, qualitative or mixed research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Questionnaires, according to Punch (2005), aim to discover information which includes background and biographical information, knowledge and behavioural information. The questionnaire used in this study covers measures of attitudes, values, opinions, and beliefs (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Punch, 2005).

As the purpose of this study aimed to perceive lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences on a wide range of assessment practices, the questionnaire adopted was deemed a valuable instrument. This method enabled participants to respond to a range of issues relating to the conceptualisation of assessment that shape current assessment practices. Furthermore, the questionnaire used in the study was seen as time-efficient and generally feasible.

### **3.6.2. Semi-structured interview**

As this study used Creswell's explanatory mixed design for data gathering, individual interviews with lecturers and focus group discussions were also conducted after the completion of initial survey result. An explanatory mixed-methods design was used because a survey was conducted in the first stage, and follow-up interviews and focus groups were conducted afterwards (Creswell, 2005)—to better explain the results of the survey and to gain deeper insights into the perspectives of lecturers and students in relation to assessment practices.

Interviews are a key to obtain in-depth information about people's perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Punch, 2005). Patton (1987) points out that in-depth interviews allow the researcher to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain a better understanding of that person's views. Interviews can result in more accurate and honest responses because the interviewee has chances to express related issues and the interviewer can clarify research purposes and questions (Gay, 1992). Hence, this study used a semi-structured interview to gain more insights from lecturers' views of current assessment practices, to seek further clarification from lecturers and supplement survey findings.

The interview protocol of this study comprised seven questions (see Appendix C) which covered seven main themes of assessment practices. These were purposes of assessment, content of assessment, modes of assessment, assessment marking criteria, value of feedback and the assessment challenges. Information sheets for interviews with lecturers were also provided before the interview began. In addition, interviewer could ask probing questions when there were incomplete or unclear responses. In the interview, participants were asked some related questions in order to make information clear. This study is not intended to produce findings that are generalisable; rather,



through rich description, the intention was to provide overall description of current assessment as perceived by main stakeholders.

### **3.6.3. Focus group discussion**

Two focus group discussions with students were conducted in this study. Creswell (2005, p. 215) defines that “focus group interview is the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people, typically four to six”. Group interviews can make important contributions in research as the group situation tends to encourage people to make explicit their views, perceptions, motives, and reasons (Punch, 2005). Therefore, the focus group discussions were conducted in this study because they can be used to complement other methods of data collection, the interview and the survey. They are also useful to provide in-depth information in a short period of time (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In this particular study, the combination of the focus group and semi-structured interview with a survey was used to ‘flesh out’ views and information in the survey (Punch, 2005).

With such a potent tool for gathering useful information within a group, it was possible to discuss the related topic with several people and obtain rich information in a short period of time. Participants could share their thoughts and express any concerns about current assessment practices. In this study, focus group protocol (see Appendix D) along with an information sheet was sent to participants who volunteered to participate in the focus group a few days before discussions began.

### **3.6.4. Documentary data**

Course outlines were also examined. The course outlines were obtained with permission from the dean of the faculty. Analysis of seventeen course outlines was undertaken in this study to identify assessment marking criteria and assessment types outlined in the faculty. The common characteristics of the course outline in this faculty are outlined with course description, course objectives, methods of on-going assessment/scoring, course content, and teaching methods. This includes required textbooks/learning resources, grades and grades points and references. Data from these course outlines provided another means for the researcher to triangulate with data collected from the survey, interview, and focus group discussions. Therefore, the information provided in

the course outlines is another useful source which can be used to determine characteristics of current assessment criteria and practices.

### **3.7. Data gathering procedures**

The mixed methods design used in this study adopted a self-report questionnaire, semi-structured interview and focus groups to perceive lecturers' and students' current assessment practices. This section explains how questionnaires were piloted and administered, and how the interview and focus groups were conducted.

#### **3.7.1. Piloting questionnaire**

The questionnaire was piloted with five lecturers and five year-four students in the Faculty of Education in a Cambodian private university. The purpose was to check the appropriateness of the content so that any changes necessary to improve the data gathering tools could be made. As Creswell (2005) explains, a piloting questionnaire attempts to determine the participants' capability in the sample with regard to the completion of surveys and to check participants understanding of questions. Piloting questionnaires could result in increased reliability, validity, and practicability of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2000).

Three lecturers provided feedback after completing the piloting the questionnaire. One of the lecturers said the introduction of the questionnaire should be shorter and another expressed that some students may not be familiar with the modes of assessment section. One of the lecturers mentioned that the English version questionnaire should be translated to a Khmer version. The other two lecturers had no comments. I responded to with brief explanations in Khmer language while questionnaires were distributed in the designated classes. Students, on the other hand, gave some comments that the questions were well-understood and they understood the meaning of the questions. Two students were concerned with the assessment section content. They found it hard to understand. One student was interested in the value of feedback section; he said did not receive that kind of feedback. As the pilot group provided some comments on the questionnaire, they were excluded from the final sample. The comments received from pilot groups were used to ensure the wording of the items was concise and understandable. Some items in the questionnaires were revised and reworded according to the feedback received. I explained to the two pilot groups that I would be in the classroom while

questionnaires were distributed so that any clarification could be made. They all agreed that the questionnaires would be fine then. Thus, an English version was used in this study.

### **3.7.2 Administration of the questionnaire**

The fieldwork began after gaining ethics approval from the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). In addition, seeking permission to the research site was done before the process of gathering data. Once a permission letter from the university administration was received, I sought help from class lecturers to manage time for me to distribute information sheet (see Appendix F) about the study to the students. All the lecturers suggested that I could distribute information sheets at the end of their teaching time. At the arranged time, I distributed information sheets to six classes in the faculty. While distributing the sheets, I also gave a brief explanation to the students about the purpose of my study. This stage took me about a week to complete. I informed students that I would be there again to distribute the questionnaires.

The respondents in this survey were informed clearly about the purpose of the study, their confidentiality and the use of the data. Punch (2005) argues there is a critical need to approach respondents professionally and fully inform them about the purpose and context of the research. Any necessary assurances need to be made about confidentiality and anonymity and how the provided information is to be used. When this procedure is followed properly and professionally, Punch (2005) affirms that participants will cooperate, and therefore the quality of data is improved.

I handed out questionnaires to students for each designated class. With permission from lecturers I could hand out questionnaires to each student ten to fifteen minutes before the end of a lesson and collected them back when completed. It took about a week to complete the questionnaire's distribution. Punch (2005) points out that "if it is a choice between the researcher administering the questionnaire, and somebody else on the researcher's behalf, the former is the better" (p. 100). The presence of myself giving the questionnaires enabled me to observe their behaviours as they were completing the questionnaires. More importantly, I could give more explanations to some particular questions when needed. Some students requested clarification of some items in the content of assessment section.

Similarly, I distributed the information sheet (see Appendix G) to individual lecturers when I met them in the lecturers' room. A week later, I began to hand out the questionnaires to the lecturers and informed them that they could return the questionnaire either to me or place it in a box provided in the lecturers' room. I also sought assistance from the faculty dean's assistant to hand out the information sheets and questionnaires for part-time lecturers. I normally checked with the assistant if there were some questionnaires returned. As lecturers here have been busy, it took me about three to four weeks to collect the questionnaires back. All questionnaires returned from lecturers as well as from students were coded so that the respondents' could remain anonymous.

### **3.7.3. Individual interview with lecturers**

In this section, I describe how the semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. Six volunteer lecturers participated in the interview. The individual interview with six lecturers was conducted in an informal manner so that lecturers could have opportunities to express their thoughts freely with regard to the related topics or issues.

I sent a list of interview questions along with information sheets (see Appendix H) to the six lecturers a few days before the interview so they had some time to be ready to participate in the semi-structured interview. Before the interview began, I explained to the interviewee about the confidentiality of the data used for my study. I then gave consent forms (see Appendix I) to the interviewee and explained that they could withdraw from the interview at any time, even though they have already signed the consent form. They had five minutes to review the questions before the interview began. I informed each interviewee that they could either use Khmer or English for the interview. Three of them preferred to use Khmer and another three used English for the interview. The interview was conducted in a spare room at the university campus. The average time spent in each interview was forty minutes.

I used a recording device for interviews with permission from each interviewee and the data obtained from the interview were then fully transcribed and used in this study. I asked each interviewee if there was something to add before I finished the interview. I sent the transcript to each interviewee for amendment when needed. Two of six interviewees responded that they agreed with the interview information and others did not respond.

#### **3.7.4. Focus group with students**

The focus group discussions took place in the university campus on different days in a spare classroom arranged by the researcher. I sent a list of questions along with information sheet (see Appendix J) to the two focus groups a few days before the discussion so that they had some time to ready themselves for participation.

The fourth year group which consisted of five members agreed to use Khmer language for the discussion. They said they would be more comfortable and flexible using Khmer. The third year students, on the other hand, agreed to use English for the discussion because they thought that it was a good opportunity to have English used in the discussion; and they said they needed to improve their speaking. This group consisted of six members.

I began the discussions by explaining the confidentiality of the data in this study. I also provided the consent form (see Appendix K) for each student to read and ensured they were happy to participate in the discussion. I then informed them that they were able to withdraw from the discussion at any time even though they said they volunteered to participate in the discussion and signed the consent form. At the beginning of the discussion I introduced the study's purposes and informed participants that they had about five minutes to review the questions. I facilitated the focus group discussions so that I could learn more about participants' behaviours and the way they responded to the questions. I encouraged each participant to elaborate when they wished to do so and allowed each participant an equal chance to share their thoughts during the discussions.

Focus group discussions took about 50 minutes for each group, and I used a recording device with permission from the groups. I informed them that the data from the discussions was to be transcribed and used for this study. A full transcript was made with pseudonyms for each group.

### **3.8. Data analysis procedures**

Quantitative data and qualitative data were analysed separately. The qualitative data was used to supplement the survey and aimed to gain more insights into views from the main stakeholders about our research focus.

### **3.8.1. Quantitative data analysis**

As this study followed a cross-sectional design, descriptive analysis was a main method in this study. According to Elliot, Menter, Hulme, Lewin, and Lowden (2011) and Gay (1992), descriptive statistics are used for descriptive information and summarising data. They can also provide an understanding of individual's scores and insights into where one score stands in comparison with others (Creswell, 2005).

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to help analyse the demographic information and participants' responses. Frequency distributions in this package were adopted in this study, aiming to summarize and understand data. According to Punch (2005), the individual scores in the distribution are tabularized on the basis of the number of respondents. Therefore, this study used percentage format which was illustrated in graphs to describe the survey responses rated by both lecturers and students. In addition, a chi-square test was carried out, aiming to identify a significant difference in terms of perceptions and experiences about the current assessment practices between lecturers and students.

### **3.8.2. Qualitative data analysis**

Qualitative analysis is commonly involved with non-numeric information where understanding, explanation, and interpretation are the foci of the area of study (Elliot et al., 2011).

This study draws data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups; it thus uses the deductive approach for qualitative data analysis. Elliot et al. (2011, p. 145) point out that "the deductive approach refers to the way that we have some ideas of what we are looking for which then we tend to explore and then test theories". The deductive approach was the appropriate analysis approach for this study because pre-determined themes were identified. These themes of assessment practices included purpose of assessment, content of assessment, assessment approach, timing of assessment, modes of assessment, assessment criteria, and the value of feedback. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), researchers sometimes bring a pre-existing codes scheme to the research project which is known as 'a priori codes'. It is defined that "codes that were developed before examining the current data" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 539).

Johnson and Christensen (2008) also explain that these codes should be applied only when they are well in line with the segments of data.

Coding in this study was done to identify key words or phrases within each thematic category for both interviews and focus groups. The patterns of recurring key words were grouped and emergent themes were also identified within each main theme. All the key words and phrases were examined and identified carefully in order to reflect the research objectives, questions and related concepts. In this study, the illustrative quotes shown in italicised script from the transcript were used to give evidence from participants.

### **3.8.3. Document analysis**

An analysis of documents can enable researchers to search for patterns and raise questions of material (Angrosino, 2007). In this study I examined seventeen course outlines to understand the assessment marking criteria and assessment types implemented in this faculty.

## **3.9. Trustworthiness of the study**

Validity, reliability, and objectivity are the key elements for evaluating quality in a positivist research paradigm (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). As this study adopted an interpretive paradigm, the issue of trustworthiness in the study was discussed concerning the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These four criteria were used in this study to evaluate interpretive research work.

### **3.9.1. Credibility**

Bradley (1993) explains that “credibility refers to the adequate representation of the constructions of the social work under study” (p. 436). To help improve the credibility of the research results I utilized four main activities: triangulation, member checking, checking interpretations against raw data, and prolonged engagement in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was adopted in this study to strengthen its trustworthiness. Three methods of triangulation—data sourcing, data collection methods and triangulation mixed methods design were adopted in this study. Firstly, two main data sources were drawn from lecturers and students; and secondly methods of data

collection included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and course outlines.

I sent transcripts to the six lecturers to let them check the accuracy of the transcribed data. Two of them responded positively that the transcripts looked fine, and the others did not email me their responses. While writing the results, I normally checked and counted the number of responses in raw data against the questions asked in the interview and focus groups. I also spent a great deal of time at the participants' setting, aiming at understanding the aspects of their setting, and I often accessed the university's website to familiarise myself with programmes offered in this university.

### **3.9.2. Transferability**

Transferability refers to extent findings can be used to apply to other contexts (Bradley, 1993). The researcher's task is not to provide an index of transferability; however, Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that rich descriptions of the research setting and participants should be made so that other researchers can make transferability judgments of the findings and relate it to other settings or contexts if they see fit. In this study, I presented the details of the participants including the demographic information, educational data and the context of the study. This thick description can provide other researchers with a basis for deciding whether the findings of this study can be transferred to other similar settings.

### **3.9.3. Dependability**

Dependability, according to Bradley (1993), refers to "the coherence of the internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena" (p.437). In this study, dependability is determined by checking the consistency of the process of data collection and data analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). I outlined the selection of participants clearly so that other researchers are able to audit whether or not the selection of participants in this study meet the criteria. Also, I provided the details of the data gathering tools and the analysis of the interview and focus group data.

### **3.9.4. Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to "the extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posited by the researcher can be confirmed by others who read or review the research results"



(Bradley, 1993, p. 437). In this study, my supervisor assisted me with a review of the interpretations and the research results. I have also provided details of the methods I used for data collection and analysis.

### **3.10. Ethical consideration**

This research project has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. According to Alderson and Morrow (2004) “a straightforward explanation of ethics is that it is concerned with respecting research participants throughout each project, partly by using agreed standards” (p.11). Conducting research with humans has the potential to create a great deal of physical and psychological harm so that the treatment of participants is the most vital and fundamental issue that researchers must take into consideration (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). As lecturers and students participated in this study the anonymity of their participation and research sites were maintained strictly.

Some main ethical guidelines were adhered to in this research study to ensure that the participants’ names and the private university were not disclosed throughout the project. The lecturers and students participating in interview and focus group were kept confidential.

A number of ethical matters have been considered during the data collection process. These were, amongst others, informed consent, right of refusal to take part without penalty, right to withdraw without penalty, confidentiality and anonymity, lack of deception, and security and safety to prevent any emotional or physical harm (Plowright, 2011). Any possible harm to participants was addressed in this study. The questionnaires used in this study were strictly anonymous. This means that respondents were asked not to write their name, and each questionnaire was allocated a code number on the basis of the order in which they were returned so that it would not be linked with respondents’ names. The information sheet was distributed to participants to disclose their right to take part or withdraw from the study without any penalty. The returned questionnaires meant participants gave consent to participate in this study. The interviews and focus group discussions were confidential and the information sheet was distributed to the participants. The consent forms were given to each interviewee before the interviews or discussions. Interviewees were informed about their rights. The information from the interview and focus group was used in this study and then stored

in locked files. Interviewees' identities were kept confidential, and codes were applied to all the transcripts.

To sum up, in this study all related information and consent forms were distributed and the purposes of the research were explained to participants on. In addition, the data gained from the lecturers and students was anonymised and participants' names were not identified.

### **3.11. Chapter summary**

This chapter explained the choices of research paradigm and design. A mixed-method design was used in this study to investigate lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences about the current assessment practice in one private university in Cambodia. This study used a questionnaire to gain perceptions from the key stakeholders. Additional in-depth interviews with lecturers and focus groups with students were conducted to further investigate their experiences and perceptions about assessment practices. The triangulation of data sources, methods of data collection, and mixed-design was employed to enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

This chapter has also explained the data gathering methods, the selection of participants, and data analysis procedures. Considerations have been taken into account to ensure the ethics and trustworthiness of the study. This study has used an appropriate methodology to investigate participants' perceptions and experiences and to understand the current assessment practices in this particular university.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1. Overview of the chapter**

This chapter reports on the results of the data-gathering approach selected in the methodology. This chapter presents an integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings with the aim of providing ‘a big picture’ of perceptions and experiences of assessment practices of lecturers and students. As Creswell (2005) explains, “the purpose of a triangulation mixed methods design is to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand a research problem” (p.514).

This chapter presents the analyses of quantitative and qualitative data provided by lecturers and students in their responses to questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group discussions. The following themes drawn from the combined quantitative and qualitative findings—purpose of assessment, content of assessment, assessment approach, timing of assessment, modes of assessment, assessment criteria, and value of assessment—will be reported accordingly. The challenges of current assessment which were drawn from both interview and focus groups are also reported.

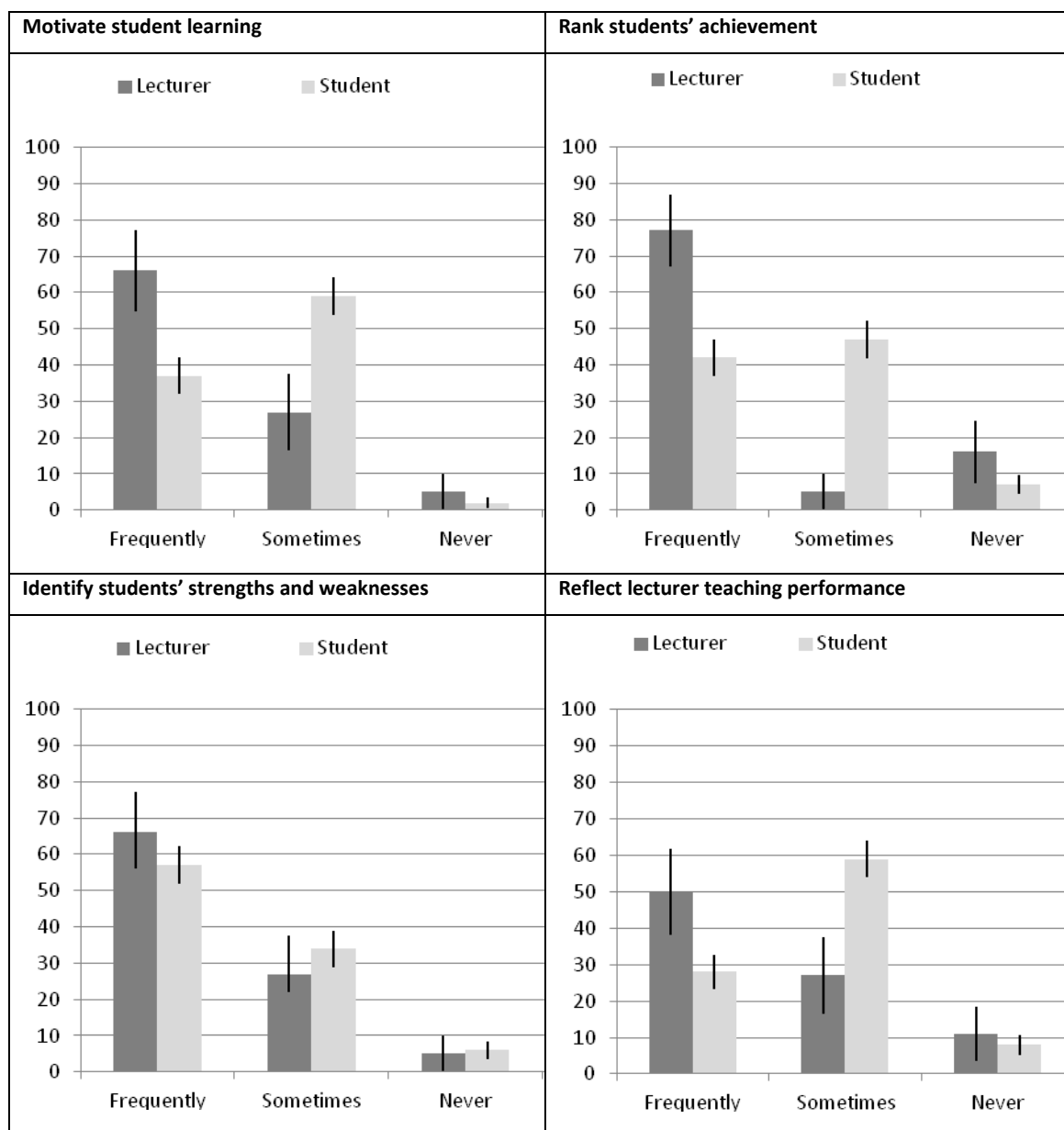
### **4.2. Introduction**

The survey was conducted in the Faculty of Education in one private university in Cambodia. A 35-item questionnaire on the perceptions and experiences of assessment practices was used for this study. The questionnaire included items on the purposes of assessment, content of assessment, assessment approaches, timing of assessment, modes of assessment, assessment marking criteria, value of feedback, and demographic information. Eighteen lecturers out of 25 and 93 third and fourth year students out of 102 students returned the completed questionnaire. The lecturers’ response rate was 81.81 per cent and the response rate of student respondents was 91.17 per cent.

Semi-structured interviews with six lecturers and two focus groups of eleven students were conducted exploring similar topics to the survey. These aimed for more in-depth information about the research topics. The demographic characteristics of individual interview and focus group participants are indicated in Table 3.5 in chapter 3. The results of this study are reported in the following sections.

#### 4.2.1. Lecturers' and students' perceptions of purpose of assessment

In the questionnaire, lecturers and students were asked to report on their perceptions and experiences of assessment purposes. They were asked to indicate on a four-point Likert scale—frequently, sometimes, never, and don't know—the extent to which four purposes applied.



**Figure 4.1: Lecturers' and students' perceptions of purpose of assessment**

As Figure 4.1 indicates, the majority of lecturers showed that all four aspects of assessment were frequently important. On the other hand, students rated all four aspects as being important less frequently than lecturers. Sixty-six per cent of lecturers selected motivation of learning as a frequently important aspect of assessment, compared with

only 37% of students, with 59% of them perceiving that this purpose was sometimes important. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 5.04$ ,  $p = .02$ ) shows a significant difference between lecturers' and students' perceptions of this aspect. Seventy-seven per cent of lecturers perceived ranking students' achievement as being frequently important, compared with 42% of students, 59% of whom responded sometimes. Again, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 7.12$ ,  $p = .00$ ) shows significantly different perceptions about this aspect.

A majority of lecturers and students perceived that the diagnosis of students' strengths and weaknesses is a frequently important purpose of assessment. Sixty-six per cent of lecturers rated diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses as being frequently important, and 27% of them rated this purpose as being sometimes important. By comparison, 57% of students rated this item as frequently important, and 34% of them perceived this purpose as sometimes important. In this case, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.44$ ,  $p = .50$ ) shows no significant difference between students' and lecturers' perceptions of this aspect. With regard to the reflection of assessment on teaching performance, 50% of lecturers perceived this as frequently important while only 28% of students believed this was frequently important, with 59% responding that it was sometimes important. This chi-square result ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.46$ ,  $p = .03$ ) indicates a significantly different perception.

The interview and focus group discussions also sought participants' perspectives in relation to the purpose of assessment. In the interview, a majority of lecturers stated assessment exists to check the progress of student learning and evaluate students' work. Two of the lecturers argued that assessment was conducted because it was required by the university.

*Generally speaking, the university policy requires having tests. Besides the main purpose of measuring students' ability, we need scores which are demanded by the university in order to determine whether students fail or pass so this is also the purpose of university that needs tests. (Lecturer B)*

*Without assessment, you cannot know, you cannot evaluate and you don't have the scores for the students because at the end of the course you must add up all the assessment that you gave to students by scoring along with the final exam, and this is a must. (Lecturer D)*

Two lecturers responded positively in relation to the purpose of assessment as a tool for encouraging and motivating learning, and the other two perceived the purpose of assessment was to identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' achievement. The purpose of assessment was to compare students with other students who are outstanding with those facing learning difficulties. Two lecturers perceived that assessment reflected their teaching. One of the lecturers emphasised the achievement of goals as a purpose of assessment. The following quote expressed his perspectives:

*In terms of the purpose of assessment, we want to know whether or not students can achieve and can reach the goal we set; for example we want our students to be able to do this or to do that. So when we have assessment we want to make sure whether students can reach the goal. This is the main objective that says about assessment. (Lecturer A)*

In addition, lecturers' conceptualisation of the purpose of assessment was focussed on the degree of student understanding rather than involving them in self-assessment and peer assessment:

*In my point of view, the purpose of assessment is to get students' understanding. (Lecturer D)*

*We provide them a test so we want to know how much they understood, and what we should teach in the next chapter. (Lecturer B)*

*The purpose of my assessment is to check up my students' understanding. (Lecturer E)*

Students in the two focus group discussions understood the purpose of assessment to be improvement, encouragement, diagnosis of their strengths and weaknesses, and reflection of lecturers' teaching performance. This indicates that lecturers' perspectives expressed in the interview were in line with students' perceptions with regard to the purpose of assessment. This was illustrated in students' answers in focus group discussions:

*Wanting to know lecturers' performance how much they provide to the students whether students can get it. (Focus group 1)*

*The purpose of doing assessment is to know whether students enjoy his/her teaching; sometimes students feel not happy with his/her teaching, they are bored with the lesson. Lecturers can prepare the lesson again whether the lessons are enjoyable to the students, students then can learn a lot from their teaching. (Focus group 2)*

Other comments from students relating to the purpose of assessment were about keeping records for the university, giving feedback, understanding learners 'ability and keeping students busy. This was illustrated in the following quotes:

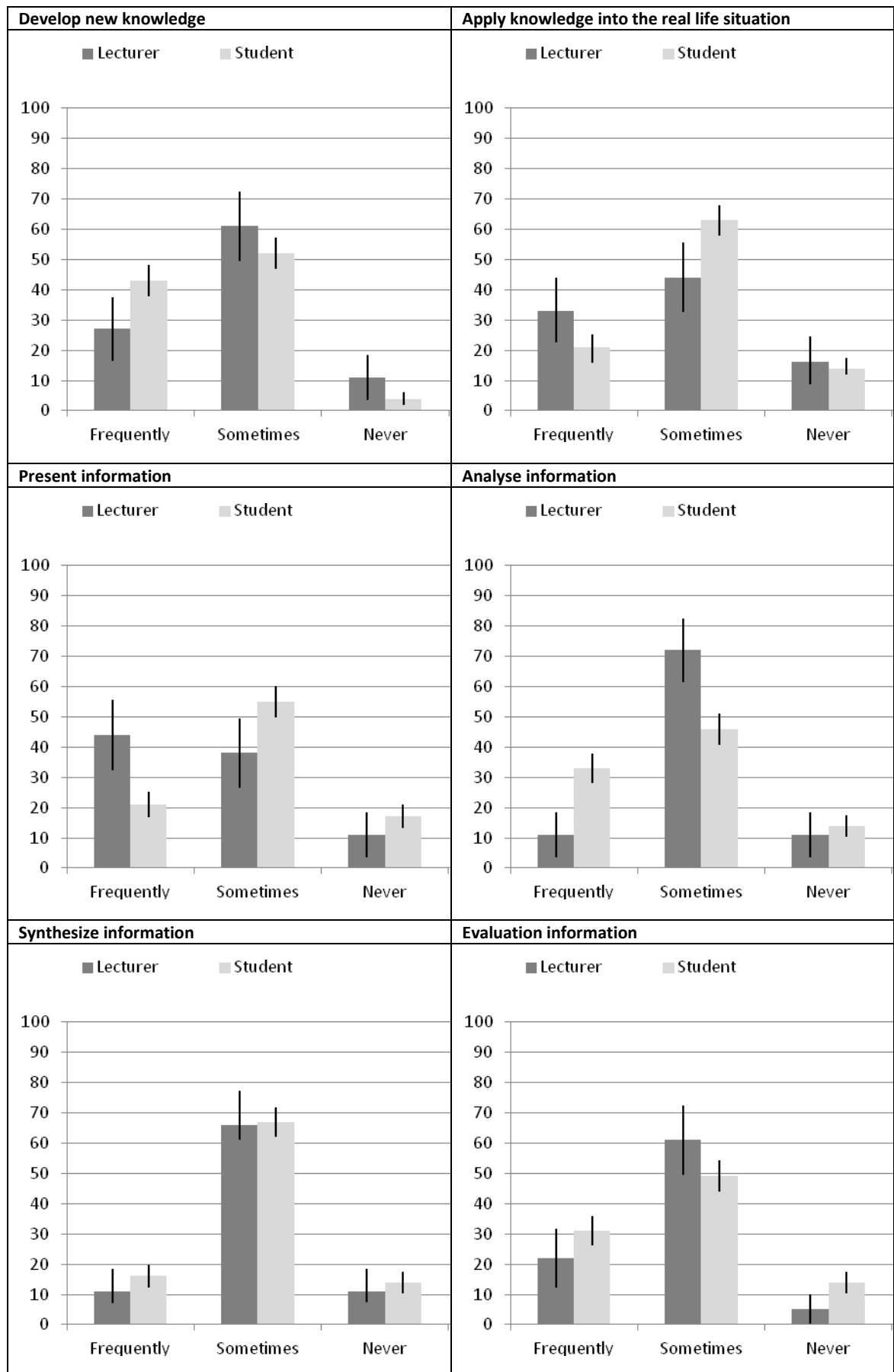
*The purpose of assessment is to give feedback to students. For example, when assessing students' homework, we would like to know how much the students received from teaching. This is a kind of feedback that students get from lecturers. (Focus group 1)*

*I think the purpose of assessment is keeping record for the university. After assessment, lecturers can keep that record for the university and to check how much students learn. (Focus group 2)*

To sum up, lecturers seem to perceive the four aspects of assessment purposes as more important when compared with students. However, they shared similar understandings on these aspects during interviews and focus groups. Encouragement, motivation, diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses, and reflecting teaching performance are seen as the primary purposes of assessment. In addition, lecturers and students understood the purpose of assessment conducted in this university is a part of the institution's policy. Keeping scores and records is seen as another a part of purpose of assessment.

#### **4.2.2. Lecturers' and students' perceptions of the content of assessment**

The respondents were asked to express their views on the content of assessment. Each question sought to reveal how lecturers and students consider the design of assessment tasks. They were asked to rate the importance of each item on the four-Likert scale in relation to the content of assessment. Figure 4.2 summarises the respondents' selection about the content of assessment.



**Figure 4.2: Lecturers' and students' perceptions of content of assessment**



Lecturers' views about the content of assessment were more diverse than their views around the four aspects of assessment purpose. Similarly, students rating all aspects of assessment content were more diverse than their selections about assessment purposes.

Figure 4.2 indicated 27% of lecturers chose development of new knowledge as a frequently important aspect of content of assessment, while 61% rated this aspect as being sometimes important. By comparison, 43% of students saw the development of new knowledge as a frequently important aspect of content of assessment, with 52% of them perceiving this aspect as sometimes important. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.45$ ,  $p = .22$ .) was carried out showing no significant difference between lecturers' and students' perceptions of this aspect. Thirty-three per cent of lecturers thought that application of knowledge into real situations as a frequently important aspect in the design of assessment tasks, compared with only 21% of students, while 63% rated this aspect as sometimes important. Again, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.45$ ,  $p = .22$ .) shows no significant differences in perception.

Forty four per cent of surveyed lecturers perceived the presentation of information as a frequently important aspect of the content of assessment, compared with 21% of students, of whom 63% responded that this aspect was sometimes important. In this case, this chi-square result ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.18$ ,  $p = .04$ .) indicates a significant difference in perception. Only 11% of lecturers selected the aspect of analysis of information as a frequently important content of assessment, while 72% of them selected this aspect as a sometimes important content of assessment. In comparisons with lecturers' perceptions of this aspect, 33% of students rated the analysis of information as frequently important, and 46% of them rated this aspect as sometimes important. In this case, the chi-square test could not be performed as one cell had an expected count of less than five.

Lecturers and students perceived the aspect of synthesis of information less frequently important than other aspects of assessment content. Only 11% of lecturers perceived this aspect as being frequently important while 16% of students also perceived this aspect as a frequently important content of assessment. Sixty-six per cent of lecturers perceived the synthesis of information as sometimes important, compared with 67% of students. Again, in this case the chi-square test could not be performed as one cell had an expected count less than five. Amongst lecturers that were surveyed, 22% selected the evaluation of information as a frequently important aspect of assessment content,

and 61% of them selected this aspect as being sometimes important. 31% of students perceived this aspect as frequently important, with 49% of them perceiving this aspect as sometimes important as assessment content. This chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.39$ ,  $p = .52$ .) shows no significant difference between students' and lecturers' perceptions of this aspect.

Data obtained from interviews indicates that lecturers held various perceptions about the role of objectives in the design of assessment tasks. Lecturers held views that the design of assessment tasks aimed to compare what students learnt with the set course objectives. In their view, it also served to measure students' achievement, reflect their teaching, check students' understanding and improve students' knowledge. For example:

*If you assign the written assignment for students, the main task is to measure their proficiency in writing and another thing is to make sure that they understood the related topic. (Lecturer D)*

*Generally, the written assignment given to students is to improve their understanding because they need to do some research for more information in order to have the assignment in details. (Lecturer F)*

*Normally each task is set with objectives and what students achieve after each task. After doing individual presentation, students will get research skills, build up confidence, and get rid of nervousness. With group assignment task, students will experience teamwork and information sharing. With regard to the tests, students know how much they gain after learning when they have completed the tests. This is the main objective of each assessment. (Lecturer C)*

According to the interview data it seems the design of assessment tasks such as written assignments, presentation or tests, focused on the development of knowledge and measurement of students' level of understanding rather than equipping students to analyse or synthesise information or apply knowledge in the real life situations. This evidence showed in the survey data with less than 50% of lecturers identifying any aspect of the content of assessment as frequently important.

Students also made comments about the perceived content of the current assessment tasks and its application to real life situations. A fourth-year-student focus group

complained that the content of current assessment tasks of some subjects did not match with the content of teaching; they suggested that the content should cover speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills:

*We learnt all skills, but we merely knew only grammar and vocabulary. No listening and mostly no writing are covered in the current assessment tasks. (Focus group 1)*

Students admitted that most of the assessment tasks could not be applied to real situations because lecturers just follow the programmes. The following quote indicates the students' feelings:

*Most of the taught subjects have been finished by following the programme set; there is a less teaching which relates to the outside world. Lecturers would not complete the university programme if they have taught something relating to the outside world. (Focus group 1)*

However, a third-year student focus group thought group presentations would provide them a chance to share ideas and learn more when working as groups. They suggested that lecturers should have done more research about related topics before conducting their teaching. They also suggested lecturers should provide students with tasks for further research as well. In addition to this, one student expressed an idea about the links between current content of assessment and its application in real-life situations. Here are the student's thoughts:

*Sometimes we understood from the assessment, but we did not use it. We sometimes face the problem in real life, but we did not experience in the real situation. For instance, we understood the real society when writing assignments, but we did not experience it yet when we saw people around. (Focus group 2)*

Focus group data suggested a need for assessment tasks in which students could utilise the knowledge in real world settings. Furthermore, the assessment tasks should be designed against the content of teaching and it seems students need more research tasks. This can imply that more authentic assessments are needed. In addition, when lecturers were asked 'what do you want to achieve when assessing students?' the common responses included students' improvement, comparing learning with the course

objectives, reflecting teaching, students' achievement, quality strengthening, and meeting the needs of university policy.

In order to gain further insight about current aspects of assessment content, lecturers and students were asked about the characteristics of good assessment. Lecturers put more emphasis on reflecting student learning, reflecting previous teaching, indicating students' performance, and assessing students without bias. For instance:

*A good assessment is an unbiased assessment; the bias refers to the questions which are too open questions and the questions set are placed too emphasis on the lecturers' perspectives, thus students are difficult to get marks. (Lecturer F)*

One of the lecturers considered context, place, and students' ability as the key elements determining whether the assessment is good. He expressed concern that:

*This university where I am working now, good assessment is focused on tests, homework, and assignment; they don't take 'attendance' into account, it is worth only 5%; my opinion is that Cambodian students should be forced to learn, therefore the attendance should be worth more than that and I think it is good assessment'. He added that attendance is considered a strong assessment tool; students have to attend the classroom and listen to the lecturers. There is an important link between assessment and attendance; attendance is a part of assessment and gets assessment better. (Lecturer C)*

In contrast, and in response to the same question about indicators of good assessment, students valued feedback, assessment tasks, classroom discussion, and participation. They needed quick and realistic feedback that could be swapped between students and lecturers. The following quotes illustrated students' perspectives:

*Good assessment is assessment that students get feedback from lecturers and lectures also get feedback from students in relation to their teaching. (Focus group 1)*

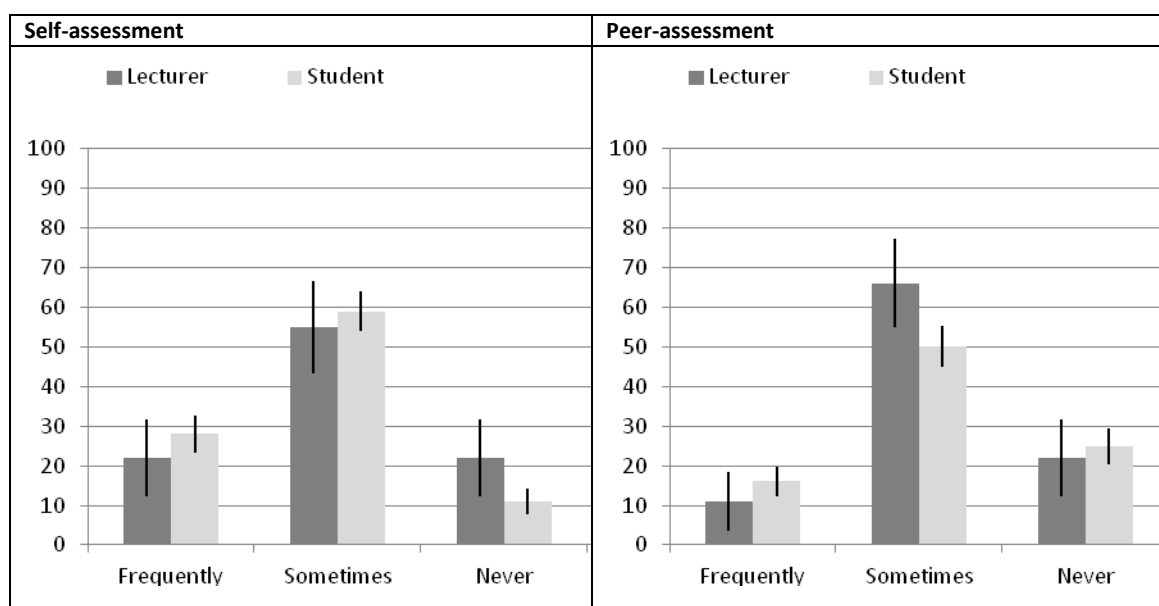
*Good assessment is a kind of assessment that there is participation from both students and lecturers. I mean that there is mutual communication, explanation about good points. So there is a smooth process when doing assessment. (Focus group 1)*

*After teaching a lesson, students should be provided a real practice in speaking or in writing so I think a good assessment comes from the well-prepared tasks from lecturers. (Focus group 2)*

In conclusion, lecturers seem to place an importance on students' achievement, and reflection of previous teaching as indicators of good assessment whereas students indicate a need for effective feedback to support their learning. Some students also complained that assessment sometimes did not cover what had been taught. With this in mind it seems that lecturers and students have different ideas about whether or not assessment covered what was taught. Mutual understanding between lecturers and students about assessment is considered important; students perceived such understanding as key to good assessment.

#### 4.2.3. Lecturers' and students' perceptions of assessment approach

Lecturer and student participants were asked about the use of self and peer assessment methods. Items reflecting practices and experiences of lecturers and students of the assessment methods are illustrated in Figure 4.3.



**Figure 4.3: Lecturers' and students' perceptions of assessment approach**

Similar to the perceptions of lecturers and students on the content of assessment, less than 30% of surveyed lecturers and students indicated 'frequent' experience of self and peer assessment. Twenty two per cent of lecturers reported that they frequently used self-assessment, with 55% of them reporting they sometimes used this method in the course while 28% of students reported frequent assessment by this method.

Additionally, 59% of students reported they have sometimes been assessed by this method. In this case, the chi-square test could not be performed as one cell had an expected count less than five.

With regard to peer assessment, only 11% of lecturers indicated they frequently used peer-assessment, and 66% of them indicated that they sometimes used peer assessment in the course while 16% of students indicated they had been frequently assessed with this method. Half of the students indicated they had sometimes been assessed by this method. In this case, the chi-square test could not be performed as one cell had an expected count less than five. The data revealed lecturers and students rarely engaged in this kind of alternative assessment methods in their course.

In the interview, three lecturers viewed self and peer assessment as a good assessment approach because students could learn to check themselves and learn to be more independent. These lecturers also saw that students could be evaluated and be given feedback by their peers. They reported that actual practices in their courses consisted of assigning students to work individually, work in groups, and work as pairs in class. The other lecturers, on the other hand, admitted that they have never conducted these assessment approaches. The constraints of implementing these approaches were raised by the lecturers:

*It is a bit hard to implement this approach due to mixed-ability students. For example, how poor students assess good students. With an approach like self and peer assessment, we have to be very careful; otherwise we will come up with conflict and confrontation among students. This tool may be implemented if marks or scores do not take into considerations. (Lecturer D)*

*I always recognised something new and I have brought something new to practise, but as we work for the university and the university requires us for the particular type of assessment, I have not practised self and peer assessment yet. I think it is good. If this approach can be practised, it can encourage students to learn harder. (Lecturer F)*

Data from focus groups indicated students valued self and peer assessment methods. Furthermore, they reported these methods could identify students' real ability and weaknesses or strengths. Students' perspectives on these assessment methods were that

they managed to study by themselves about the related topics through reviews of lessons, searches of information through the internet, and library work. Students reported that they experienced self-assessment in individual presentations.

Even though students recognised the utility of peer assessment for exchanging ideas and sharing experiences during group discussions, some students complained about the practices of these methods:

*We find it hard to share ideas with students who have often been absent because when they come to class they did not understand what we were doing. So when they assess us, they don't know how to answer or they just answer; therefore, we cannot receive the real answer. (Focus group 1)*

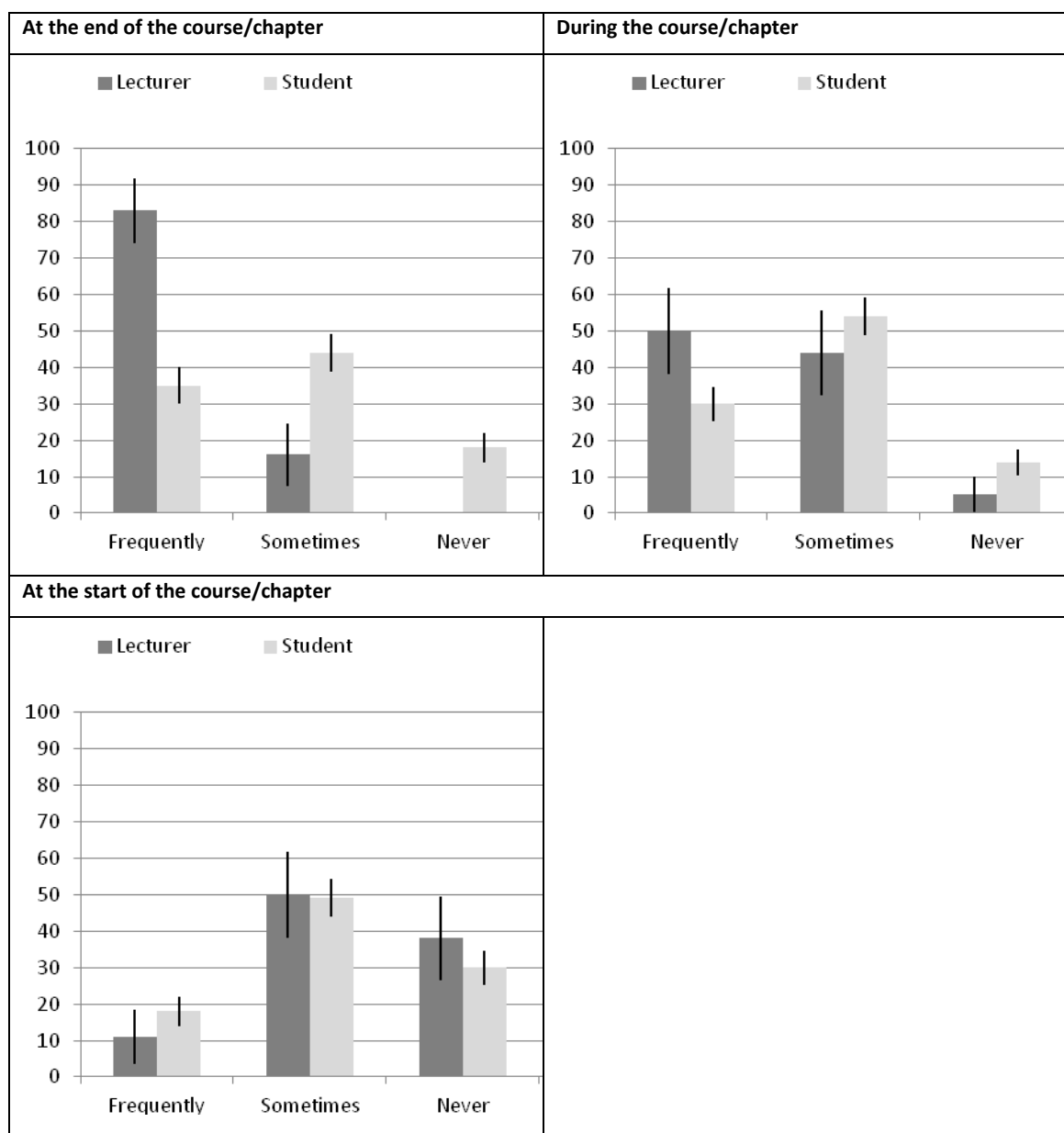
Even though some lecturers and students recognised the importance and utility of self and peer assessment methods in the course; the practices of the methods they describe seem not to reflect self and peer assessment methods as practised in higher education elsewhere. The findings from interviews and focus groups were consistent with the survey data as both lecturers and students reported that they sometimes used these methods.

#### **4.2.4. Lecturers' and students' perceptions of timing of assessment**

In the questionnaire, lecturer and student respondents were asked about the timing of assessment practised and experienced in their course. The items included three main stages within the course: at the end of the course/module, in the middle of the course/module, and at the start of the course/module. Figure 4.4 reports the participants' responses.

According to figure 4.4, the most common time for assessment was the end of the chapter/module/course. The majority of the surveyed lecturers (83%) reported they 'frequently' assessed students when they finished chapters, modules or a course. By comparison, only 35% of students reported they frequently had been assessed at the end of chapter/module/course, with 44% of them reporting they sometimes had been assessed at the end of the chapter. The chi-square test could not be performed as one cell had an expected count less than five. Fifty per cent of lecturers indicated they frequently conducted assessment during the course/module, and 44% of them reported that they sometimes conducted the assessment in this time whereas only 30% of

students reported that the assessment occurred frequently during the course/module. Of these students, 54% reported assessment occurring sometimes during the course/module. In this case, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .10$ .) shows no significant difference between students' and lecturers' report about time of assessment.



**Figure 4.4: Lecturers' and students' perceptions of timing of assessment**

Eleven per cent of lecturers indicated they frequently conducted assessment at the start of the course/module, and 50% of them reported they sometimes conducted assessment at this time. By comparison, eighteen per cent of students reported they had been assessed at the start of the course/module frequently, with 49 % of them reporting they sometimes had been assessed at this time. In this case, the chi-square test could not be performed as one cell had an expected count less than five.



To conclude, it seems lecturers used more summative assessment in their course rather than providing assessment throughout the course. In this respect, students seem not to agree with lecturers' responses about assessment being conducted at the end of the course/chapter. This discrepancy may have resulted from a lack of clarity in the question.

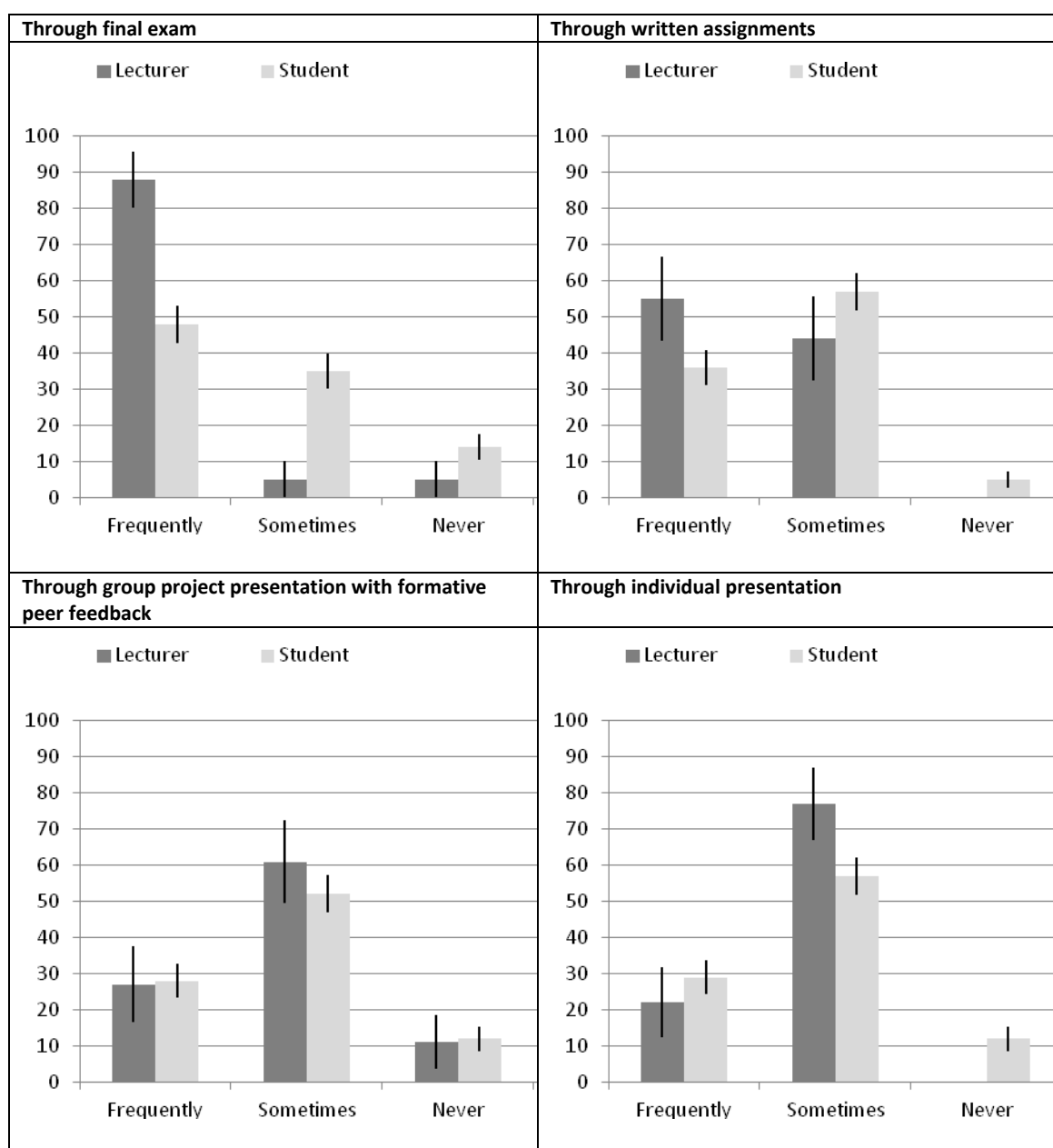
Data from the interview and focus group discussions indicated that lecturers and students acknowledged having assessment tasks conducted at the end of chapter/module/course. Participants did not mention any assessment tasks done during the chapter/module/course. They reported that mid-term exams were conducted during the chapter/module/course. Some lecturers also conducted some assessment tasks at the start of the chapter/course such as a simple talk, a short piece of writing, and self-introduction. The views were also consistent with students in relation to pre-assessment tasks which included doing some reading, having quizzes, and general assessment tasks.

*If lecturers do assessment before the chapter/course, they can find out and prepare the lesson for their teaching. (Focus group 2)*

Some students were inclined to have assessment tasks conducted before the chapter/module. These seemed to be aimed at understanding more about students' knowledge so that lecturers could prepare for their teaching. To this end they may need formative purposes of assessment. Data from the survey along with data from interviews and focus group discussions indicated that summative grading assessment was commonly conducted in this faculty.

#### **4.2.5. Lecturers' and students' perceptions of modes of assessment**

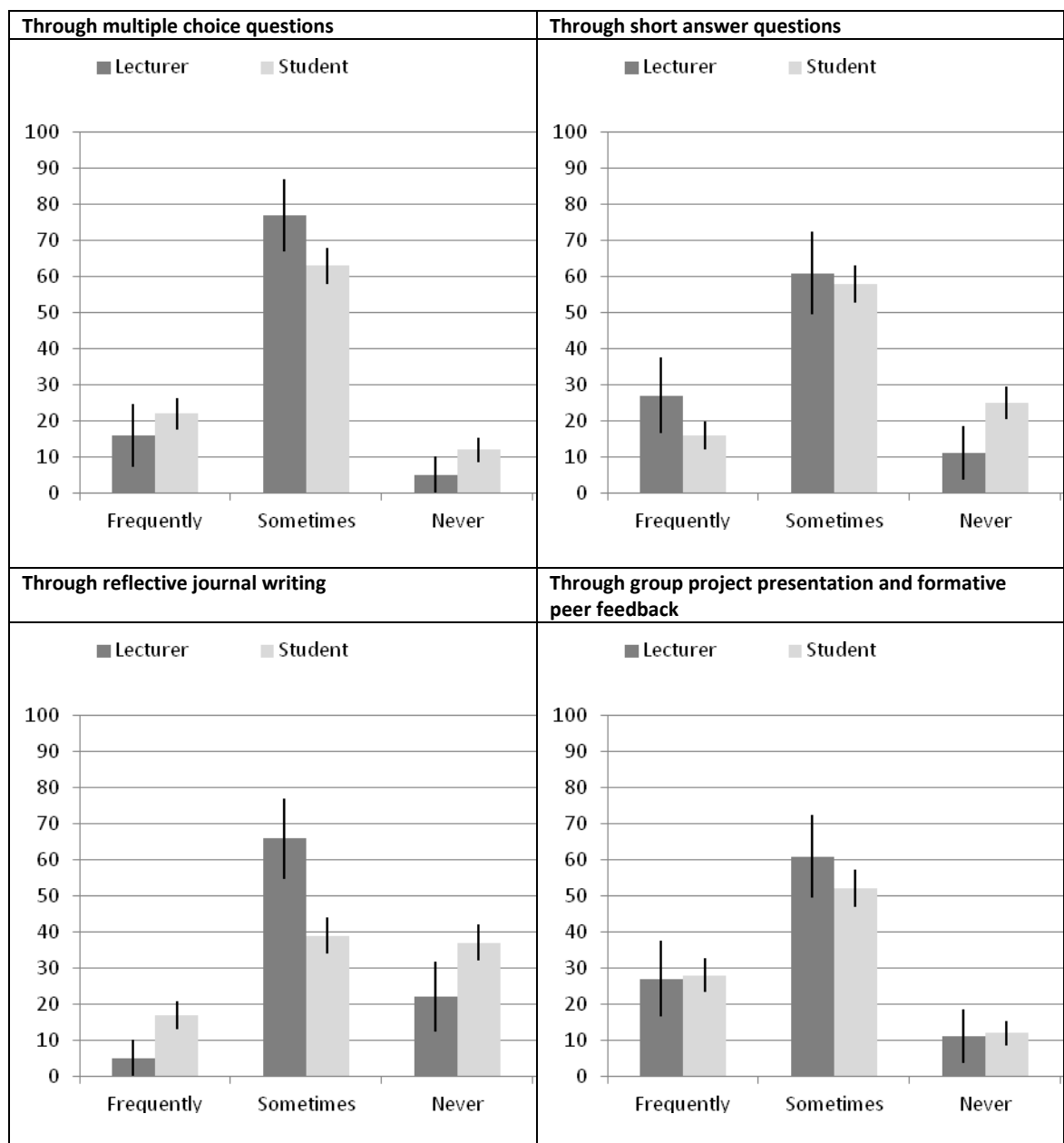
In this section of the questionnaire lecturers and students were asked to select the modes of assessment practised within the course. The eight modes of assessment reflect lecturers' practices and students' experiences of assessment conducted in the faculty. Figure 4.5 indicates participants' responses about the modes of assessment.



**Figure 4.5: Lecturers' and students' perceptions of modes of assessment**

As Figure 4.5 illustrates the most common mode of assessment that both lecturers and students practised was final examinations. Eighty-eight per cent of lecturers reported frequent use of final exams in their course while about half of surveyed students (48%) recognised frequent been assessment by final examination. Of these students, 35% reported they sometimes been assessed through end of course exams. The chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five. The second mode commonly used by the two groups was written assignments. Fifty-five per cent of lecturers reported that they frequently used written assignments; with 44% of them reporting that they sometimes used this mode to assess students. Only 36% of students reported frequent experience with this mode, with 57% of them reporting experience of

this mode in the course. This chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.66$ ,  $p = .19$ ) shows no significantly different perception about this mode. Group project presentation with formative feedback was seen as the third frequent mode of assessment practised by the two groups. Twenty-seven per cent of lecturers reported that they frequently used this mode, and 61% of them reporting they sometimes used this mode to assess student learning. By comparison, 28% of students reported that they had been assessed by this mode, with 52% reporting some experience of this mode. Again, this chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.03$ ,  $p = .85$ ) shows no significantly different perceptions about this mode.



**Figure 4.5 (Cont.)**

Both lecturers and students reported they ‘sometimes’ used other modes of assessment in the course. Seventy-seven per cent of lecturers reported that they sometimes used a mode of individual presentation, compared with 57% of students. In this case, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five. While 77% of lecturers reported that they sometimes used a mode of multiple choice questions to assess student learning, 63% of students recognised the use of this mode. Again, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five.

Sixty-one per cent of lecturers reported that they sometimes used short answer questions, compared with 58% of students. This chi-square result ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.12, p = .28$ ) indicates a significant perception in relation to this mode. Sixty-six per cent of lecturers reported they sometimes used reflective journal writing to assess student learning, compared with only 39% of students. In this case, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five. Fifty per cent of lecturers also reported they sometimes used group presentations without feedback from lecturers or peers, compared with 40 % of students. Again, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five.

In the interview and focus group discussions, data revealed that final exams were the common form of summative assessment conducted in the course. There is evidence from the survey data to support this perception. In response to the survey item, *Assessment is conducted through a final exam*, 88% of lecturers and 48% of students indicated they frequently practised this mode of assessment as shown in Figure 4.5.

Lecturers and students were asked to describe their current modes of assessment in the interviews and focus group discussions. They reported these modes of assessment which included written tests, quizzes, written assignments, review exercises, individual presentations, group presentations, homework, attendance, class participation, individual work, pair work, group work, mid-term exams, and final exams. It seems that some activities such as homework, attendance, class participation, individual work, pair work, and group work considered other assessment activities adopted in the Cambodian university context. This intends to give students some extra tasks, aiming at checking the progress of their study. When asked why these modes were used, lecturers reported that these modes were adopted in this faculty to measure student learning, achieve

learning goals, and judge or check student understanding and improve student learning. These modes were also used due to requirements of the university:

*It is the policy of university. The university follows the standard which is called Minimum Standard for Institutional Accreditation, Cambodian Royal Government. The committee is in charge of monitoring the academic programmes of university, so university just follows that standard. Lecturers are required to set tests, assignments, mid-term and so on as I have described. (Lecturer F)*

When asked in the interviews and focus groups, both lecturers and students did not describe any alternative modes of assessment such as group project presentations with formative feedback, presentations with peer feedback, reflective journal writing, portfolios, self or peer assessment. This was the case despite moderate responses in the survey which are shown in figure 4.5. It seems that these modes of assessment are not commonly known or practised in the faculty.

When participants' views were sought with regard to alternative assessment tools, lecturers had a wide range of views about its advantages and the challenges of its implementation. Three lecturers saw presentation with peer feedback as an encouraging tool to support student learning. Lecturers, for example, hold views that:

*Students need feedback from their peers in order to perform better for the next tasks; feedback from their peers seems to be more honest than that from lecturers. (Lecturer F)*

Some students also valued the utility of this tool as they mentioned that “*while giving a presentation, we don't know what our weak points are and sometimes we say something wrong in unexpected way, so other students can give us feedback about that*”(Focus group 1).

Other lecturers, on the other hand, identified knowledge, marks, and a learning culture as barriers. They hold views that:

*This tool is not effective since peers' knowledge is not higher than the presenter so there is no constructive feedback given. (Lecturer C)*

*It can be done only informal way. We cannot take that for serious marking because students sometimes do not accept feedback given by their peers in the form of marking. (Lecturer D)*

*In Khmer culture, students do not feel good when they receive feedback from their peers. They just feel that they are equal, this is a local culture. They don't trust their peers, may be their peers are not good enough. (Lecturer E)*

There is also evidence from the focus group discussions about presentations with peer feedback. Some students claimed there was less involvement from their friends while doing presentations as they ignored each other or just focused on their topics. Students sometimes argued that:

*Feedback given from friends is not a kind of constructive feedback, but it is negative feedback. (Focus group 1)*

Interview data revealed how lecturers perceived reflective journal writing assessment as a good tool. However, lecturers still admitted they have never practised this tool in their current modes of assessment. Two of the lecturers reported including this tool in written assignments and saw it was common for writing subjects. The following quotations from lecturers shed some light on the constraints or difficulties in having this tool implemented:

*I have never used this tool because this kind of reflective writing requires high critical thinking and students' good knowledge. (Lecturer B)*

*It is very good. This tool encourages students to learn a lot, to remember, and to have more ideas. Students can develop their writing and keep writing something they learnt. The challenge of journal writing is the matter of time of the lecturers. We cannot practise this tool because we don't have time to correct students' work and give them feedback. Another one thing is I don't teach writing subject. (Lecturer E)*

*This tool is common for writing skills; it is rarely used for other subjects. If this tool can be done, students can develop their spelling, grammar, and structure. Students gain more knowledge compared to presentation tool. (Lecturer C)*

*Journal writing is included in written assignment. Here we don't ask our students to do journal writing. We can't implement this tool due to the subject taught and policy of the university. The university sets the assessment rules. (Lecturer A)*

*This tool can encourage students to read articles, textbooks and write it up by expressing the ideas in relation to what they have read. I think it is good. Previously, students don't know how to do reflection or do critique on the writers' views, they just follow the ideas in the reading articles; they don't have ideas about judgement and reflection. With this new tool, it requires training and I think we can manage to do it. (Lecturer F)*

In response to reflective journal writing, students also acknowledged the importance of this assessment tool. They described the way reflective journal writing was used in their course:

*One lecturer asked us to read a story and questioned us what we think about the story that reflect the society, I think that the lesson was involved with the real practice so we can learn from the actors and actresses in the story and we can apply it to the real life. (Focus group 2)*

*Other students perceived that "we can express more ideas after reading the texts; if we can write more, it means we understand more. But students here have not practised this tool yet". (Focus group 1)*

Furthermore, both lecturers and students acknowledged the practice of group project presentation within their course because this tool could provide knowledge and experience of teamwork as well as sharing of ideas and experiences. These points were confirmed by survey findings that indicated this tool was used 'sometimes' (61% of lecturers and 52% of students). According to some participants, group project presentation is a good tool because:

*It encourages students to work in team and also encourages students to learn how to conduct presentation in more professional way. (Lecturer E)*

*We can share ideas; we can discuss and exchange ideas regardless whose ideas are better. (Focus group 1)*

Even though this tool was practised and its utility was valued, both lecturers and students expressed concerns about timing, group understanding, and the achieved results. The following quotes indicated their concerns:

*As we study at the weekend, the difficulty with the project presentation is timing. We don't have enough time for discussion about the topic because some students might be busy so that a delay for presentation can be made. (Focus group 2)*

*We can do group presentation as long as there is mutual understanding in the group. (Focus group 1)*

*Teamwork is seen to be rather difficult since students may put the blame for the work assigned; this or that person does not help each other. It thus results in late work or be absent for the presentation. (Lecturer F)*

*I think group project presentation is a good assessment tool, but I think sometimes we cannot know the results clearly; it means that who produced that results. It may one or two students work hard for the group and others just have their name in. (Lecturer D)*

Portfolio assessment tools are seen to be underdeveloped by lecturers and students in this university. Only one of lecturers commented that “*I have heard about this tool which is implemented in other universities, but not in this university where I am working now*” (Lecturer F). When the lecturer was asked about this tool, he expressed an intention to have it implemented in this university:

*It brings me with ideas that I can raise it in the mechanism meeting whether what we should do with this tool, aiming at improving academic qualities. We can do it because students can save up their work done, achievement and marks with this tool; we can encourage students from time to time until the end of term. I think it is good. (Lecturer F)*

Even though this tool has not yet been introduced or practised in this particular university, some students valued its importance through experiences at other universities. One student said that “*I think it is good because it informs us how progress of our study is from the past until now*”. Another one said that “*We can keep that document and we can show it to other students in other classes who do not understand*

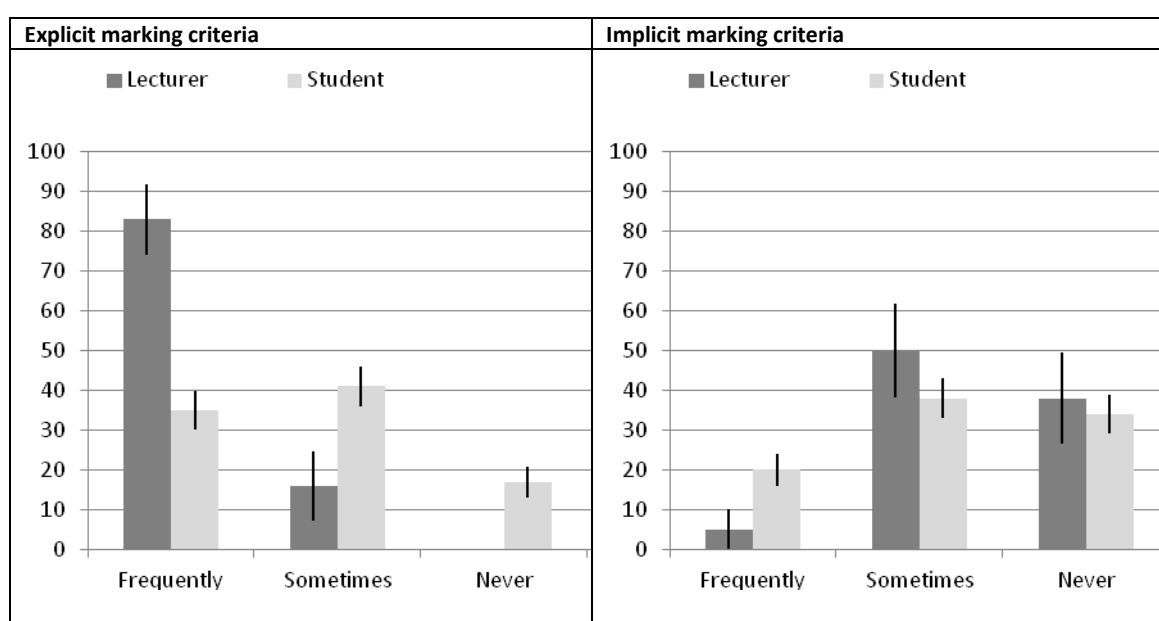


*it, so this portfolio can be used as a sample for other classes or next cohort”. One student also commented that “First I thought it was not good because it kept us busy of doing it, we have to write a lot every week”. (Focus group 1)*

To sum up, lecturers and students in this faculty seem to adopt more conventional assessment tools than alternative assessment methods. When lecturers and students were asked about alternative assessment tools in this study they acknowledged the importance and the utility of innovative assessment tools. Some lecturers intend to have these tools implemented in their course. However, data indicated that a number of barriers stand in the way of these innovations. These were: time constraints, assessment cultures at the Cambodian university, dominant practices of traditional forms of assessment, professional development for assessment methods, and student resistance to the alternative assessment itself.

#### 4.2.6. Lecturers’ and students’ perceptions of assessment criteria

In the questionnaire, lecturers and students were asked to indicate their practices around assessment criteria in the course. Assessment criteria included marking criteria, the provision of marking criteria in assignments, the outline of assessment criteria in subject outlines, and the introduction of assessment requirements and marking criteria at the beginning of the course. Figure 4.6 summarises the participants’ response about assessment criteria.



**Figure 4.6: Lecturers’ and students’ perceptions of assessment criteria**

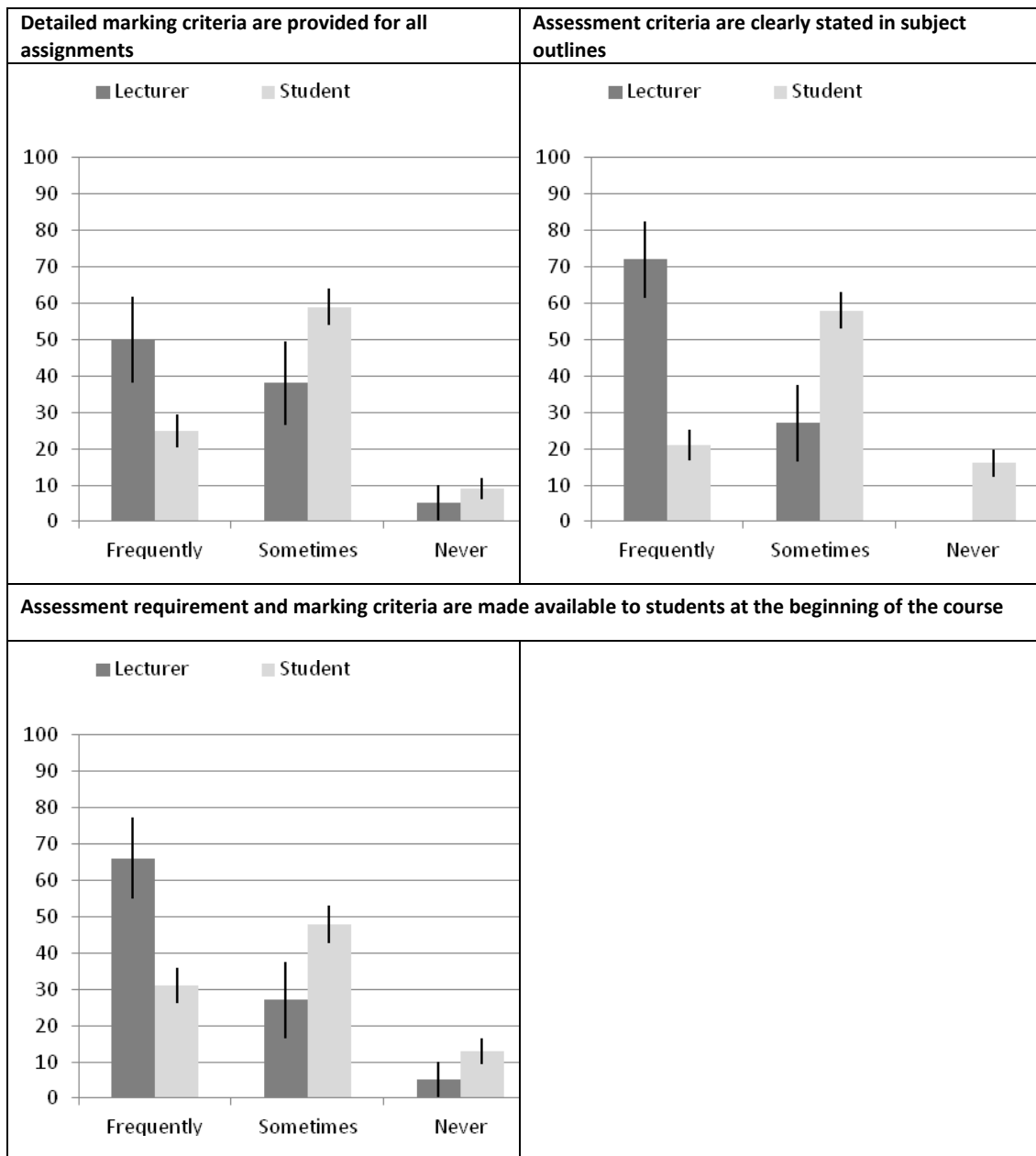
The majority of lecturers (83%) revealed marking was ‘frequently’ undertaken against explicit criteria, compared with 35% of surveyed students, with 41% of them acknowledging that marking was sometimes used against explicit criteria. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 7.85$ ,  $p = .00$ ) shows a significant difference between lecturers’ and students’ perceptions of this aspect of assessment criteria. Both lecturers and students reported that marking was ‘sometimes’ against implicit criteria. Fifty per cent of lecturers acknowledged that marking sometimes was against implicit criteria, compared with 38% of students, with 20% of them reporting frequent assessment against implicit criteria. In this case, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five.

In the interviews and focus group discussions, data revealed that both lecturers and students used explicit criteria for assignments. For example:

*The total marks for presentation, for example 20%, the introduction is worth 5%, the flow of ideas is 5%, the language use is 5%, and the conclusion is 5%. (Lecturer A)*

*Marking criteria for written assignment is based on meaning, grammar accuracy, and language structure. (Lecturer F)*

Some students, however, complained that “Some lecturers just give comments, for example, writing is ok, grammar is needed to work on and the total mark is provided instead” (Focus group 1). This indicates that some lecturers marked students’ work against implicit criteria.



**Figure 4.6: (Cont.)**

A majority of lecturers claimed that assessment criteria were ‘frequently’ stated clearly in assignments, subject outlines, and introduced at the beginning of the course while students claimed assessment criteria were not stated as clearly as lecturers claimed.

Total responses from lecturers about detailed marking criteria frequently applied to all assignments were twice that of students. Fifty per cent of lecturers reported that detailed marking criteria were provided for all assignments, compared with 25% of students, 59% of whom reported they sometimes experienced these marking criteria. The chi-square result ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.54$ ,  $p = .03$ ) indicates a significant difference in perception around detailed marking criteria for assignments. Seventy-two per cent of lecturers

reported assessment criteria were frequently stated in subject outlines whereas one fifth of students (21%) reported they were frequently stated. Fifty-eight per cent of students acknowledged assessment criteria were sometimes made available in the subject outlines. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 12.85$ ,  $p = .00$ ) shows significantly different perceptions of the state of assessment criteria in subject outlines. Sixty-six per cent of lecturers reported assessment requirements and marking criteria were frequently made available to students at the beginning of the course. This compares with 31% of students, of whom 48% reported assessment was criteria made available at the start of the course. Again, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 6.76$ ,  $p = .00$ ) shows a significantly different perception of this aspect of assessment criteria.

In their interviews lecturers claimed to have used detailed marking criteria in assignments. They described how marking criteria were normally given with the assignments but they did not cover this in subject outlines. Some students on the other hand were disappointed with marking criteria for assignments. The complaint was that *"We mostly receive the total score and some comments; for example, it is 20% for assignment and it does not mention what criteria have been included for that marking"*. (Focus group 1)

Lecturers and students were asked about assessment criteria/marketing criteria described in their subject outlines. In response, they showed assessment criteria/marketing criteria in subject outlines included on-going assessment worth 60% and final exams worth 40%. This data indicates that within an average course at this institution, 60% of its weighting comes through assessment forms such as mid-term exams, revision tests, home work, class participation, presentation, and attendance. A further 40% is devoted to final examinations. Thus, when asked about assessment criteria, respondents explained weightings for each piece of assessment, rather than specific criteria or standards for the quality of the work.

The interview data confirmed survey findings around the availability of assessment requirements and marking criteria at the start of courses. The evidence can be illustrated in the following quotes:

*We spend first session to introduce the subject and assessment marking criteria. We do not only provide the course outline to them, but also explain it to them.*  
(Lecturer E)

*Generally, we spend few times in the first day of the course to look at the course outline and describe some important points. We do not read it in details, but we just inform students about the key points. (Lecturer F)*

Lecturers and students discussed the importance of introducing course outlines at the start of courses because it encouraged learners to get prepared in advance for learning:

*Content and schedule in the course outline tell us when we have assignments, homework, so we can read the lesson from the beginning and prepare to do that homework; as a result we will receive higher score of that homework or assignments. (Focus group1)*

*It outlines the lessons that we are going to learn within a course. It is like a learning goal and it informs the students when tests or assignments are provided. (Focus group 2)*

*Course outline lets students have a better preparation to deal with the following assessment requirements and to achieve the goals set in the course. (Lecturer E)*

*Course outline provides students with learning intentions and advanced-learning preparation, and it also informs them what they should prepare in order to get good results. (Lecturer C)*

Following the interview and focus group discussions, lecturers and students seem to agree that criteria were introduced in the course outlines, even though the two groups held varying views in the wider survey findings.

This study looked at course outlines to identify information given about assessment criteria and assessment types. I looked at 17 course outlines. Each outline illustrates the weighting for assessment tasks. For example, on-going-assessment such as attendance, homework, assignments, tests/quizzes or presentation are worth 40%, mid-term exams are worth 20%, and final exams are worth 40%. As we found with students and lecturers, outlines refer to the weighting of assessment tasks, but they do not mention assessment criteria used to judge students' work and ability.

The data also revealed that modes of assessment such as tests, quizzes, presentations, written assignments, and final exams are commonly used in the course. In the documents, every course had one or two tests, one mid-term exam, and a final exam.

Some courses provided one written assignment and an oral presentation. As outlined in every course, mid-term exams were normally conducted halfway through a semester, and final exams were commonly used at the end of a course. Some courses also outlined revisions or progress tests which were normally conducted after the completion of chapters or units. These practices show us mainly summative purposes of assessment are being practised in this faculty.

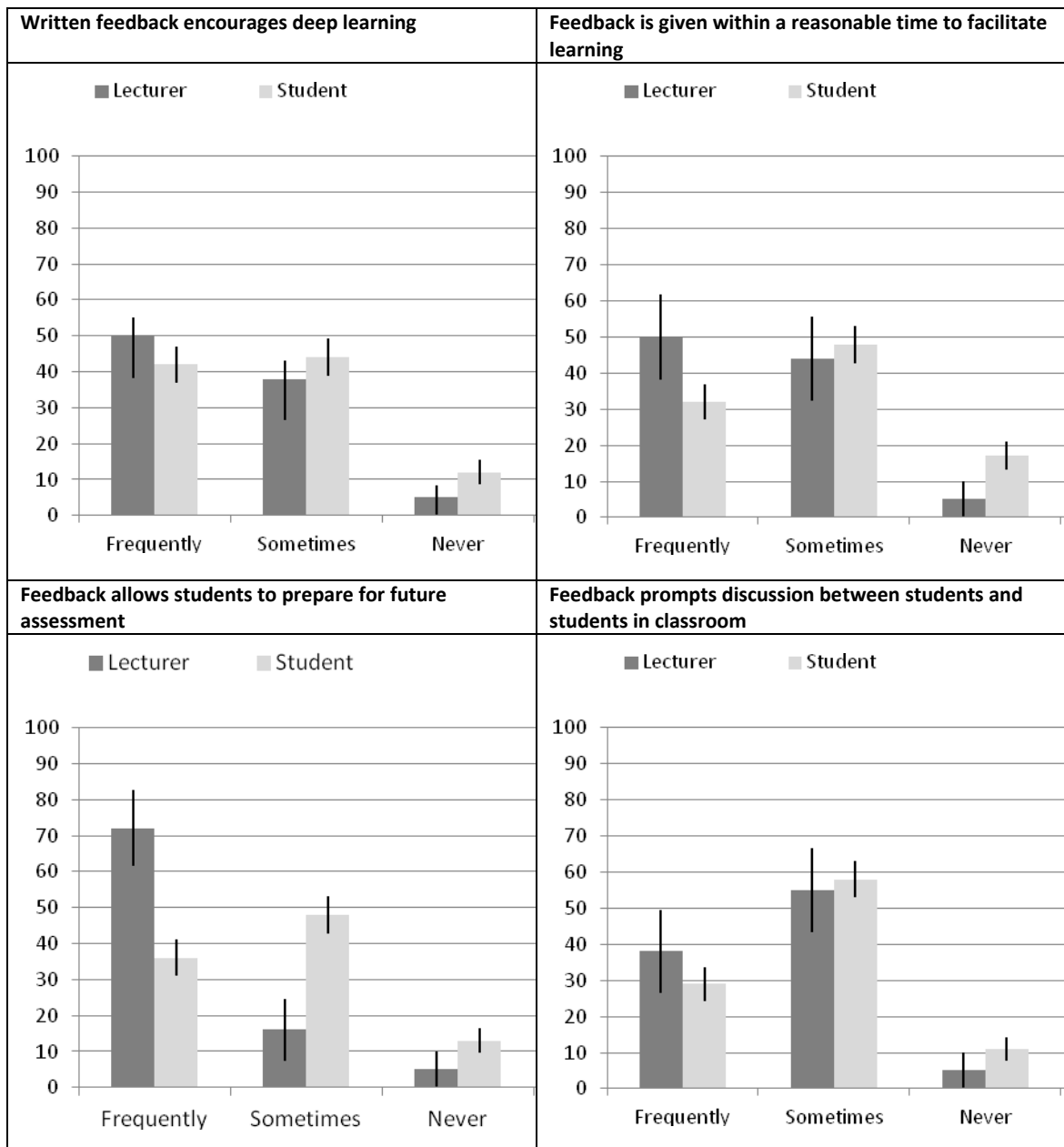
#### **4.2.7. Lecturers' and students' perceptions of value of feedback**

Lecturers and students were asked to consider the purpose and utility of feedback. This included their beliefs about the importance of feedback and its relation to the facilitation of learning, discussions with lecturers and peers, and understandings of future assessment. They were asked to rate the usefulness of feedback on a four-point Likert scale. A summary of participants' response indicates in Figure 4.7.

The majority of lecturers indicated that all aspects of feedback were frequently important. Students, on the other hand, recognised the value of feedback although they did not place the value of feedback as frequently as lecturers claimed. Amongst lecturers, 50% believed feedback could frequently encourage deep learning compared with 42% of students. Elsewhere, 44% of students considered that feedback sometimes encouraged deep learning. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.60$ ,  $p = .43$ ) shows no significant difference in perception around this issue. Fifty per cent of lecturers indicated that timely feedback could frequently facilitate student learning, with 44 % of whom indicating that it could sometimes. By comparison, 31% of students held that timely feedback frequently facilitates student learning, with 48% of them considering this aspect sometimes facilitates learning. Again, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.98$ ,  $p = .32$ ) shows no significant difference in perception around this aspect.

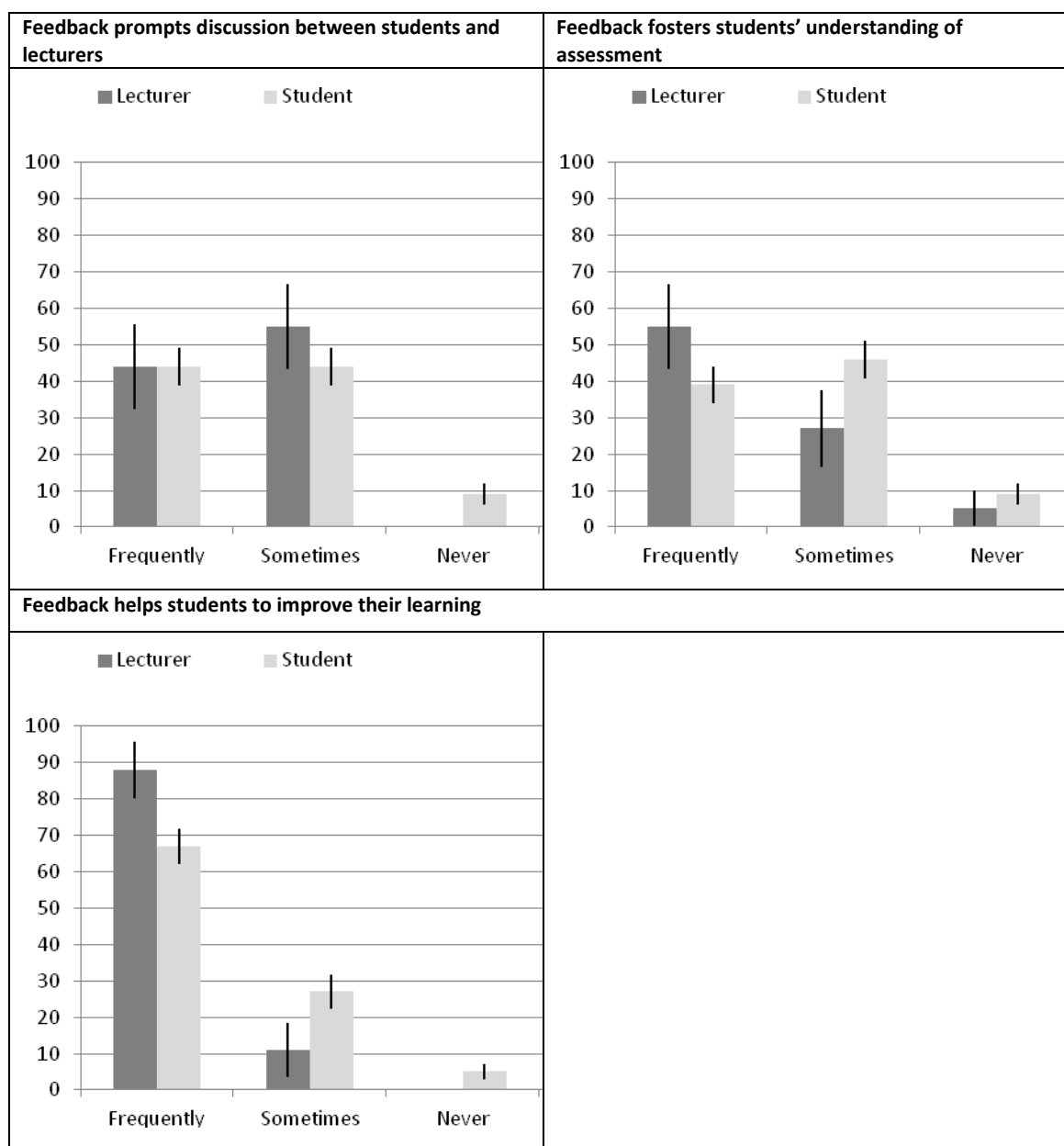
Seventy-two per cent of lecturers believed feedback could frequently prepare students for future assessments, compared with 36% of students. From these students, 48% indicated this aspect sometimes prepared them for future assessment. In this case, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five. Thirty-eight per cent of lecturers thought feedback could frequently prompt discussion amongst students, with 55% indicating this aspect sometimes prompts discussion. Twenty-nine per cent of students, on the other hand, considered this aspect frequently prompts discussion, and 58% indicated this aspect sometimes encouraged discussion.

This chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.60$ ,  $p = .43$ ) shows no significant difference in perception around this aspect.



**Figure 4.7: Lecturers' and students' perceptions of value of feedback**

Forty-four per cent of lecturers indicated feedback could frequently encourage discussion between students and lecturers, while another 55% considered this aspect sometimes prompted discussions. By comparison, 44% of students considered this aspect could frequently encourage discussion, with another 44% indicating this aspect sometimes prompted discussion between students and lecturers. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.18$ ,  $p = .67$ ) shows no significant difference between lecturers' and students' perceptions of this aspect.



**Figure 4.7: (Cont.)**

Fifty-five per cent of lecturers believed feedback could frequently foster student understandings of assessment this compares with 39% of students. Another 46% of students believed this aspect could be sometimes important in fostering understanding of assessment. Again, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2(2) = 2.35, p = .12$ ) shows no significant difference between lecturers' and students' perceptions of this aspect. Eighty-eight per cent of lecturers considered feedback could frequently improve student learning, compared with 67% of students. Another 27% of students indicated this aspect could sometimes improve student learning. In this case, the chi-square test could not be carried out as one cell had an expected count less than five.



In the interview lecturers emphasised their belief that feedback can improve student learning, prepare students for future learning and encourage overall learning. This was illustrated in lecturers' interviews:

*The purpose of giving feedback is to improve and to change in relation to students' strengths and weaknesses. Feedback is important to guide students to learn better. (Lecturer A)*

*Learning requires feedback. It means that learning requires returned information which shows the mistakes and outcomes. Feedback can be positive and negative. Learning without feedback, students don't know how good or bad performance is. So feedback is important. (Lecturer C)*

*Feedback reflects students' strengths and weaknesses, so when they know their weaknesses students will try to improve and help their learning more successfully. (Lecturer B)*

*Learning needs feedback. If you want to learn well, we need feedback from lecturers and from peers because feedback helps students to learn more and help them make change or improve what they have learnt. (Lecturer E)*

Even though lecturers acknowledged feedback was an encouraging tool for supporting learning, they still admitted challenges in giving feedback. Such challenges included time constraints and large class sizes.

In focus group discussions, students indicated a need for feedback and they believed feedback supports their learning. They recognised the importance and utility of feedback during presentations and written assignments. This was illustrated in students' answers during focus group discussion:

*When finishing presentation, lecturers give us oral feedback, for example, no eyes contact, wrong grammar and other weak points. We can correct those mentioned points and have it better because we can correct ourselves. (Focus group 1)*

*The current feedback I received from my lecturers regarding writing a sentence correcting grammar and the way how to write essay writing. Lecturers show us*

*the mistakes; and they use a red-ink pen for the mistakes and they show us the right points. I think it is good. (Focus group 2)*

In order to gain more insights about feedback, lecturers and students were asked about the characteristics of effective feedback. This revealed some common themes for effective feedback. These were: constructiveness of feedback, clarity, positivity, alignment of feedback with lesson focuses, corrections and guidance for students, not embarrassing students, and applicability of comments to future writing and speaking. For example:

*Effective feedback is feedback that is given in the right target, matching with our skill and study so that we keep using that feedback when we work. After giving presentation, for instance, I don't want my lecturers to say something about my strength and weakness, but the target points instead. We can change the weak points. If bad feedback received, we cannot use it effectively. (Focus group 1)*

*Effective feedback is feedback that students can apply those comments in writing or in speaking after a lesson or a course. If the lessons are taught and students don't use anything, so I can say this is ineffective feedback. Effective feedback should be positive, encouraging students, if we give serious feedback to students, they can be bored. (Focus group 2)*

*Effective feedback is feedback that helps students, motivate students to work harder. Feedback you have to explain to students why it is wrong, why it is right. (Lecturer A)*

*Effective feedback is not intended to make students embarrassed. I think feedback can be done in the way that lecturers should give more encouragement to students to learn. (Lecturer C)*

*Effective feedback is a kind of constructive feedback which encourages students to learn, understand, and have commitment to improve the weakness. We do not recall the previous mistakes; we just mention the current points related to the recent tasks that I would like to give feedback. (Lecturer F)*

In response to the link between the current feedback and effective feedback, lecturers claimed the importance of providing feedback and shared understandings about its

effectiveness. In contrast, students admitted their disappointment and frustration when comparing their feedback characteristics of effective feedback. The following quote illustrated students' feelings:

*Some feedback I got from my lecturers I consider it is not effective feedback because some feedback I cannot apply it or I cannot use it. It is in low level. (Focus group 1)*

To sum up, lecturers and students valued feedback that encourages learning. However, students indicated a need for effective feedback to enhance their learning. A number of students indicated a need for feedback with positive comments and motivational purposes.

#### **4.2.8. The challenges of current assessment practices**

Lecturers and students were asked to identify common issues with current assessment practices in the faculty. Students needed timely corrections with feedback and their total score with on-going assessment. At this point, lecturers admitted they struggled with time for the correction of students' work. This could delay feedback along with the quantities of assessment tasks and students.

One lecturer placed more emphasis on class sizes as the main issue for faster assessment. He asserted that:

*Generally, we do not want to assess students in group, sometimes we want to assess student individually. When we follow strict assessment, students learn harder so students' outcome is better. (Lecturer B)*

In contrast, another lecturer argued that if strict assessment is implemented there is a risk of losing some students. The practice of current assessment is based on real circumstances and situations. He admitted that:

*Personally, I think most of the assessment that we are doing in the course I am teaching now is not very professional way of assessment. (Lecturer A)*

Exam monitoring is also another concern. Students have chances to cheat or discuss related topics with peers during exams. Lecturers acknowledged this may result from the design of tests or exam papers which are not good enough. However, one of the

lecturers said current assessment practice was good, and attributed problems to lecturers not being able to implement it effectively.

According to interview and focus group data, three lecturers and some students called for the implementation of alternative assessment tools and analytical assessment tasks in their courses. The design of assessment tasks should match students' levels of understanding and tests should have more comprehensive questions related to lesson concepts. Lecturers should set up the questions or exercises in the form of analysis that requires students to give opinion and their own analysis of topics. These kinds of assessment tasks can prevent students from cheating. Other lecturers also recommended having marking finished and giving assessment results on time. Lecturers and the university should work together with regard to policy about exam regulations and releasing final results.

### **4.3. Chapter summary**

The findings revealed that measuring students' understanding and the diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses were seen as major purposes of assessment. The data also revealed that another key purpose of assessment meeting university requirements. The study identified that traditional forms of assessment were predominantly adopted in this context. Lecturers in my study declared the use of explicit marking criteria whereas students seemed not to recognise such clear communication around assessments. The study highlighted the important role of feedback in facilitating student learning; however the study also identified a need for effective feedback to help their growth. In addition, the findings highlighted a need for alternative assessment tasks that were deemed important.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Overview of the chapter**

This study sought to reveal assessment perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students in a Cambodian university. The aim of this study was to identify current assessment practices and purposes, and examine perceived purposes of current assessment tasks.

In this chapter the findings will be discussed with reference to the research questions, past research and the theoretical framework of the study. Firstly, the discussion will answer the main research question which seeks to reveal lecturers' and students' perceptions of assessment. After that it moves onto the sub questions which aim to identify current modes of assessment practices and the perceived purposes of current assessment tasks. Finally, students' involvement in self-and peer assessment and the extent to which feedback promotes learning are discussed. This chapter will also outline limitations of this study before concluding with recommendations for the practice of assessment and further research.

### **5.2. Key findings of the study**

Ranking/grading students' achievement and identifying students' strengths and weaknesses are seen as primary purposes of assessment. My study also identified that another purpose of assessment is to meet the requirements of the university. The findings indicated that traditional forms of assessment such as tests, written assignments are practised predominantly in this faculty. The findings also revealed that lecturers and students do not share common understandings around assessment criteria. The data showed that assessment criteria are not clearly described in subject outlines.

The design of current assessment tasks was focused on the development of new knowledge and the presentation of information. An inconsistency was evident between the practices of self-and peer assessment in this faculty and the scholarship of self and peer assessment. Even though time constraints and students' capabilities are barriers in implementing the alternative assessment tasks, both lecturers and students acknowledged such tasks can support student learning. In addition, the findings highlighted the importance of and a need for effective feedback.

### **5.3. What are perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students about assessment?**

For the first research question I will discuss three key elements related to the purposes of assessment. These will be: the notion of assessment, the timing of assessment and the assessment criteria.

#### **5.3.1. Notion of assessment**

Identifying students' strengths and weaknesses is seen as a primary intention of assessment. In this respect, lecturers saw the purpose of assessment as checking students' understanding and their learning progress. While it is important to check the progress of their learning through assessment, supporting and enhancing learning should also be considered as purposes of assessment.

The two groups of participants in my study hold varying views relating to ranking student achievement. Lecturers emphasised this more than students. Marking or grading is seen as important for academic learning in this context; students may feel no motivation to learn when completing tasks carrying no marks. Scoring is a reward symbol for students to show their work has been done. Scoring was deemed important to determine students' knowledge. Ranking/scoring achievement is also needed by the university to establish students' levels of achievement and communicate these with employers (Atkins, Beattie & Dockrell, cited in Maclellan, 2001; Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Due to this assessment context, students are likely to make an effort to achieve high marks rather than develop their knowledge as something with value in itself. This can create a testing culture which builds short-term learning goals in academic study. This is consistent with the notion of assessment of learning which aims to check the progress of students' performance with summary marks (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Newstead, 2003; Price et al., 2011). The findings of my study are similar to Maclellan's (2001) study and also Samuelowicz and Bain's (2002) in that my findings a primary purpose of assessment as grading or ranking students. Measuring students' achievement is a common view of lecturers in the Cambodian educational context. Some lecturers and students see that a student's high score equates to a better learning performance.

However, the way students are assessed and the formats of assessment should be considered in relation to the purposes of assessment. If this current perception of assessment purposes remains at this university it will be difficult to move towards developmental notions of assessment discussed in the literature. Nonetheless, as summative assessment systems have been practised in Cambodian education, some students may prefer to adopt passive learning strategies rather than active learning roles requiring them to think critically and manage a bigger workload.

Assessment literature suggests assessment does not have to function solely to give marks and give students certificates. Rather, it can promote student learning (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2005). Additionally, assessment activities can perform ‘double duty’ (Boud, 2000). This implies that the purpose of assessment can integrate both assessment for learning and assessment of learning. The tasks should be designed in a way that students are able to develop themselves beyond just their academic life. The purpose of assessment is to promote ‘productive student learning’ regardless of a predominance of summative or formative purpose (Carless, 2009). Assessment can do more than simply rank students’ achievement; it can be used to grow learners as academics. The notion of assessment for learning means providing students with the information gained from tests and any assigned tasks as evidence for supporting future learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Newstead, 2003; Price et al., 2011; Stiggins, 2002). My study argues that both lecturers and students should hold perceptions about assessment that extend beyond ranking/grading students’ achievement. Strict adherence to the summative view can hinder the development of assessment practices in this context. As Boud (2000) remarks that “purposes of assessment should be extended to include the preparation of students for sustainable assessment” (p.151). In other words, a main focus should be placed on assessment activities that positively contribute to the development of knowledge, skills and dispositions for learning after graduation (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Even though measuring or ranking students is seen as a must for academic study, my study suggests a need for more emphasis on the developmental aspect of assessment to motivate student learning, promote students to develop critical thinking through the assessment, and develop their self-and peer assessment. When students have these views in mind, they will be able to develop their self-regulations not only in academic life, but further in their professional life.

### **5.3.2. Timing of assessment**

The findings indicated that a majority of lecturers (83% of them) reported the use of assessment at the end of a chapter/module, compared with only 35% of students. There was a significant difference of perception about the timing of assessment conducted in the course. Even though students reported differently, the document analysis supported the lecturers' responses. Therefore, my study is consistent with Maclellan's (2001) study in which assessment typically took place at the end of a module.

In Cambodian context, it is common that assessment occurs at the end of the chapter/module/course. The purpose of assessment is to cover what has been taught and check whether students gained this knowledge. This strays from Prosser and Trigwell's (cited in Maclellan, 2001) view that when assessment is not conducted at the start of the chapter/module, it prevents opportunities for assessment that meets student understandings. Some students of my study highlighted the importance of assessment conducted at the beginning of the chapter/course because they thought lecturers were able to find out more about what they need. As a result they can prepare better teaching lessons. Assessment tasks should be provided across a period of study, not just at the end of modules (Carless, 2007; Gibbs, 2006).

As we discuss the importance of distributing assessment tasks across the course, my study suggests that lecturers should consider the provision of assessment tasks at the beginning and during the chapter/module rather than after the completion of a chapter/module. Lecturers and students may benefit from this timing of assessment as they can learn more for future teaching and learning improvements.

### **5.3.3. Assessment criteria**

Lecturers claimed to assess against explicit criteria, while students seemed not to recognise these criteria. Statistically, there was a significant difference of perception with regard to these assessment criteria. In addition, according to the document analysis, there is no indication in the outlines of the explicit marking criteria lecturers were speaking of. This finding lends support to previous empirical work. For example, a study into the perceptions and experiences of tutors and students about assessment undertook in a U.K university saw 81% of staff frequently mark students' work against explicit criteria, whereas 54% of students reported that this occurred (Maclellan, 2001).



It has been indicated that lecturers acknowledged the use of explicit marking criteria that was available in assignments and subject outlines, while students reported they had only sometimes been assessed on the basis of implicit criteria.

Assessment criteria need to be clear, written in a meaningful language, and made in available in advance of assessment activities (Brown, 2004). In this context, one of the great challenges of assessment practices in the faculty is the lack of the understanding with regard to the clear expression of assessment criteria. For group presentations or individual presentations, explicit criteria were: clear speech, good topic knowledge, good organisation, and English expression. Assessors understood the use of explicit criteria, but they may not consistently use it for all assessment tasks or they sometimes use implicit criteria instead. The provision of clear assessment criteria is intended to enable student learning.

Assessment criteria provide an important learning tool, and current literature on assessment argues the process of assessment should be transparent and criteria need to be explicit and clear to all concerned. Clear assessment criteria can help students learn (Brown, 2004; Drew, 2001). Students' assessment performance can be improved when understandings of assessment tasks and criteria are made available to support students (Rust et al., 2003). Therefore, criterion-referenced assessment is considered a key to support student learning and its aim is to increase transparency. Students are required to meet specific criteria rather than compare with each other as in a norm-referenced assessment (Boud, 2000; Hendry, Armstrong, & Bromberger, 2012; Knight, 2001; Leathwood, 2005; Tanner, 2001).

However, when students are not clear about the assessment criteria or if implicit criteria have been used, they certainly will be unclear on how to reach the desired standard (Maclellan, 2001). In the case of my study, for example, students gave no indication explicit criteria were provided in the courses. Maclellan (2001) further argues that "if students believe the criteria to be implicit, then they may see assessment as some sort of lottery in which they experience inequable treatment from idiosyncratic staff" (p. 316).

As discussed in the literature, criterion-referenced assessment can be of great importance. With this in mind my study suggests further development of assessment practices whereby criterion-reference details should be made available in the subject outlines. In the survey, lecturers and students considered that assessment practices were

criterion-referenced assessment as opposed to norm-referenced assessment. However, their lack of understanding around the criteria made it unclear in relation to the practices in courses. Students should be given advanced information about the learning objectives and assessment criteria for the assessment tasks that will be assessed. Further, a shared understanding of these matters should also be made clear at the beginning of the course. Lecturers should provide a clear explanation to students about marking criteria, and the marking guide should be given to students so they can see what elements of assessment tasks will be assessed.

With such an outline, students are able to set their learning objectives more effectively if they are clear about what is expected of them in assessments. Students' achievement can then be compared against this learning standard, and not between students. Lecturers in this context should pay more attention to their use and provision of clear assessment criteria if they intend to enhance student learning.

#### **5.4. What modes of assessment are being practised in a Cambodian university?**

This research question aims to identify the current modes of assessment practised in the context of my study. Findings based on lecturers' and students' experiences show that the common modes of assessment were final exams, written assignments, individual presentations, group project presentations with formative feedback, tests, mid-term and exams. The respondents did not describe any experiences or practices in relation to alternative assessment methods such as reflective journal writing, portfolio, cooperative learning, self-and peer assessment, problem-based learning, review and case studies, project-based learning when asked about the current mode of assessment during interviews and focus groups. This implies that they seem unfamiliar with these alternative assessment tools.

The findings of the previous studies undertaken in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Afghanistan indicated the dominance of traditional assessment approaches in those university contexts (Brown & Wang, 2011; Fook & Sidhu 2011; Mussawy, 2009). Additionally, a study at a university in Portugal found that many students preferred traditional methods because they could play a more passive role in their learning (Fernandes et al., 2012). Thus, a school culture assessment may also influence the

practices of traditional assessment in the university. Assessment system in Cambodian education may instil traditional forms of assessment into lecturers and students. It can be argued that some students in the faculty may not actively get involved with those alternative assessments due to the extra commitments required. For example it can be time consuming conducting analytical reading and searching for information. This problem is larger if students are comfortable or dependent on a culture of passive learning. They may prefer the current modes of assessment with scoring for their study.

The current modes of assessment reported in my study are consistent with conventional methods of assessment (Struyven et al., 2005). The dominance of traditional assessment approaches in this context can result in surface approaches to learning (see Entwistle & Entwistle, 1991; Thomas & Bain, 1984). Secondly, these approaches can create the possibility of cheating (see Sambell et al., 1997). This may result from assessment formats designed to cover factual information from textbooks rather than transforming existing knowledge and demonstrating original thought. Thus students are not equipped to use analytical views and critical thinking in response to assigned tasks. Finally, due to the dominance of an exam-oriented culture, the opportunities to introduce alternative assessment methods are challenging. Heavy emphasis on particular modes of assessment implies that a limited range of learning was actually being assessed. This is not fully consistent with a standards model (Maclellan, 2001). A standards model aims to ensure the acquisition of knowledge because it reflects what has been learnt in criterion referenced terms (Newstead, 2003; Biggs & Taylor cited in Maclellan, 2001).

Nonetheless, lecturers acknowledge the importance of alternative assessment tools, some lecturers intend to have these tools implemented even though they faced challenges such as time constraints, tracing individual students' knowledge, and embedded passive learning culture. There may be some other hidden factors inhibiting the implementation of alternative assessment tools. These could be limited lecturer knowledge about innovative assessment tools, the dominance of traditional forms of assessment, university policy and the educational culture of this context.

Many studies have suggested the adoption of alternative assessment tools in the university (Fook & Sidhu 2011; Mussawy, 2009; Struyven et al., 2005). The research found that alternative assessment tools stimulate deep-level learning and critical thinking student learning (see Sambell et al., 1997; Segers & Dochy, 2001; Slater,

1996). Alternative assessment is perceived to promote the quality of learning because it appears to measure qualities, skills and competencies which are valuable in contexts other than just the immediate needs of summative assessment (Cummings et al., 2008; Struyven et al., 2005). Alternative assessment intends to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning, and make assessment an essential part of their learning experience. Furthermore, it is hoped students will be able to apply a wide range of knowledge rather than engaging with memorised information (Eisner, 1999; Hargreaves et al., 2002; Harlen & Crick, 2003; Wolf et al., 1991).

My finding suggests the need to develop the assessment activities that stimulate students' abilities to create and apply the gained knowledge in real-life situation. However, the development of innovative assessment is questionable in terms of assessment literacy, the current examination-dominated culture, and the assessment system. Lecturers in my study identified challenges for the practices of alternative assessment in this particular context. Despite this, the possibility of implementation of these tools can still be opened through student training and introductions to new methods and how they are used. Therefore staff participation in professional development is considered an important step for learning something new. On top of this, support or encouragement from the university and institution can contribute to the practices of alternative assessment in this context.

### **5.5. What are the perceived purposes of current assessment tasks?**

This research question aims to discover lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences about current assessment tasks. Lecturers and students in my study have diverse conceptions about the content of assessment. These were assessed via questions regarding what they believed the important content when designing assessment tasks.

My study shows the design of current assessment tasks were 'sometimes' used to judge the development and application of knowledge together with the skills of presentation, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information. Emphasis on the development of new knowledge and presentation of information appears to be a main focus for the design of assessment tasks, for example, written assignments, presentation or tests when lecturers were asked in the interview. This is consistent with the notion of declarative knowledge. Lecturers in my study may not get involved with subjects that require them to design tasks of high synthesis, analysis, and evaluation. This suggests that assessment design

may focus on factual information that requires students to recall content rather than design tasks that stimulate critical thinking and develop students' problem analysis. The design of assessment tasks should integrate certain requisite qualities and perform certain critical functions. It should also emphasise the promotion of student learning rather than just focusing on measurement (Brown, 2004; Joughin, 2008). This can develop students' analytical and critical thinking. My finding contradicts the findings of Maclellan (2001). In this faculty, assessment was frequently designed to assess students' ability to analyse, synthesise, and evaluate information.

In the context of my study, assessment content seems to imply that measurement of students' knowledge is a main focus in the design of assessment tasks. Measuring students' understanding is a must in academic study regardless of assessment format or approach. However, the extent to which assessment tasks fully focused on students' ability to transmit and present information could be viewed as questionable. The content of assessment tasks should achieve a collection of things. It should relate the subjects to real-life situations, support the notion of sustainable assessment and support co-operative work rather than competitive settings (Boud, 2000; Carless, 2007; Keppell & Carless, 2006). The study suggests a need for more authentic assessment that enables students to develop self-regulated learning as some students of my study highlight a need for assessment tasks where knowledge gained can be applicable in the real-life situation. However, as exam-based assessment is culturally rooted in this education system, a culture of competition is strongly instilled in students from primary school through to university. The concept of assessment tasks that require students to work together is seen as a challenge to conventional Cambodian education. Therefore, the extent to which assessment tasks can make authentic demands of students is then questionable.

Literature suggests that students should be assessed on abilities related to the accumulation and interpretation of information, formulation of ideas, construction of justifiable arguments and critical reasoning (Maclellan, 2001; Norton, 1990). When students are able to engage in these types of cognitive tasks, they are required to demonstrate authentic academic achievement, and they also have the potential to apply knowledge to real-world learning and problem solving situations (Gulikers et al., 2008; Messick, 1994; Newmann & Archbald, 1992).

My findings suggest the designing of assessments that stimulate students' reflection through cognitive tasks. It is simple to design assessment tasks requiring students to produce information, but it is more difficult to have assessment tasks that require students to transform their knowledge. My study suggests a further development of assessment task design so that it covers areas such as: analysis, synthesis, evaluation of information. Again, I stress that the content of tasks should be applicable in the wider world. With these important contents, students will be equipped with development of problem analysis and critical thinking skills for immediate academic study and life after graduation.

### **5.6. To what extent does assessment involve students in self-and peer assessment?**

This question aims to discover the perceptions and practices of lecturers and students in relation to self-and peer assessment. The findings indicate both lecturers and students did not often engage in self-assessment and peer assessment methods. This finding is consistent with Maclellan's (2001) finding that self-and peer assessments were not frequently employed. Maclellan's (2001) study indicated that self-assessment and peer assessments were considered strengths in an assessment system. However, participants from her study claimed that self-assessment was seen as difficult for students who were viewed as not having the skills to assess each other. Lindblom-ylänne, Pihlajamäki, and Kotkas (2006) found that self-assessment was sometimes difficult as students felt it was not possible to be objective when viewing their own work. In relation to peer assessment, students found it hard to be critical when assessing the essays of their peers. Therefore, any peer or self-assessment by students needs teachers/lecturers who are supportive and offer clear criteria and guidance to students who engage in this process. In the Cambodian context, adopting so-called 'self and peer evaluation methods' seems to not actually reflect the practices of self-and peer assessment as practised in higher education elsewhere. Assessment literacy may be a barrier to the implementation of these methods in the faculty.

My findings show that self-regulation and self-reflexivity cannot be developed when there is no indication of fostering self-assessment in this context of study. This finding is not consistent with the notion of assessment for learning. Boud (2009) claims that the encouragement of reflexivity and self-regulation does not occur by itself in courses or

educational programmes. Furthermore, it cannot be expected to benefit others if courses do not have the attributes to sustain reflection throughout.

Some lecturers and students valued the utility of these methods when asked in the interviews and focus groups. However, it seems the procedures they used were not consistent with the notion of self-and peer assessment. An example of the implementation of peer assessment is when students locate and discuss their mistakes when they finish presentations. In these cases students can discover strengths and weaknesses in their performances through each others' feedback. Peer assessment should involve students taking responsibility for assessing their work against the set assessment criteria. As Nulty (2010) argues, "students are explicitly involved in helping each other to identify the standard and criteria, and making judgements about each others' work in relation to those criteria" (p.6). Students in my study see self-assessment methods as the way they learn by themselves through reviews of the lesson. This implies their underdevelopment with regard to alternative assessment methods.

Literature indicates that self-assessment requires students to reflect on their own work while aiming to judge how well they have performed in relation to the assessment criteria. The focus is not necessarily on having students produce their own grades, but rather providing opportunities for them to identify what constitutes a good or poor piece of work. Self-assessment refers to "the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standard" (Boud, cited in Liu & Carless, 2006; p. 281). The extent to which there were appropriate practices of these methods could be viewed as questionable. For instance, lecturers in my study do not provide criteria and students cannot do self-and peer assessment.

The research evidence shows the significance of self-and peer assessments that aid knowledge and understanding of subject content and help students understand the assessment process more fully. These methods were seen to promote student learning in the following studies (see Ballantyne et al., 2002; Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2012). Patton (2012) found that students support the notion of peer assessment as formative exercises, but were highly critical of peer assessment as a summative practice. Janes (2007) argues that these methods of assessment can be effective tools to deepen student learning and develop reflection on subject related content.

Peer assessment has been used as an alternative method, aiming to engage students in the development of their own learning (Davies, 2006; Morris, 2001). Peer assessment can be used to help student fostering student autonomy through involvement not only in the final judgements of student work but also in the original setting of criteria and achievement standards (Boud, 1995; Brown, Rust, & Gibbs, 1994). Topping (1996) argues that self-and peer assessment can be combined to provide advantages. For example peer assessment can assist self-assessment as students can converse with each other to gain insights into their own performance. This can foster students' ability to make judgements which in turn contributes to skills for current study and wider professional life (Carless, 2009; Yorke, 1998).

These alternative assessment methods may be difficult to implement in the context of my study. Firstly, neither lecturers nor students have been familiar with these methods as they have mainly used traditional forms of assessment from a so-called 'testing culture system'. Secondly, using these alternative methods is considered challenging as background training is needed for lecturers and students. Trust also needs to be built amongst students for self-and peer assessment to work. It is claimed that "as a society we have come obsessed with certification and grading and public measures of performance and accountability" (Boud, 2000, p. 155). This suggests how deeply embedded traditional assessment methods have become. Finally, time constraints and the willingness of lecturers and students are seen as more barriers to the implementation of formative and alternative assessment methods. Lecturers are often referred to demanding teaching hours in the Cambodian context. This can stand in the way of innovative assessment methods which are believed to require more time to deal with current methods.

The resonance of my finding with the literature shows the importance of involving students in self-and peer assessment. The development of self-reflection on previous achievement and the making of judgements are deemed important in academic study for two reasons. On the one hand it steers students towards deep learning while on the other it develops problem analysis and critical thinking skills. With this new perspective, students will be able to extend their use of knowledge beyond immediate study settings into their professional lives. With the importance of these assessment methods discussed in the literature, and the evidence showed in the research, my study suggests the implementation of self-and peer assessment in this university. The university should



consider this if it wants to provide students with potential skills such as judgment skills, critical abilities and self-awareness in a Cambodian educational context. In addition, the university should consider institutional supports like teaching staff development to allow these alternative methods a proper introduction.

### **5.7.To what extent does feedback promote learning?**

This research question sought to reveal lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences in relation to the utility and the importance of feedback. Lecturers and students in my study placed significance on the role of feedback for student learning, however students saw their feedback was less valuable than lecturers claimed. This is consistent with Maclellan's (2001) findings where a majority of staff considered feedback to improve learning whereas students did not see the same picture. Many studies acknowledged the importance of feedback that supports student learning (Asghar, 2012; Fernandes et al. 2012; Ferguson, 2011; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002). However, there is little evidence that such feedback is used effectively. Studies in Hong Kong and the UK suggest students and teachers misunderstand or do not share understandings about the purposes of feedback (Carless, 2006; Handley, Price, & Millar, 2008).

The characteristics of current feedback at the university present a problem when compared with general features of good feedback. For example, students considered the bad timing and content of academics' feedback as main issues (see Ferguson, 2011; Goos et al., 2011; Wren et al., 2009). Lecturers claim to provide students with good feedback, whereas students seem not to recognise it is good enough to promote their learning. It seems that the feedback given by staff does not meet the students' needs.

Much of what the students in my study described as their experiences with feedback problems agreed with research documented elsewhere. This suggests that good feedback practices are needed even though lecturers claimed to use good feedback in this context. In this case, due to a marking-oriented culture, students may not pay much attention to the comments for their work; they may focus on the received scores instead. Literature suggests that feedback given should be separated from grading (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). For example, if feedback is given against the grades or marks, it is likely to justify the grade rather than develop student learning (Price, Handley, & O' Donovan, 2008). Unclear and brief messages from lecturers may

distract students' attention from the comments. Feedback is a key component in assessment for learning, and students need to understand and be able to reflect on the received feedback in order to support their learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). According to Price, Handley and O'Donovan (2008), engagement with feedback appears most effective when the following key elements are present: clarity of feedback purpose, utility for future work, evidence about the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge regarding standards and disciplinary knowledge, a personal positive relationship with the marker.

Timely feedback is considered important to get students involved in using feedback for current tasks as well as their future work. However, the actual practices in relation to the timeliness are questionable in this context. With regard to assessment criteria, when explicit criteria are not clearly expressed in my study, the possibility of having good practices feedback is hardly likely. The characteristics of feedback should be clear, comprehensive, meaningful, challenging and supportive. Feedback needs to relate to assessment criteria and align with curriculum objectives if it wants to assist progress and carry students to completion (Brown, 2004). This is consistent with Carless's (2007) perspective claiming that feedback tends to be more effective when students are aware of the set criteria and they check their progress towards the stated standard. This indicates that the assessment tasks given should relate directly to the standards being assessed because students are able to manage to do their tasks against the marking criteria, and more importantly students are able to clarify against the criteria when feedback is given. Therefore, lecturers in my study need to use explicit criteria if aiming to practise good feedback.

When asked in the focus group discussion about current characteristics of feedback, students indicated that feedback is generally conceptualised as a 'transmission process' (Boud, 2000; Yorke, 2003). A transmission process in terms of feedback according to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) occurs when "teachers transmit feedback messages to students about what is right and wrong in their academic work, about its strengths and weaknesses, and students use this information to make subsequent improvement" (p. 200). There are a number of concerns regarding this transmission view when applied to formative assessment and feedback. Firstly, it is hard to know whether or not students can develop self-regulation skills needed for life-long learning when formative information is dependent entirely on the teachers (Boud, 2000). Secondly, when

teachers transmit feedback information to students, it is assumed that this information is seen to be easy to put into practice (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, the evidence indicates that this feedback information is always complicated and difficult to work out, and that students need time to construct actively an understanding of the feedback through discussion before it can be used to adjust performance (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001). Thirdly, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that the feedback given to students should be linked to motivation and beliefs. Research shows that beliefs can regulate the effects of feedback information, how students feel about themselves in a positive or negative manner (Dweck, 1999; Garcia, 1995). Finally, teachers are even more loaded with a burden of work as students' numbers and class sizes get larger due to the practice of transmission process of feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). As this process may place some barriers in supporting student learning, my study thus suggests re-examining the current characteristics of the feedback that is processed and getting students involved in self-and peer assessment methods as additional ways to promote effective feedback.

The literature review suggested a model of good feedback practice which seeks to help students become active self-regulators in an assessment process (see Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). For example, one well-established model of good feedback from Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) proposes seven principles for effective feedback. The principles are as follows:

- (1) Good feedback helps clarify what good performance is;
- (2) Good feedback facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
- (3) Good feedback delivers high-quality information to students about their learning;
- (4) Good feedback encourages teachers and peer dialogue around learning;
- (5) Good feedback encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
- (6) Good feedback provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
- (7) Good feedback provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching. (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, pp. 206-214)

Hattie and Timperly's (2007) model is based on the premise that feedback aims to reduce the difference between performance and a desired goal. Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that effective feedback deal with three issues:

- (1) Feed up, which enables learners to answer questions about goals;
- (2) Feedback, which enables learners to answer questions about where they are now;
- (3) Feed forward, which enable learners to answer questions about where they need to go next.

These proposed principles can be used as guidance for feedback practices aiming to empower learners and close performance gaps. There are considerably important when practising good feedback. We should consider applying these principles in a Cambodian university context.

Lecturers in my study perceived effective feedback to be positive, constructive, and applicable to the work of students. They understand what effective feedback is, but there is little evidence of lecturers actually practising this in my study. Timing issues and a 'high-stakes' examination culture are seen as challenges to good feedback practices in the context of my study. My study shows that lecturers recognise time constraints and large classes as barriers to give good feedback to students. Another barrier lies with lecturers' and students' perspectives about consistency between feedback and marking. This can hinder the development of good feedback practices as the stakeholders get too involved in comparing feedback against marks.

On the basis of Hattie and Timperly (2007) together with Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) reviews, my study suggests we consider the modification of current feedback with the intention of moving towards good feedback practices. Considerations about good feedback practices should be focused on clarifying purposes of feedback and providing marking criteria so students and markers can see strengths and weaknesses in students' performance. Therefore, assessment criteria are deemed important not only for the learning objectives, but also for the provision of feedback when that time arrives. Self-and peer assessment methods should be encouraged, aiming to reduce over-reliance on feedback from lecturers. Informative feedback should aim to develop students' future work, and not concentrate too heavily on current mistakes. Dialogue should be open between lecturers and students where students are provided opportunities to approach

their lecturers to ask for clarification and advice in terms of feedback. The study suggests feedback should relate to the following aspects: encouraging deep learning, prompting discussion, preparing for future assessment, and fostering understanding of assessment.

## **5.8. Summary**

The discussion on the findings of my study revealed important issues that need consideration in order for us to see effective assessment practices in this university. Some challenges include: the need for effective feedback and assessment literacy, time constraints and large class-sizes, an entrenched school culture and its impact on approaches to learning. This study has the following recommendations for practice:

- Good feedback practices can be enhanced when adoption of explicit criteria against the assessment tasks is made;
- Dialogue about assessment process should be open amongst teachers and students;
- The adoption of self-and peer assessment methods can help relieve teachers' workload in relation to the provision of feedback;
- Educational leaders, policy makers and lecturers in the institutions should revisit their current assessment policy and consider forming an assessment policy that encourages students to adopt deep learning;
- More formative assessment activities should be included in courses;
- Shared understandings about the process of assessment should be achieved amongst stakeholders;
- Student development in relation to the use of alternative assessment should be provided in the course.

## **5.9.Limitations of study**

Although my study was carefully prepared with the selection of appropriate research design, and the discussion relates the research questions to the theoretical framework and relevant importance of empirical studies, there were some unavoidable limitations and these must be recognised. This study concludes with three major limitations.

First of all, this study was undertaken in only one faculty of the private university in Cambodia and the findings thus may be different across other private universities as well as other state-owned universities. The data collected in the context of my study were based on one faculty of the lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences in relation to assessment, therefore the findings are not intended to generalise to other university contexts including private and public universities in Cambodian. In addition, the findings are not generalisable to other disciplines in the context of higher education as my study was centred in a Faculty of Education. With these points in mind, the findings should not be taken to represent all Cambodian universities.

Secondly, there are some weaknesses of the questionnaire designs as the questionnaire was not previously designed and researched in a Cambodian university context. Consequently, there might be some gaps of knowledge in relation to theoretical frameworks of assessment practices which were not captured by the questionnaire items. The majority of research and literature in this area has been undertaken in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and other developed countries. It could be argued that conditions are not always the same as for Cambodia which is a developing country. In addition, the English questionnaire used in my study may cause some misunderstandings of questions. Consequently some responses may not reflect the reality of the current situation of assessment practices. Ultimately, the translations and transcriptions of data from some participants using Khmer language may have resulted in some lost meaning. In addition, as time constraints were challenges for some participant lecturers, they may not have been ready to participate in the interviews as fully as they could have been. In this sense their views may not be fully expressed in relation to current assessment practices.

As my study set out to explore perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students rather than test their knowledge, it is difficult to know whether or not this is related to the participants' assessment literacy in Cambodian context. Also, as some questions used in my study related to the concept of assessment, some participants may have no experience in real practices of assessment so it is quite challenges to get correct information about the links between concepts and the practices.

## **5.10. Implications for practices and policy**

The study specifically gives recommendations for practices of assessment that enhance student learning, and foster critical thinking and problem analysis in Cambodian university. It does so by highlighting areas that need to be taken into consideration in order for innovative assessment tools to be implemented in Cambodian tertiary education. Literature discussing the importance of assessment practices along with research evidence has indicated how assessment can function beyond just giving grades to students' performance. More specifically it has shown us that assessment can drive student learning. In my study, similarities and a lot more mismatches have been found. These findings thus have implications for the following domains of assessment practice.

### **5.10.1. Notion of assessment**

The evidence from my study indicated that assessment seemed to concentrate on the summative grades even though lecturers' views placed some importance on motivating student learning. Lecturers in this faculty should broaden their understandings of the purposes of assessment beyond just ranking achievement. The findings from my study are consistent with the notion of summative assessment. In addition, the purpose of assessment should not just focus on ranking/grading students' achievement but also support them to learn, and equip them with self-regulated learning. The findings drawn from this study have implications for professional development in relation to new assessment workshops or international conferences. With personalised professional development experiences, lecturers might be more active and have effective ways to promote innovative assessment in their own teaching.

As discussed in the literature, assessment for learning can serve as a vehicle for growth. Students' can use knowledge about their work to support future learning. Lecturers may struggle with workload when marking students' work, but they should use the work to reflect their teaching, revise their assessment tasks as well as supporting students' growth through informative feedback. My study suggests that lecturers in my context may need professional development assistance in order to learn a diverse range of assessment techniques rather than place a focus on measuring student learning. In my study, little evidence was found to demonstrate that assessment for learning is consistent with lecturers' and students' perceptions and experiences in this context. The data from my study, for example, indicated the use of traditional forms of assessment, outlines of

implicit assessment criteria, end-of chapter tests, and a need for effective feedback. This indicates that high-stakes examination is culturally embedded in the context of my study. One possible way to shift from this assessment paradigm is professional development activities for lecturers, deans and policy makers. This might assist the stakeholders in understanding new assessment practices already practised in a wide range of universities in developed countries.

#### **5.10.2. Timing of assessment and assessment criteria**

The findings of my study also suggest implementing assessment tasks throughout courses. My study identified some informal practices of pre-assessment before the course/chapter, and students also highlighted the importance of assessment at the start of a course/chapter. In these instances, lecturers can acquire students' knowledge backgrounds and use that to design assessment that meets student understanding. Furthermore, this process enables students to keep their learning throughout the course rather than focus on tests at the end of chapter/module.

My study suggests that a clear picture of assessment criteria and marking criteria should be provided in the subject outlines and made available to students before assessment. Inconsistency was indeed evidenced in my study between lecturers and students with regard to the outline of assessment criteria in the subject outline and provision of explicit marking criteria. Lecturers should set their course outline against criterion-referenced assessment. Each assessment task should also be designed to meet the learning objectives described in the course outline. For example, marking criteria for assignments should be made explicit and stated in the course outline or attached to the assessment tasks. The importance of designing course outlines based on explicit assessment criteria provides a clear guiding practice for both lecturers and students. Shared understandings between lecturers and students about assessment and marking criteria should be made clear before the course and its assignments. Students should be told that their work will be marked against explicit marking criteria so that they can use the criteria as learning objectives. In addition, support from the university is needed for lecturers to meet these standards. The university should reform its assessment policy to allow this strengthening of its educational quality.



### **5.10.3. Assessment approach and alternative assessment tools**

This study showed limitations in relation to the practices of self-and peer assessment methods although some lecturers claimed to have used these methods. Furthermore, the data was not consistent with the notion of self-and peer assessment methods as lecturers described in this context. Even though some forms of alternative assessment tools were used in the context of my study, it seems this only applied to some particular modes. This indicates that a limited range of student learning has been assessed.

My study suggests implementing self-and peer assessment, and a variety of alternative assessment tools in Cambodian universities if we want students to adopt deep learning and foster analytical and critical thinking skills. With these methods and tools, a wide range of student learning can be assessed through the assessment tasks. My findings indicated that lecturers may be underdeveloped with these innovative assessment methods. So if we want students to practise these innovative assessments there is a critical need for lecturers to explore the new methods first. Lecturers in this context will need to acquire new ideas through participation in educational training such as short-courses, workshops and reading scholarly articles. New knowledge is needed for university lecturers before they can make some positive changes to educational quality in Cambodia. If we want to improve learning quality, we lecturers have to develop new knowledge as well. Therefore, there is a need to seek support from the university to encourage staff to participate in staff development locally and internationally.

### **5.10.4. The content of assessment design**

The current focus during assessment design looks for students to develop new knowledge and present information. This can limit students' knowledge around the topics and it appears to encourage surface learning as the tasks favour factual information. The design of assessment tasks should seek content that allows students to use analytical approaches so that the content is applicable to their lifelong learning. The design of assessment tasks should promote analysis, synthesis, evaluation of knowledge, and application to the real world. With knowledge gained from the assessment, students should be able to apply these skills not only in academic life, but also in their professional life.

#### **5.10.5. Effective feedback**

Feedback is an encouraging learning tool if appropriate forms are applied. Participants in my study acknowledged the potential utility of feedback. They believed that feedback support student learning. Nevertheless, its effectiveness in practice seemed to concern students. My study identified that the practices of good feedback should be taken into considerations if we intend to encourage deep learning, prepare students for future assessments and foster students' understanding of assessment.

Research literature discussed the important roles of feedback and students in my study indicated a need for effective feedback. With this in mind, lecturers should consider the following principles if they wish to provide students with a good practice of feedback. These suggested principles are drawn from the literature, empirical studies, and my findings and suggested for considerations in relation to a good practice of feedback. Lecturers in my context should reflect on their current feedback practice with these following principles:

- (1) Good practice of feedback should be timely feedback;
- (2) Good practice of feedback should be contained critical and constructive information;
- (3) Good practice of feedback should be linked to the motivation and beliefs;
- (4) Good practice of feedback should be related to the assessment marking criteria;
- (5) Good practice of feedback should be set with the clear purposes;
- (6) Good practice of feedback should place an emphasis on the development of student learning rather than focus on their achieved grades;
- (7) Good practice of feedback should open the conversation between lecturers and students regarding the clarifications of feedback and learning.

#### **5.11. Implication for further research**

The findings from my study contribute to the body of literature on assessment practices in tertiary education by building a foundation for understanding lecturers' and students' perceptions and practices of assessment. As such, these findings have implications for future research. Firstly, as my study investigated assessment practices in one Faculty of

Education in one private university, it is suggested that a similar study should be undertaken across disciplines in either a private or public university.

Secondly, further research on the impact of current assessments on student learning and the extent to which students believe in current assessment approaches should be done. Such research would seek the preferences of stakeholders and assessment effectiveness for student learning. Thirdly, there should be further research that involves universities in which innovative assessment practices have been implemented in Cambodia. A comparative study in relation to the assessment system and learning careers between a developing country and a developed country should also be investigated. The findings from these proposed studies can build the scholarship of assessment and assessment frameworks in Cambodian context. They can also direct stakeholders - especially the policy makers - to further development in this field with the intention of enhancing assessment quality in Cambodian tertiary education.

## **5.12. Concluding remarks**

The findings of my study reveal that assessment of learning is predominantly practised in this faculty. The data evidenced a number of things about the faculty that are inconsistent with the notion of assessment for learning. These were: the predominantly summative purposes of assessment, the employment of traditional modes of assessment, the conduction of assessment at the end of chapters/courses, unclear assessment criteria, and the need for effective feedback.

Assessment literature along with research evidence identified that assessment for learning can support student learning, yet the findings of my study reveal it is not widely used in this context of Cambodian tertiary education. Lecturers in my study seem ill-equipped or ill-prepared for the implementation of assessment for learning. Therefore, important actions should be taken in relation to staff development. My study suggests that university support is also needed to promote alternative assessment tools. In addition, the university needs to revisit current assessment procedures and look to include more alternative assessment methods in current programmes. Greater learning quality may result from the willingness of individuals and the institution as a whole so it is not too late to introduce assessment for learning in tertiary education in Cambodia.

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## APPENDICES:

### Appendix A: Questionnaire for lecturers



## Faculty of Education

This questionnaire investigates lecturer and student experiences and perceptions of assessment in a Cambodian private university. As a lecturer in this faculty, **you are encouraged to consider assessment in courses you are currently teaching**. To ensure confidentiality, the survey will be allocated numbers and you will not be identified by name. The information collected will be used for research purposes. The questionnaire has a four-point Likert scale—*frequently*, *sometimes*, *never*, and *don't know* which participants can place their responses. Read the following sentences carefully and **circle the number** that reflects your perceptions and experiences about the current assessment practices. **Please place the completed questionnaires in the box provided in the lecturers' room.**

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ④ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ③ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ① \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
frequently                      sometimes                      never                      don't know

#### Purposes of assessment

*Circle One*

1. Assessment is used to motivate student learning.	4	3	2	1
2. Assessment is used to rank student achievement.	4	3	2	1
3. Assessment is used to identify students' strengths and weaknesses.	4	3	2	1
4. Assessment is used to reflect lecturers' teaching performance.	4	3	2	1

#### Content of assessment

5. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to develop new knowledge.	4	3	2	1
6. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to apply knowledge into the real life situation.	4	3	2	1
7. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to present information.	4	3	2	1
8. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to analyse information. (analyse= compare and contrast information)	4	3	2	1
9. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to synthesize information. (synthesize=create or construct)	4	3	2	1
10. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to evaluate information.(evaluate=judge)	4	3	2	1

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ④ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ③ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ① \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**frequently                      sometimes                      never                      don't know**

**Assessment approach**

11. Students are encouraged to assess their own work. (Self-assessment).	4	3	2	1
12. Students are encouraged to assess other students' work. (Peer-assessment)	4	3	2	1

**Timing of assessment**

**Circle One**

13. Assessment is conducted at the start of the course/ module/chapter.	4	3	2	1
14. Assessment is conducted during the course/ module/chapter.	4	3	2	1
15. Assessment is conducted at the end of the course/ module/chapter.	4	3	2	1

**Modes of assessment**

16. Assessment is conducted through individual presentations.	4	3	2	1
17. Assessment is conducted through written assignments.	4	3	2	1
18. Assessment is conducted through multiple choice questions.	4	3	2	1
19. Assessment is conducted through short answer questions.	4	3	2	1
20. Assessment is conducted through reflective journal-writing.	4	3	2	1
21. Assessment is conducted through group-project presentations with formative peer feedback.	4	3	2	1
22. Assessment is conducted through a final exam.	4	3	2	1
23. Assessment is through group presentation without feedback from lecturer or peers.	4	3	2	1

**Assessment criteria**

**Circle One**

24. Marking is based on implicit criteria.(No clear points provided; whole essay is given 10 in total)	4	3	2	1
25. Marking is based on explicit criteria. (Every point is clearly stated, it means that introduction= 5, content =5 etc)	4	3	2	1
26. Detailed marking criteria are provided for all assignments.	4	3	2	1
27. Assessment criteria are clearly stated in Subject Outlines.	4	3	2	1



28. Assessment requirements and marking criteria in Subject Outlines are made available to students at the beginning of the course.	4	3	2	1
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[ \_\_\_\_\_ ④ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ③ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ① \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**frequently                      sometimes                      never                      don't know**

### **Value of feedback**

29. Detailed written feedback is necessary to encourage deep learning.	4	3	2	1
30. Feedback on assessment is given within a reasonable time to facilitate learning.	4	3	2	1
31. Feedback allows students to prepare for future assessment.	4	3	2	1
32. Feedback prompts discussion between students in classroom.	4	3	2	1
33. Feedback prompts discussion between students and lecturers.	4	3	2	1
34. Feedback fosters students' understanding of assessment.	4	3	2	1
35. Feedback helps students to improve their learning.	4	3	2	1

### **Demographic information**

**Please provide the demographic information.**

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Female ☐ Male ☐

3. What subjects are you currently teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your highest educational qualification? ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master

☐ Doctor/PhD ☐ Other

5. How many years have you taught here?

☐ 3 - 5 years ☐ 6- 10 years

☐ 11 or above

## Appendix B: Questionnaire for students



## Faculty of Education

This questionnaire investigates perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students about assessment practices in a Cambodian university. As a student in this faculty, **you are encouraged to consider the current assessment practices in courses you are currently studying**. To ensure confidentiality, the survey will be allocated numbers and you will not be identified by name. The information collected will be used for research purposes. The questionnaire has a four-point Likert scale—*frequently*, *sometimes*, *never*, and *don't know* which participants can place their responses. Read the following sentences carefully and **circle the number** that reflects your perceptions and experiences about the current assessment practices. **Please place the completed questionnaires in a box on your lecturer's desk.**

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ④ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ③ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ① \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
frequently                      sometimes                      never                      don't know

### Purposes of assessment

*Circle One*

1. Assessment is used to motivate student learning.	4	3	2	1
2. Assessment is used to rank student achievement.	4	3	2	1
3. Assessment is used to identify students' strengths and weaknesses.	4	3	2	1
4. Assessment is used to reflect lecturers' teaching performance.	4	3	2	1

### Content of assessment

5. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to develop new knowledge.	4	3	2	1
6. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to apply knowledge into the real life situation.	4	3	2	1
7. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to present information.	4	3	2	1
8. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to analyse information. (analyse= compare and contrast information)	4	3	2	1
9. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to synthesize information. (synthesize=create or construct)	4	3	2	1
10. Assessments are designed to assess students' ability to evaluate information.(evaluate=judge)	4	3	2	1

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ④ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ③ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ① \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**frequently                      sometimes                      never                      don't know**

**Assessment approach**

11. Students are encouraged to assess their own work. (Self-assessment).	4	3	2	1
12. Students are encouraged to assess other students' work. (Peer-assessment)	4	3	2	1

**Timing of assessment**

**Circle One**

13. Assessment is conducted at the start of the course/ module/chapter.	4	3	2	1
14. Assessment is conducted during the course/ module/chapter.	4	3	2	1
15. Assessment is conducted at the end of the course/ module/chapter.	4	3	2	1

**Modes of assessment**

16. Assessment is conducted through individual presentations.	4	3	2	1
17. Assessment is conducted through written assignments.	4	3	2	1
18. Assessment is conducted through multiple choice questions.	4	3	2	1
19. Assessment is conducted through short answer questions.	4	3	2	1
20. Assessment is conducted through reflective journal-writing.	4	3	2	1
21. Assessment is conducted through group-project presentations with formative peer feedback.	4	3	2	1
22. Assessment is conducted through a final exam.	4	3	2	1
23. Assessment is through group presentation without feedback from lecturer or peers.	4	3	2	1

**Assessment criteria**

**Circle One**

24. Marking is based on implicit criteria.(No clear points provided; whole essay is given 10 in total)	4	3	2	1
25. Marking is based on explicit criteria. (Every point is clearly stated, it means that introduction= 5, content =5 etc)	4	3	2	1
26. Detailed marking criteria are provided for all assignments.	4	3	2	1
27. Assessment criteria are clearly stated in Subject Outlines.	4	3	2	1

28. Assessment requirements and marking criteria in Subject Outlines are made available to students at the beginning of the course.	4	3	2	1
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[ \_\_\_\_\_ ④ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ③ \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ② \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ ① \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**frequently                      sometimes                      never                      don't know**

### **Value of feedback**

29. Detailed written feedback is necessary to encourage deep learning.	4	3	2	1
30. Feedback on assessment is given within a reasonable time to facilitate learning.	4	3	2	1
31. Feedback allows students to prepare for future assessment.	4	3	2	1
32. Feedback prompts discussion between students in classroom.	4	3	2	1
33. Feedback prompts discussion between students and lecturers.	4	3	2	1
34. Feedback fosters students' understanding of assessment.	4	3	2	1
35. Feedback helps students to improve their learning.	4	3	2	1

### **Demographic information**

**Please provide the demographic information.**

6. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Female ☐      Male ☐

8. What year are you studying now? ☐ Year 4      ☐ Year 3

## Appendix C: Semi-structured interview with lecturers



Faculty of Education

### Interview guide with lecturers

1. What comes to your mind when you think about assessment? In your viewpoint, what are the purposes of assessment?
2. What are the main objectives when designing assessment tasks? What do you want to achieve when assessing students?
3. What modes of assessment do you currently use to assess students? Why do use these modes? For what reasons/purposes?
4. What do you think about other alternative assessment tools—self-and peer assessment, reflective journal writing, and group project presentation?
5. What information does the course outline include? What strategies do you use to ensure that students understand the assessment requirements and marking criteria that will be used in assessing their work?
6. What are the purposes of giving feedback? What forms of feedback do you currently use? In your viewpoints, what are the characteristic of effective feedback?
7. What do you consider to be the main issues or concerns around assessment practices in your faculty? What strategies are being implemented to deal with this issue?

Thanks for your time and effort.

## **Appendix D: Focus group with students**



**Faculty of Education**

### **Focus group discussion with students**

1. What forms of activities do you consider to be assessment?
2. In your viewpoint, what are the purposes of assessment?
3. What modes/types of assessment do your lecturers currently use to assess students?
4. What do you think about other forms of assessment such as self-and peer assessment, reflective journal writing and group project presentation?
5. What does the course outline include? In your opinion, what are the advantages of having course outline at the start of the course?
6. What forms of feedback do you currently receive from your lecturers?
7. In your viewpoints, what are the characteristics of effective feedback?

Thanks for your time and effort.

## Appendix E: Letter of Ethics approval



FACULTY OF EDUCATION PO Box 17-310 Wellington 6012, New Zealand  
Website [www.victoria.ac.nz](http://www.victoria.ac.nz)

1 June 2012

Sopha! Nguon  
MEd Student  
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education  
C/- School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy  
Donald Street  
Wellington

Dear Sopha!

**RE: Ethics application SEPP/2012/20 RM 19329**

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application '**Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students**', with the required changes, has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Please note that the approval for your research to commence is from the date of this letter.

Best wishes for your research.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'J. A. Loveridge'.

Dr Judith Loveridge

Co-Convener  
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

## **Appendix F: Questionnaire student information sheet**



**Faculty of Education**

### **Information sheet**

#### **Questionnaire with students**

Research title: Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students

Researcher: Sophal Nguon, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Dear students,

I am a postgraduate student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington. I am currently undertaking a research project for my master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students with regard to the current assessment practices in a Cambodian private university. This study will provide the key stakeholders—lecturers, educational leaders and policy makers with some important insights into how the current assessment practices impact on student learning and will be useful for informing further development of assessment in tertiary education in Cambodia.

In this study, I would like to invite you to participate in the survey. The survey aims to gather information on your practices and understandings about the current assessment. For this questionnaire, you will circle the number that reflects your practices and perceptions. Your time spent on completing this questionnaire will help me to identify the current assessment practices in tertiary education in Cambodia. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and will not affect your grades.

I will hand out a questionnaire at the beginning or at the end of session as your lecturer recommends; and it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. I would appreciate your honest responses. Your returned questionnaire means you give consent to participate in the research study. Please place the completed questionnaires in a box on your lecturer's desk.

The responses from the questionnaires will be used for this research only. Only my supervisor Dr. Liz Jones and I can see the collected questionnaires and they will be kept in a locked drawer and in confidential manner. The data will be stored securely and destroyed two years after the research project has been completed.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for any particular participants upon their requests after the completion of this project. In addition, you do



not need to answer the questions in the questionnaires if you change your mind about participating.

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

Should you have any queries or would like to receive further information regarding this study, please feel free to contact my supervisor at the address below:

Dr. Liz Jones  
Associate Dean (Academic)  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Wellington 6012, New Zealand  
DD: 04 463 5939  
Email: [liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz).

Or you could contact me directly at:

Sophal Nguon  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Email: [nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz)

Your time and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Sophal Nguon

## **Appendix G: Questionnaire lecturer information sheet**



**Faculty of Education**

### **Information sheet**

#### **Questionnaire lecturer participants**

Research title: Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students

Researcher: Sophal Nguon, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Dear faculty colleagues,

I am a postgraduate student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington. I am currently undertaking a research project for my master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students with regard to the current assessment practices in a Cambodian university. This study will provide the key stakeholders—lecturers, educational leaders and policy makers with some important insights into how the current assessment practices impact on student learning and will be useful for informing further development of assessment in tertiary education in Cambodia.

In this study, I would like to invite you to participate in the survey. The survey aims to gather information on your practices and understandings about the current assessment. For this questionnaire, you will circle the number that reflects your beliefs and practices. Your time spent on completing this questionnaire will help me to identify the current assessment practices in tertiary education in Cambodia. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and will not affect your work.

I will hand out a questionnaire during your break time in the lecturers' room; and it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. I would appreciate your honest responses. Your returned questionnaire means you give consent to participate in the research study. Please place the completed questionnaires in the box provided in the lecturers' room.

The responses from the questionnaires will be used for this research only. Only my supervisor Dr. Liz Jones and I can see the collected questionnaires and they will be kept in a locked drawer and in confidential manner. The data will be stored securely and destroyed two years after the research project has been completed.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for any particular participants upon their requests after the completion of this project. In addition, you do not need to answer the questions in the questionnaires if you change your mind about participating.

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Should you have any queries or would like to receive further information regarding this study, please feel free to contact my supervisor at:

Dr. Liz Jones  
Associate Dean (Academic)  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Wellington 6012, New Zealand  
DD: 04 463 5939  
Email: [liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz).

Or you could contact me directly at:

Sophal Nguon  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Email: [nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz)

Your time and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Sophal Nguon

## Appendix H: Interview information sheet



Faculty of Education

### Information sheet

#### Interviews with lecturers

Research title: Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students

Researcher: Sophal Nguon, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Dear faculty colleagues,

I am a postgraduate student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington. I am currently undertaking a research project for my master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students with regard to the current assessment practices in a Cambodian university. This study will provide the key stakeholders—lecturers, educational leaders and policy makers with some important insights into how the current assessment practices impact on student learning and will be useful for informing further development of assessment in tertiary education in Cambodia.

In this study, I would like to invite you to participate in an individual interview. The purpose of the interview is to gain your perceptions and experiences about the current assessment practices. The interview will take approximately one hour and it will be held in the university campus and in a room that you find it convenient, and at a suitable time. I will use a recording device during the interview; the interview data will later be transcribed by me. Furthermore, I will give you a copy of transcript to check the main ideas. Either English or Khmer language will be used for the interview depending on your preference.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you change your mind about participating in this interview, you can just let me know without needing to give any explanation. In addition, if you decide after the interview that you do not want your data interview to be included in the research, you can have this withdrawn up to two weeks after the interview, by just contacting me my email at [nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz).

The information from the interviews will be used for this research only. The participants' identities in this study will be kept confidential. This means that your names will not be reported in the thesis or in any academic publications. Only my

supervisor Dr. Liz Jones and I can see the collected information and they will be kept in a locked drawer and in confidential manner. The data will be stored securely and destroyed two years after the research project has been completed. I will check the main ideas with you at the end of interview so that I can ensure my notes are correct.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for any particular participants upon their requests after the completion of this project. This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact my supervisor at the address below:

Dr. Liz Jones  
Associate Dean (Academic)  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Wellington 6012, New Zealand  
DD: 04 463 5939  
Email: [liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz).

Or you could contact me directly at:

Sophal Nguon  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Email: [nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz)

Your time and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Sophal Nguon

## Appendix I: Consent form for lecturers



Faculty of Education

### Consent form for lecturers

Research title: Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students

Please read the following statements and tick the box if you agree to participate in this study.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the nature of the research project and agreed to participate as requested. I agree with following statements.

- ☐ I have read the information sheet and have had details of the study explained to me.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw up to two weeks after the interview without explanation before the data analysis is complete.
- ☐ I understand that I consent to participate in the interview.
- ☐ I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that my identity and that of my workplace will be kept confidential except to those in the group and any information provided will not identify me.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for a period of two years before being destroyed.
- ☐ I understand the findings of this research could be presented at conferences and written up in academic journals, and in a thesis to be deposited in the Victoria University of Wellington library.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive a summary of findings. ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide your contact details: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix J: Focus group information sheet**



**Faculty of Education**

### **Information sheet**

#### **Focus group discussion with students**

Research title: Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students

Researcher: Sophal Nguon, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Dear students,

I am a postgraduate student at Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington. I am currently undertaking a research project for my master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions and experiences of lecturers and students with regard to the current assessment practices in a Cambodian university. This study will provide the key stakeholders—lecturers, educational leaders and policy makers with some important insights into how the current assessment practices impact on student learning and will be useful for informing further development of assessment in tertiary education in Cambodia.

In this study, I would like to invite you to participate in the focus group. The purpose of this focus group discussion is to gain your perspectives and experiences about the current assessment practices. The discussion will take approximately one hour and it will be held in the university campus and a room that you find it convenient, and at a suitable time. I will use a recording device during the focus group discussion; the focus group data will later be transcribed by me. Furthermore, I will check the main ideas with all the participants at the end of discussion so that I can ensure my notes are correct.

Your participation in this focus group discussion is completely voluntary. If you change your mind about participating in this discussion, you can just let me know without needing to give any explanation. Either English or Khmer language will be used for the focus group discussion depending on the preference of the majority of your group.

The information from the discussion will be used for this research only. The participants' identities in this study will be kept confidential. This means that your names will not be reported in the thesis or in any academic publications. Only my supervisor Dr. Liz Jones and I can see the collected information and they will be kept in a locked drawer and in confidential manner. The data will be stored securely and

destroyed two years after the research project has been completed. This focus group discussion is confidential. Information shared with the focus group will be confidential and each participant needs to respect the confidentiality of others in a group and does not share the contents with anyone outside of the group.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for any particular participants upon their requests after the completion of this project. This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact my supervisor at the below address:

Dr. Liz Jones  
Associate Dean (Academic)  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Wellington 6012, New Zealand  
DD: 04 463 5939  
Email: [liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:liz.jones@vuw.ac.nz).

Or you could contact me directly at:

Sophal Nguon  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Email: [nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:nguonsoph@myvuw.ac.nz)

Your time and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Sophal Nguon



## Appendix K: Consent form for students



Faculty of Education

### Consent form for students

Research title: Assessment practices in a Cambodian university: Through the lens of lecturers and students

Please read the following statements and tick the box if you agree to participate in this study.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the nature of the research project and agreed to participate as requested. I agree with following statements.

- ☐ I have read the information sheet and have had details of the study explained to me.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw up to two weeks after the focus group without explanation before the data analysis is complete.
- ☐ I understand that I consent to participate in the focus group discussion.
- ☐ I understand that the focus group discussion will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that my identity will be kept confidential except to those in the group and any information provided will not identify me.
- ☐ I agree to keep the identities of those in the group and what they share confidential.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for a period of two years before being destroyed.
- ☐ I understand the findings of this research could be presented at conferences and written up in academic journals, and in a thesis to be deposited in the Victoria University of Wellington library.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive a summary of findings. ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide your contact details: \_\_\_\_\_

