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ASSESSMENT PREFERENCES OF MBA AND MBUS STUDENTS: A NEW ZEALAND STUDY

ABSTRACT

Assessment is often seen as a significant influencer of learning. Cooperative learning which encourages group work is viewed as a major contributor to the development of relevant workforce knowledge and skills, particularly in the context of an increasingly diverse demographic student population. This study seeks to explore the assessment preferences of MBA and MBus students in New Zealand through the use of a survey linking culture and educational preferences. It is hypothesized that the four variables – competition requirements, structure requirements, respect for education and motivation to study will have an influence on assessment preferences, but these relationships will be suppressed or mediated by attitudes to cooperative learning. Results indicate that the most preferred form of assessment is individual assignments with the least preferred being exams for all ethnicities. However, some ethnic differences in assessment preferences did surface and these have been explored. Implications for educators are discussed including the need to legitimize knowledge and traditions from many cultural realities.

Key words

Assessment, Cooperative learning, International students, New Zealand, Tertiary Education

INTRODUCTION

Student learning and assessment has a cornucopia of scholarship which includes assessment methods used, how students learn, the learning environment and the objectives of the specific educational institutions. In an age of increasing population mobility, both students and their teachers come from many nations bringing with them their own cultural mores and preferences. Linking population mobility with the supersonic speed of change in the realm of knowledge is the fact that one person cannot have all aspects of knowledge and hence the need for working together with other people in order to have a more complete basis for information and action.

This study seeks to explore the assessment preferences of postgraduate business students in a New Zealand context. The theoretical background of the study is presented with emphasis on cooperative learning and assessment. This is followed by the hypotheses and the context of the study. The methodology used for the study is presented followed by a description of the participants who volunteered to partake in this research. Results and discussion are interwoven and include limits of this study as well as suggestions for future research. The study concludes with an invitation to educators to reflect on their assessment practices in the knowledge that there are many realities, both Eastern and Western in how knowledge is constructed and hence how it can be assessed.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cooperative learning is regarded as beneficial in tertiary education and it stands as one of the most recommended educational methods (Johnson and Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 1995a, 1995b). The success of cooperative learning depends, at least in part, upon the attention given to arranging students into groups (Maloof and White, 2005). Slavin (1995b) is of the view that controlled grouping is preferred to random grouping; that students learn better overall in groups of different ability levels (Slavin, 1995a, 1995b) and tolerance for others is learned when groups are diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and academic success (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991; Slavin, 1986; 1995a). Cooperative learning teaches skills that are needed in the workforce, skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership and management.

Johnson & Johnson (1990) and Slavin, (1995b) found students engaged in cooperative learning were more likely to use cooperative behaviours they were taught when they worked with new classmates. Candy (1991) affirms that professional learning is essentially experiential and that skills are acquired and refined through social interactions, dialogue and negotiation with others. This poses a particular challenge for web-based learning prompting McLoughlin and Luca (2002) to stress the importance of online group discussion.

Many students enjoy cooperative learning because it helps them make new friends and useful business contacts, bringing them into contact with people from other cultures (Slavin, 1980). For immigrants and international students cooperative learning is particularly appealing because it helps them learn about local customs and procedures, and may help them practise a new language (Long and Porter, 1985; Pica, Young, and Doughty, 1987). Interaction in the cooperative learning groups is said to contribute to academic achievement (Bejarano, 1987; Ghaith and Yaghi, 1998; Kagan 1989, Ghaith, 2002; 2003) and the learning experience goes beyond mere receptive understanding to multiple source of information access and tasks (Olsen and Kagan, 1992). More importantly, this attraction seemed to cross boundaries of race, gender, disability and ethnicity (Kohn, 1987). It is likely that people who are motivated to study by the promise of cooperative learning will be more in favour of group assessment, particularly if they enjoy cooperative learning (Johnson and Johnson, 1975; 1984). Studies (Cohen, 1994; Dornyei, 1994, 1997) also show that cooperative learning enhances motivation and psychological adjustment of learners. Another advantage of cooperative learning is the reduced marking load for teaching staff when there is group assessment. However, this is offset by the increase in time spent in preparation and often facilitation of the group process.

LINK BETWEEN COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND GROUP ASSESSMENT

However, group assessment is not always popular amongst students and Garfield and Gal (1999) have included this topic amongst the current assessment challenges in education. A common complaint amongst students is that group assessment is unfair. It is often felt that some group members do not pull their weight while others are forced to work much harder in order to make up for the deficiencies in the

performance of other team members. Grading systems have been developed in order to address these perceived weaknesses in group assessment. For example in some classes students are asked to rate the performance of their fellow group members and these ratings are taken into consideration in the final grades. However, educationists argue that it is the hard working high performance contributors in teams who benefit most from group assessment. In having to explain concepts to weaker team mates they obtain additional understanding, and, in having to conduct more of the work they are better prepared for any ensuing examinations or work tasks.

Attitudes towards educational styles can be expected to colour perceptions of the effectiveness of group assessment (Selvarajah, 2005). For example highly competitive people may be less likely to favour group assessment, especially if they do not enjoy cooperative learning. People who prefer a tightly structured study environment are probably less confident and are therefore expected to favour group assessment, particularly if they enjoy cooperative learning. Finally students who venerate education for its own sake are probably more old-fashioned/traditional and can therefore be expected to prefer conventional assessment methods such as examinations to group assessment. But this effect would be reduced in the case of students who enjoy cooperative learning.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Over the last three decades different approaches to cooperative learning have been proposed by different individuals. The three most popular are those of David Johnson, Roger Johnson and Karl Smith (Johnson *et al.*, 1991), Robert Slavin (1980, 1995a, 1995b), and Shlomo Sharan and Yael Sharan (Sharan, 1995; Sharan & Sharan, 1994).

In explaining cooperative learning, Johnson (1979), described three types of behavior settings which are called "goal structures." The three goal structures are Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic. As Johnson explains, these goal structures are primarily based on the presence or absence of interdependence among classroom members. Sherman (2000) states that cooperative goal structures operate when two or more individuals are in a situation where the task-related efforts

of individuals help others to be rewarded. Other attributes considered important in defining cooperative goal structure are: face-to-face interactions, heterogeneous groupings, individual accountability, group processing, and positive interdependence. Collaborative learning is sometimes used interchangeably with cooperative learning (Sherman, 2000; Brody, 1995). Kohn (1992) describes competitive goal structure as mutually exclusive goal attainment (MEGA) where reward is given to students by means of comparative or normative evaluation. Goal attainment is at the expense of others. In an individual goal structure, criterion-referenced evaluation is assigned to student performance against individual goals.

It is obvious from the above discussion, that there is a relationship between goal structures and evaluation methods. Bloom, Hastings and Madaus, (1971) described evaluation as either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced where cooperative and individualistic goal structures usually are criterion-referenced and competitive goal structures are norm-referenced. It can also be recognised that peer evaluations are often used in cooperative goal structures whereas an authority such as a teacher is the primary evaluator in competitive and individualistic goal structures (Sherman, 2000).

ASSESSMENT

A major driver of learning is assessment. Within assessment is embedded a complexity that includes power as a basis for gaining qualifications (Pio, 2004). Assessment can also include learning opportunities which challenge both student and teacher while preserving the legitimacy of the institution (Pio, 2004). In a social construction approach to knowledge, students can be positioned, nurtured and facilitated to be critical thinkers and social agents of change who feel empowered when they can access new knowledge in addition to seeing themselves in history with a relevant degree and better employment prospects (Lee, 2005; Pearson and Chatterjee, 2004; Sen Gupta, 2003; Wong, 2001). In fact in a world with increasing demographic changes, globalization, currency fluctuations ecological and ethnic consciousness, it is imperative that educational institutions prepare their students for negotiating the reality of a multicultural environment. For business courses, such a stance assumes increasing importance in consideration of the reality of global

conglomerates, multi-national corporations, expatriate employees and migrant workers.

Assessment of student learning can be predicated on various conceptualizations of mastery and can include rational comprehension of content, collaborative ability through peer interaction and knowledge application through small group projects, cooperative learning and performance based assessment (McBurnie, 2000; Morey, 2000; Lewis, 1997). Moreover alternative assessment forms in a multicultural context need to move away from assessments which have primarily been used to demonstrate expertise by white middle class male students, dominant culture epistemologies, standardized tests and the Anglo-European concept of competition and individual student achievement (Lynch, 1997; Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Clark, 2002). Leask (2001) suggests that the assessment profile facilitate independent and collaborative learning through a range of group and individual projects so that “students are required to work with others, consider the perspectives of others, and compare them with their own perspectives...in embracing the content and pedagogies of others” (pp. 110 - 112). Mackinnon and Manathunga (2003, p. 132) state: “If our assessment continues to be based upon a Western template of knowledge that only values Western ways of knowing and learning, all our lip service to developing interculturally competent students is meaningless. It also institutionalises discrimination against students from non-dominant backgrounds and privileges students from dominant groups.”

Interestingly assessment is often considered the poor relation in discourses on learning and teaching (Allen, 2004). To counteract this view, a series of studies using an instrument developed by Selvarajah (2005) seek to explore assessment preferences among students. Furthermore, “higher education is now international in a way it has not been since the heyday of Europe’s great medieval universities...with two million university students studying outside their home in 2003, and an annual fee income estimated at US\$ 39 billion” (The Economist, 2005, p. 63). Hence the Selvarajah instrument (2005) incorporates ethnicity of students in its design.

HYPOTHESES

In his cross-cultural study of educational methodologies Selvarajah (2005) considered a model where educational goals and course assessment preferences were used to describe ethnic differences. In the current study preferences for educational styles and educational goals are used to explain course assessment preferences. Educational styles are divided into three dimensions, namely competitiveness, structural demand and respect for education while educational goals are divided into personal goals and goals that relate to interaction with other people.

The following hypothesis will be studied and tested. The four variables (competition requirements, structure requirements, respect for education, motivation to study) will have an influence on assessment preferences, but these relationships will be suppressed or mediated by attitudes to cooperative learning. In particular it is hypothesised that:

- a) Students who are strongly competitive will not favour group assignments because group assignments require these students to co-operate rather than compete. This effect will be reduced in the case of students who enjoy cooperative learning.
- b) Students with high requirement for structure will favour group assignments rather than exams, because they are less confident in their personal abilities. This effect will be stronger in students who enjoy cooperative learning and weaker in students who do not enjoy cooperative learning.
- c) Students with greater respect for education will not favour group assignments because educational assessment has traditionally been by examination. However, this effect will be weaker in students who enjoy cooperative learning.
- d) Students with greater motivation to study will favour group assignments because many of their required study outcomes are achieved through cooperative learning. This relationship will be stronger in students who favour cooperative learning, but weaker in students who do not favour cooperative learning.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The New Zealand tertiary education sector has a rich diversity of ethnicities from migrants and international full fee paying students. Some of the relevant highlights include the following (Ministry of Education, 2004):

1. Domestic Asian students were the fastest growing group in 2003, up by 32%.
2. The number of international students from China continued to grow in 2003, although this growth was lower than previous years. The number of students from most other Asian countries fell, with the exception India, where numbers increased by 26%.
3. Between 2000 and 2003, total revenue from international student fees at tertiary educational institutes rose by 787% to reach NZ\$ 372.7 million.

A Ministry of Education report on 'The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions' (Ward, 2001) reports: "On the whole, research suggests that international students expect and desire contact with their domestic peers, and positive social, psychological, and academic benefits arise from this contact; however, the amount of interaction between international and domestic students is low" (p. 1). The report suggests the need for strategic interventions like peer pairing and cooperative learning.

The AUT University (AUT) is the site for the conduct of this study. Considered one of New Zealand's most contemporary universities, it appropriately has internationalization as its key strategic initiative stating "there will be on-going development of learning and teaching approaches to ensure that international students are fully involved in classroom, group work and assessment activities for the benefit of all students (AUT, 2005a, p.10). AUT University is clearly committed to an underlying philosophy of cooperative learning as evidenced in the design of the new business school, which was opened in July 2004, where the classrooms have round tables primarily installed for facilitating group discussion and student interaction. The faculty of this university have also developed comprehensive and extensive guidelines for group assessment at all levels. In fact cooperative learning is of

particular concern and interest to postgraduate study, which is generally less examination focused than the undergraduate level.

AUT “supports a student centred approach to learning, teaching and assessment. This recognises that students learn at different rates, have different learning styles, have strengths in different assessment modes and vary in the development of capabilities for intellectual independence (AUT, 2005b, p. 3). Within AUT international students come from seventy four countries with the majority being 66% from China, 5% from South Korea and 4% from India (AUT, 2004, p. 57).

At the postgraduate level in the Business school, students can opt for doing a Master of Business Administration (MBA) or a Master of Business (MBus) programme, and the entry levels vary for each program. The MBA “provides a ‘tool box’ of models and techniques for all the core functions of management...(with) a link to professional practice which will enable the development of people wanting to gain advanced management knowledge and skills” (AUT, 2006, p. 14). Thus the MBA seeks to develop functional management knowledge and skills with a deep and well–rounded appreciation of the business environment along with personal and professional capabilities in analysing, formulating and evaluating strategies in a fast paced environment (AUT, 2006).

The MBus “develops critical and reflective graduates with applied research capability. This is grounded in rigorous understanding of a specialist field relevant to their professional and research interests” (AUT, 2006, p. 24). The MBus seeks to develop effective practitioners equipped to be leaders in their chosen business field, with capabilities in applied research as well as an understanding of the interaction of theory and practice (AUT, 2006).

Hence while both the MBA and MBus are postgraduate business programmes, the MBA is more practitioner focused whereas the MBus is more research focused. However, postgraduate study at the AUT Faculty of Business “aims to develop graduates who are confident, capable learners with a broad understanding of business specialist knowledge, skills and well developed personal and professional capabilities” (AUT, 2006, p.1).

METHODOLOGY

A survey of Masters students was conducted in the Business Faculty of the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in Auckland, New Zealand. The prime data collection method was a self-completion questionnaire, with the same format as the questionnaire previously used by Selvarajah (2005) at the Albany Campus of Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand. The Selvarajah study was conducted with a research population similar to that of the current study in terms of ethnicity, professional interest and age. The questionnaire was developed by Selvarajah using ideas from Hofstede's (1989, 1991, 1995) discussion of culture and educational preferences, with some secondary ideas generated from the education-oriented questions in the Executive Survey used in the IMD Report on World Competitiveness (World Economic Forum & IMD, 1995).

Initial descriptive analyses for the AUT data were performed for the demographic questions found at the end of the questionnaire. Thereafter preferences were compared for four assessment methodologies, namely individual assignments, group assignments, examinations and oral presentations. Students were asked to rank these methodologies from 1 = best to 4 = worst in terms of enjoyment, learning effect, fairness, reliability and overall preference. Unfortunately only 84 out of the 114 students who returned their questionnaires applied the rating system correctly, a common problem in self-completed questionnaires. In this study we reversed and then averaged the five criteria for each of the four assessment methodologies. This produced a reliable preference scale for each assessment methodology with Cronbach alpha values ranging from 0.752 for group assessments to 0.855 for individual assignments. The relationship of demographic variables with these scales was assessed using Multi-Way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). One-Way ANOVA for the significant demographic variables produced similar results to Selvarajah (2005) when Post Hoc pair wise comparison tests were performed.

The remaining questions in the questionnaire measured educational preferences using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'definitely disagree' to 5 = 'definitely agree'). Two motivations to study scales were created by combining Likert responses to twenty-one questions regarding current formal educational goals. The first scale

included responses to questions that suggested that cooperative learning was important while the second scale addressed issues of a more personal nature. When two of the twenty-one items, “To undertake a personal challenge” and “To use up my spare time” were ignored the Cronbach alphas were again high (0.866 and 0.699 respectively) suggesting reliable measures. These scales were compared across the demographic groups using the above MANOVA and ANOVA tests, again producing similar results to Selvarajah (2005).

The questionnaire contained ten questions that obviously related to cooperative learning; however, only six of these questions addressed enjoyment of cooperative learning. These six items were combined into a single scale with lower reliability as suggested by the Cronbach’s alpha (0.620). Twelve of the 14 questions relating to learning style seemed to suggest some reverence towards education and teachers. These items produced a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.724 when combined into a single scale. There were only four questions addressing preferences for more educational structure, but the resulting scale was again reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.759. Finally there were seven questions that measured competitive attitude which combined to produce a scale with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.631. The items from which the above scales were constructed are shown in the Appendix. All the above scales were compared across demographic groups using the above MANOVA and ANOVA tests, showing interesting ethnic differences in attitudes towards education.

Finally correlation analysis and structural equation modelling were used to test the hypotheses formulated above. Structural equation modelling, sometimes called analysis of covariance structure is an analytical tool used for testing and refining theoretical models using survey data (Byrne, 2001). Unfortunately the sample size did not allow a comparison of the final model across demographic groups. It is expected that future work will allow this when these data are combined with the data of Selvarajah (2005). The small sample size and large number of tests meant that there was a high risk for Type 1 error. Consequently all significance tests were performed at a 1% significance level rather than a 5% significance level.

THE PARTICIPANTS

In the sample of 114 students males (57%) outnumbered females. More than half the students (57%) were in the age range 25 to 34 years with 19% under 25 and 24% over 34. The majority of the students were single (60%). Chinese were the dominant ethnic group (43%), followed by Indian (24%) and then European with 15% of the students. Only 16% of the students were born and educated in New Zealand, with the Republic of Mainland China being more common (23%). Just under half of the students regarded their residence in New Zealand as permanent (45%) while 38% considered their residence temporary, leaving 17% of the students who did not respond to this question, perhaps because they were currently applying for permanent residence. The majority of the students (53%) had lived in New Zealand for less than four years. These statistics are similar to those obtained from Selvarajah's (2005) study except that the percentage of Chinese students was higher (71%).

Only 35% of the students had no paid job with percentages of 37% for full-time work and 26% for part-time work. The students were employed in a wide range of industries, the most common being finance/banking/investment (10%), education (9%) and retail (8%). The most common type of occupation was office or sales (17%), middle level professional (16%) and manager (11%). Only 6% of the students did not have a university degree, and a large number had a postgraduate qualification, a Post Graduate Diploma for 22% of the students and a Masters degree for 28% of the students. The students were currently enrolled in equal proportions for a Master of Business degree and a Master of Business Administration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The percentage of unemployed students (55%) was higher for Selvarajah's (2005) sample but otherwise the statistics were again quite similar.

A comparison of assessment method preferences indicated that on average the most preferred method was individual assignments while the least preferred method was examinations. There were no significant demographic effects except in the case of ethnicity with Chinese and Indian students showing less preference for

individual assignments but more preference for group assignments in table 1 in comparison with other ethnic groups. Similar results were obtained by Selvarajah (2005).

	Individual Assignment	Group Assignment	Examination	Oral Presentation	Sample Size
P-value Ethnic differences	0.028	0.017	0.996	0.664	
European	3.65	2.20	2.00	2.29	16
Chinese	3.13	2.77	2.05	2.44	41
Indian	2.93	2.76	2.01	2.60	14
Other	3.26	2.35	2.04	2.35	13
Total	3.21	2.59	2.03	2.43	84

Table 1: Means for assessment method preferences

A comparison of educational goals indicated that on average goals met by cooperative learning were slightly more important than personal goals ($t(114) = 1.876$, $p = 0.063$). There were no significant demographic effects except in the case of ethnicity with Chinese and Indian students attaching greater importance for goals met by cooperative learning and for personal goals. Again similar results were obtained by Selvarajah (2005).

	Goals met by cooperative learning	Personal goals	Sample Size
P-value Ethnic differences	0.000	0.007	
European	3.24	3.25	17
Chinese	3.92	3.78	49
Indian	4.10	3.88	27
Other	3.42	3.48	21
Total	3.77	3.67	114

Table 2: Means for current formal education goals

A comparison of preferred educational styles indicated that cooperative learning and a structured approach had similar popularity. A respectful attitude towards education was less popular and a competitive approach was the least popular of all. Again there were no significant demographic effects except in the case of ethnicity with Europeans showing significantly less respect for education than the other ethnic groups and having less desire for a structured approach, particularly in comparison with Indians.

	Cooperative learning	Respect	Structure	Competitive	Sample Size
P-value	0.110	0.000	0.045	0.303	
Ethnic differences					
European	3.32	2.81	3.18	2.87	17
Chinese	3.64	3.50	3.73	2.92	49
Indian	3.66	3.43	3.92	3.18	27
Other	3.33	3.23	3.55	3.05	21
Total	3.54	3.33	3.66	3.00	114

Table 3: Means for Educational Style Preferences

Table 4 shows the correlations between assessment preferences and student goals/ educational style preferences. This table suggest that group assignments are indeed more popular amongst students with a preference for structure ($r = 0.449$) and amongst students who have strong motivation to study, particularly when the study goals can be achieved through cooperative learning ($r = 0.343$). Although only moderate in size these correlation are highly significant ($p < 0.002$). However, contrary to expectation, more competitive students did not show a preference for examinations (or individual assignments) and neither did students with strong respect for education.

Student preferences	Assessment Preference for:-			
	Group assignments	Individual assignments	Examinations	Oral Presentations
Competitive	-0.074	0.003	-0.027	0.058
Structure	0.449(**)	-0.098	-0.125	0.061
Seeking				
Respect for education	0.296(**)	-0.148	0.138	-0.127
Enjoyment of	0.297(**)	-0.181	0.145	0.122
Cooperative learning				
Goals met by cooperative learning	0.343(**)	-0.103	0.042	-0.130
Personal goals	0.301(**)	-0.114	-0.055	0.047

Table 4: Correlations between assessment preferences and goals and style preferences (**) p -value < 0.01

We now use structural equation modelling to test whether enjoyment for cooperative learning has a mediating or suppressing role in terms of the above relationships. The straight lines in Figure 1 represent regression weights while the

curved lines represent correlations. Figure 1 and Table 5 suggest that when we control for enjoyment of cooperative learning there is a significant negative correlation between a competitive attitude and group assessment. This supports the first of our hypotheses suggesting that more competitive students have less preference for group assessment except when they enjoy cooperative learning.

The second hypothesis is also supported in that, when we control for enjoyment of cooperative learning, students with a high requirement for structure still tend to favour group assessment particularly when they enjoy cooperative learning. These students show a clear dislike of examinations. The third hypothesis is not supported. It appears that enjoyment for cooperative learning is unrelated to respect for education. Instead we find a direct positive correlation with preferences for examinations and a direct negative link with preference for oral presentations. The fourth hypothesis is partially supported in that the correlation between goals for cooperative learning and a preference for group assessment is reduced when we control for enjoyment of cooperative learning. In addition, the link between personal goals and preference for group assessment becomes insignificant when we control for goal for cooperative learning.

Figure 1 also shows the important correlations. The negative correlation ($r=-0.377$, $r=-0.461$ and $r=-0.355$) between exam preferences and preferences for all other forms of assessment can be attributed to the ranking system used to create the assessment preference scales. If exams are ranked most negatively the other assessment options are automatically ranked more positively. The strong positive correlation ($r=0.674$) between personal goals and goals met by cooperative learning suggests there is general agreement between these two types of goals. Of more interest is the positive correlation ($r=0.470$) between competitive attitude and respect for education and the positive correlation ($r=0.467$) between respect for education and preference for structure. Although these correlations are only moderate in size they suggest that favoured educational styles are consistently traditional or consistently non-traditional. It is possible that this stems from cultural rather than personality characteristics.

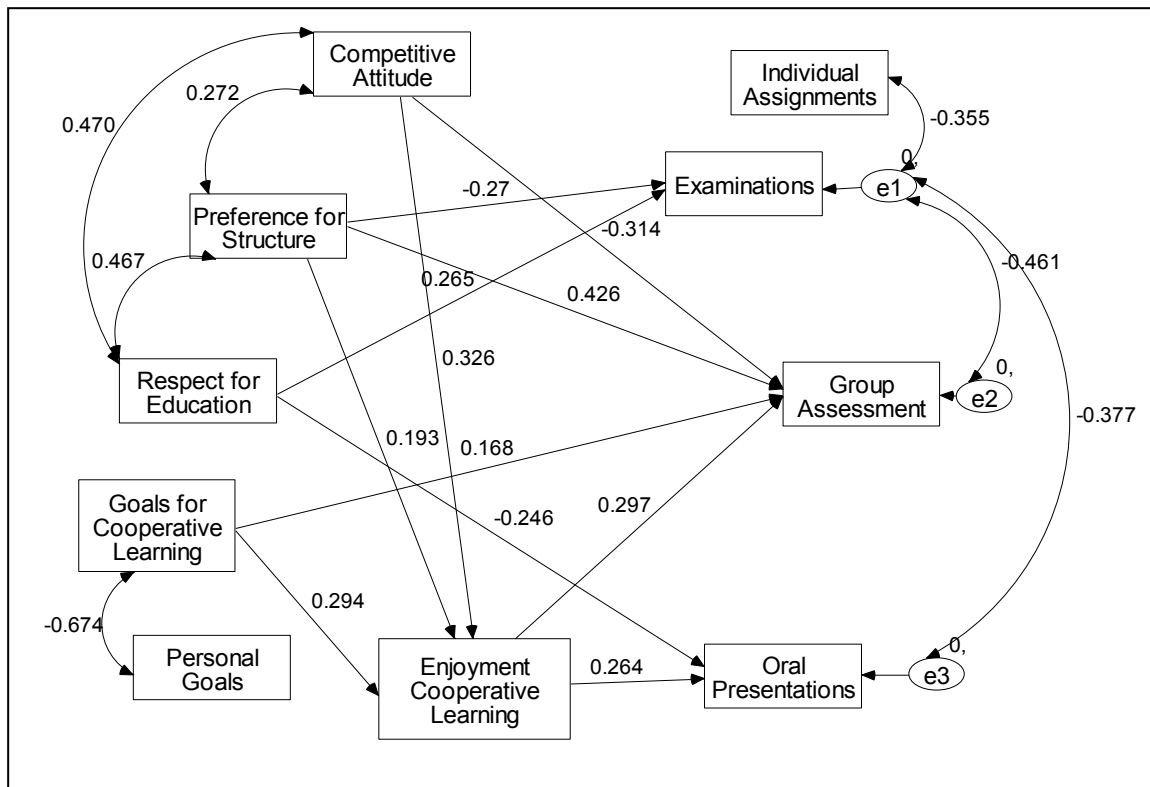


Figure 1: Structural Model for Assessment Preferences with correlations above 0.250. (Beta coefficients shown on the middle of arrows linking scales)

Regression weight			Beta	P-value
Independent Variable	Dependent Variable		Coefficient	
Goals for cooperative learning	Enjoyment learning	cooperative	.294	0.000
Competitive attitude	Enjoyment learning	cooperative	.326	0.000
Preference for structure	Enjoyment learning	cooperative	.193	0.021
Goals for cooperative learning	Preference group assessment		.168	0.031
Preference for structure	Preference group assessment		.426	0.000
Competitive attitude	Preference group assessment		-.314	0.000
Respect for education	Preference examinations		.265	.007
Respect for education	Preference oral presentations		-.246	.025
Enjoyment cooperative learning	Preference group assessment		.297	0.000
Enjoyment cooperative learning	Preference oral presentations		.264	.009
Preference for structure	Preference examinations		-.270	.007

Table 5: Standardised (beta) coefficients for structural model

The independent nature of preferences for individual assignments is another interesting aspect of this model. After we allow for correlations with the other assessment preferences there is no relationship between student goals/educational styles and their preference for individual assignments. This suggests that a preference for individual assignments is universal in this research population, with all students preferring this mode of assessment regardless of their goals or educational style.

The limits of this study include the fact that the results are based on a sample size of 114 individuals with a mix of students from the MBA and MBus. In consideration of the different focus that each of these programmes gives it is possible that more definitive conclusions could be reached if the sample size for each group was larger. Moreover the analysis of each group is also necessary in order to be able to see if and what differences emerge, and how this links to the overall objectives of the specific program.

Future research and analysis could be on the lines of gender differences, age differences, length of residence in the host country including student visa and permanent residence visa. Socialization aspects in the host country New Zealand could also potentially be linked to the assessment preferences of students. An important area that needs exploration is the use of collaborative learning in an increasingly wired world and a world where distance learning and e learning are increasingly being used for educating students at universities. A significant area of research could also be the teacher training methods for developing teachers, and their subsequent use in classrooms with particular reference to tertiary education.

CONCLUSION

A summary of the main conclusions with reference to assessment preferences among MBA and MBus students that can be drawn from this study are the following:

1. Individual assignments are the most preferred form of assessment for all ethnicities. However Chinese and Indian students show less preference for individual assignments as compared to European students. Interestingly the preference for individual assignments is independent of the five dimensions of

competitiveness, structural demand and respect for education (educational styles) and personal goals and goals that relate to interaction with other people (educational goals).

2. Group assignments are preferred to exams for all ethnicities. However Chinese and Indian students show a bigger preference for group assignments as well as for cooperative learning and personal goals (at a very significant level) as compared to Europeans.
3. Oral presentations are preferred to exams by all ethnicities.
4. Overall cooperative learning and a structured approach had similar popularity, and a competitive approach being least common in the educational style preferences in this group of students. However European students show less respect for education as compared to all the other ethnic groups and have less desire for a structured approach.
5. Students with a preference for structure have a preference for group assessment as do students whose learning goals will be met by cooperative learning. However, students with a more competitive attitude tend to dislike group assessment except when they enjoy cooperative learning.
6. Students with high respect for education tend to prefer examinations while students with a preference for structure tend to dislike examinations.
7. Students who enjoy cooperative learning enjoy oral presentations but students with greater respect for education tend to dislike oral presentations.

These conclusions raise a number of challenges for educators in the design and delivery of their assessment. In acknowledgement of the increasing interdependence of nations and the continuing demographic changes within and across nations, preparing students for the future would necessitate intercultural competencies and the ability to function with expertise in groups. Further when one considers countries like India and China who are now major players in the international global scenario (with their burgeoning populations and collectivist cultures), coupled with the fact that New Zealand has many students from these countries, it is incumbent on educators to design and implement assessment strategies which value cooperative learning. In this context it is crucial for educators to reflect on the broad philosophy which guides their teaching and the dynamics which they consequently introduce and nurture in the classroom.

While it is essential to maintain a balance between the workload and assessment design, facilitation and grading, it is also imperative that educators recognize their own epistemologies. It is possible that an Anglo-European model is the dominant one in the design and facilitation of assessments, resulting in a higher preference among all ethnicities for individual assessment. It is also probable that the facilitation of group work for international students, many of whom primarily come from Asian countries, presents a major challenge for educators who may be more grounded in a Western tradition. Such stances— articulated or unarticulated by educators – can conceivably influence the preferences of students for individual assignments.

Since educational style preferences among all ethnicities show that the least common approach is competitive, it is possible to encourage cooperative learning for enhancing interdependence and developing multicultural competencies among MBA and MBus students. It is imperative to reiterate that many of the current post graduate students will be the business leaders of tomorrow. Educators thus have a major role to play not only as creators and disseminators of knowledge, but also as facilitators who actively promote and legitimize alternative ways of knowing and being. Providing opportunities for cooperative learning can be a major step in this direction.

While research on assessment preferences among students in the New Zealand tertiary education sector is in an early stage, this study is a valuable contribution to the scholarship on assessment and addresses the growing need for relevant research regarding international students. Future research can compare international students in various tertiary institutes across New Zealand; in different geographic locations around the world; and also with domestic students who use international service providers in their own countries. This study is an invitation to educators to reflect on their rationale, design and implementation of assessment in the knowledge that there are many realities, with Western ways of knowing and assessment being one of the many.

APPENDIX: SCALE COMPOSITIONS

Goals for cooperative learning	Personal goals	Competitive attitude	Preference for structure	Respect for education	Enjoyment cooperative learning
$\alpha=0.866$	$\alpha=0.699$	$\alpha=0.631$	$\alpha=0.759$	$\alpha=0.724$	$\alpha=0.620$
To make new friends	To learn new skills so that I can change my career	Teacher friendliness and approachability is more important to me than academic reputation	I prefer the teacher to specify project topics	Getting further qualifications will give me special status with my family and friends	I prefer to work with people who have a similar background to me
To improve my skills of working with other people	To get a qualification that will look good on my resume	The teacher should praise individuals who do good work	I prefer the class program to be very structured	University teachers are to be especially respected	I prefer to work with a small group of other students
To better understand NZ business methods	To discover things that may be useful for my business	Getting good grades is very important	I expect the teacher to be able to provide answers to all my questions	I only speak in class when invited by the teacher	It is important that my personal achievements are recognised
To improve my ability to work with other cultures	To obtain a qualification essential to my career	Male students seem to perform better than female students	I like assignments where there are clear cut correct answers	I like teachers to provide very clear instructions	I like working with my friends
To be able to work more effectively in group situations	To show my children the importance of continuing education	I like to compete against other students for good grades		I prefer to associate with students who get good grades	I do better work in a group situation
To enhance my leadership skills	To improve my knowledge just for the sake of it	I don't enjoy my studies, but persevere to achieve other worthwhile goals		Even if I do not learn much it is important to me to obtain a new qualification	Developing good relationships are more important to me than academic achievement
To improve my communication skills	To show my parents I can do something worthwhile	The best performing students and groups should be identified by the teacher		I like to be able to take up my own study interests	
To improve my management skills	To meet my employers requirements that I undertake formal study			The very best students are entitled to special treatment and privileges	
To establish new business contacts	To improve my standing with business associates and friends			The top students should help other students who need assistance	
	To help me obtain a job			I would never contradict a teacher	
				Teachers have a high status in society	
				Older teachers show more wisdom	

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