A theory-driven approach to evaluate assessment practice that supports students' learning

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Contents

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List of Abbreviations

SBS: Sunway Business School
HEIs: Higher Education Institutions
TDE: theory-driven evaluation
OBE: Outcome Based Education
MOHE: Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education
MQA: Malaysian Qualification Agency
MQF: Malaysian Qualifications Framework
PEOs: Program Education Objectives
PLOs: Program Learning Outcomes
SLOs: Subject Learning Outcomes
AfL: Assessment for Learning
AoL: Assessment of Learning
SSR: Student Staff Ratio

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work. It does not contain material that has previously submitted for any other degree or qualification in this or any other institution.

Dedication

I thank God for this opportunity and I give Him all the glory!

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever.
Amen.

Romans 11:36

Abstract

Assessment is an integral part of learning in higher education. Because so much time and effort is invested in developing assessment tasks, assessments should not only measure students but also assist them in learning. Although assessment is crucial in higher education, progress in developing new concepts and implementing changes to practice has been extremely slow. There has been a lot of study on assessment and feedback, but this has not translated into widespread implementation.

This research adopted a theory-driven approach to evaluate the existing assessment system in a Malaysian private higher education institution in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which assessment practices support learning. The initial underpinning theories that are evaluated derive from Gibbs & Simpson's (2004) conditions under which assessment practice supports students learning. Teachers and students were interviewed to learn how they interpret their experiences.

Firstly, this study reveals that students struggle with assessment time; they end up prioritising graded assessments. Secondly, teachers find it a struggle to stay constructive in terms of assessment activities. Finally, this study found that assessment feedback is challenging because of an imbalance in the Student Staff Ratio (SSR) and lack of feedback literacy. These struggles expressed by the participants highlight the institutional tensions that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) face in policy implementation. Through this detailed exploration, this study reveals the need for both a top-down and bottom-up approach – a synthesis approach – in the policy implementation process to connect the dots between theory and practice. Without this approach, theory and practice will continue to exist as separate spheres when they should be integrated for effective implementation.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by 1) bridging the gap between theory and practice of assessment and feedback in the context of HE and 2) highlighting the struggle and support received by participants in pursuing assessment tasks that support learning.

All in all, this study urges HEIs to discuss the steps they need to take to close the gap between theory and practice and maximise the learning potential of assessment.

Chapter 1 Setting the Stage

1.1 Overview of the Study

This chapter highlights the overview and background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose, framework, as well as significance of the study. Throughout this thesis, I focus on identifying the link between assessment and learning integration, reflecting this study's foundation.

Assessment is often related to grading and measurement or even as a form of feedback. Assessment is one aspect that has to be carried out effectively because the value of effective assessment has ripple effects. If carried out effectively, the benefit is reaped by users of different levels, directly by the teachers and students, as well as indirectly by the institution and other agencies, which can derive information on student performance from the assessment tasks (Wilson et al., 2012). Consequently, users, especially direct users, might face adverse effects if assessment tasks are not carried out well. “Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition, if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment” (Boud, 1995, p. 35). In other words, although teaching methodologies utilised by the teachers and learning strategies of students are important factors, assessment (mainly that involves grades) has far more effect on students as assessments tend to control students (Boud, 1995). This is because assessment is considered the influential factor for students’ engagement in learning as assessments are considered to encourage students’ learning (Race, 2019; Holmes, 2018; Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Dale and Lane, 2007).

However, it is common to see students putting in much effort and spending substantial time completing coursework and studying for examinations purposes. Grades are usually why students put in the effort (Sambell et al., 2013). Students tend to orient their effort, time, and energies according to the assessments they think count (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Gradually, it can be noticed that students are becoming very strategic in tackling their coursework or examinations (Entwistle, 2018; Gibbs, 2006; MacFarlane, 1992). Although being strategic is effective for students’ time management on high-stakes assessments, Knight (2002) pointed out the fact that this type of learning muddles with the purpose of learning or even curriculum planning. Students tend to only focus on what is being tested, and the rest is ignored.

Scriven (1967) coined the terms formative and summative evaluations. Although Scriven focused on field evaluation, Benjamin Blooms proposed these terms in 1968 for use in assessment (Wiliam, 2018). The focus in the area of evaluation and assessment does not change; formative is centred on the process, whereas summative is the program's ultimate assessment. Formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning (AfL), is used to continuously analyse progress during a developmental process, whereas summative assessment, also known as assessment of learning (AoL), is used to evaluate the overall, final assessment of a program (Scheerens et al., 2003). Clarke and Boud (2018) found that when students are awarded marks or grades in summative assessment, it is frequently insufficient to explain the logic behind the grade. This does not help students' learning but still serves a purpose to measure achievement through the grades. Therefore, while formative and summative evaluations have distinct purposes, they are inseparable in the context of learning. Hence, regardless of its purpose, assessment should be optimised by integrating the learning element. Although assessment serves a wide variety of purposes, the focal points of this study are assessment and learning.

As mentioned earlier, although assessments are an important and influential component of student learning and engagement, the challenges that higher education institutions (HEIs) have faced in recent years have made it difficult to support learning through assessment tasks. HEIs are pressured not just by challenges emerging from their internal stakeholders (Teixeira et al., 2019) but also by outside elements such as funding and digital developments (Hamzah, 2020; Posselt et al., 2019) as well as politically-driven changes (Marginson, 2011). The issue is that HEIs are expected to develop strategies to deal with the pressure while teaching, learning, and conducting research (Hamzah, 2020; Bok, 2003).

It can be observed that assessment is a crucial yet complex element because of the internal and external aspects influencing the objective of assessment. The tension for effective assessments in higher education is real, and it is time to understand the challenges both students and teachers face. This is the group of stakeholders who put assessment-related policies into practice. Supporting students' learning through assessment goes beyond scoring well for assessments. It is about helping or improving students' abilities to connect what they have learnt to the current assessment task based on what they already know and to use what they have learnt in future assessments or learning experiences.

1.2 Background of the study

The focus of this study is to evaluate the existing link between assessment and learning while making the most out of assessment. In other words, just because learning is the focus, I do not intend to ignore grading and measurement because a well-planned assessment integrates – measuring performance, maintaining requirements and encouraging learning (Carless et al., 2006). This study attempts to recognise the complexities of assessment practice that support learning and consider the feedback of the two main stakeholders – teachers and students – to obtain an inclusive perspective.

Using a theory-driven evaluation (TDE) approach, this study presents the findings using an action model and a change model. The theories referred to here are not grand theories, but the initial elements that sparked my interest in finding out how HEIs can use assessment practice to help students learn and what help or problems they might run into along the way. As Chen (2012, p.17) mentioned, "the purpose of theory-driven evaluation is not only to assess whether an intervention works or does not work, but also how and why it does so. The information is essential for stakeholders to improve their existing or future programs described". The TDE lens is described briefly in the framework section later in this chapter as well as in detail in chapter 2.

The action and change models that suggest a pathway for TDE progression are adapted from Chen (2012). Chapter 2 delves deeper into these models, while chapter 5 provides a graphic representation of the findings of this research using these models. In this study, the action model identifies the required change strategies while clarifying the reality of HEIs from a wider perspective. As shown in Table 1, the change model starts once the change strategies are determined. To enable interventions, the change model identifies the determinants of change. These models help to incorporate theory, policy and practice.

Action Model	Change Model
Underpinning Theories - Gibbs & Simpson (2004)	Change Strategies
Struggles: Institutional Tensions	Determinants
The Reality	Interventions
Change Strategies	

Table 1:Overview of Action and Change Model

Note: Table 1 shows an overview of action and change model. These models have been modified from Chen's (2012) work and are applied within the framework specific to this study, as illustrated in Table 1.

1.2.1 The Backdrop

Teaching in the higher education setting for the past 15 years has piqued my interest in understanding assessment and learning because of the importance placed on assessment in the curriculum. The impetus for this thesis came about when I was doing Part 1 course EDS844 – Evaluative Practice in Social Policy Domains: Higher Education with Prof Murray Saunders. That is when I realised that I was already engaged in "evaluative moments" regarding assessment. The term was coined to:

> cover a set of widely found practices that retained some of the characteristics of evaluative practices as recognised by experts in evaluation without necessarily being seen as evaluation by those carrying them out (or by those people who were professional evaluators) (McCluskey, 2011, p. 101).

I was fascinated by the idea of evaluating the expected and unexpected outcomes of complex issues (Barnes, 2003), which mainly involves primary-intended users (Patton, 2012). Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) conditions under which assessments support learning just motivated me further to take the additional step of putting on the evaluator's cap. TDE approach used in this thesis helped me to build a roadmap for my evaluation. In this roadmap, I intended to understand the struggle faced and the support received by teachers and students while ensuring that assessment practice supports students' learning.

This research was conducted in a private higher education institution in Malaysia, Sunway University. I evaluated the assessment practices of Sunway Business School (SBS), which offered nine different undergraduate programs at the time of the study carried out. Most of the programmes available in SBS are also validated by Lancaster University Management School, ranked in the UK's top ten and among the world's top 100 business schools. After successful completion, students will be awarded two certificates, making them graduates of both Sunway University and Lancaster University.

SBS does not only have to adhere to the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) but also to regulations set by Lancaster University as well. MQA has made it a requirement for the higher education curriculum to be transformed by adopting Outcome Based Education (OBE) actively from the year 2007. It is a system where Program Education Objectives (PEOs), Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), Subject Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and other assessments of each subject are aligned to a common and measurable objective. OBE implementation is indeed a major effort to improve the quality of education in public as well as private universities in Malaysia. Besides, programmes offered by SBS are also accredited by professional bodies, and therefore, the choices of assessment practice have to also be in line with these bodies.

Aside from the various quality assurance policies that must be followed, SBS is one of the Sunway University schools with a large student population, with some teachers having as many as 200-300 students in a lecture class, which is then distributed to tutors. According to Arvantikas (2013), massification at the undergraduate level is an inescapable fact of academic life today. Some of the tutors are part-timers who may have difficulty meeting the students as often as full-timers. Part-time faculty members face many challenges, and one of them is not having an office for themselves

(Charfauros & Tierney, 1999). This may hinder part-timers from meeting students for feedback often or meeting other faculty members.

With the challenges SBS faces in terms of the large student population and the reliance on part-time staff as well as transnational education, this research brings about in-depth discussions on assessment practices that support students' learning. Although the context of this case study is within SBS, the outcome of this study is not limited to only this institution. I believe other HEIs share the same concerns in assessment practice, and the results shared and discussed here benefit institutions worldwide to ensure assessment practice supports students' learning.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Assessment can be mainly divided between formative and summative assessment. Scriven (1967) distinguished formative assessment (Assessment for Learning) as a tool used to improve, whereas summative assessment (Assessment of Learning) as a tool to decide. Knight (1995) pointed out the need to integrate both types of assessment for a more effective learning experience. Fortunately, by 2017, Carless and his colleagues confirmed that Assessment for Learning (AfL) is prevalent in HEIs. "AfL is now reasonably well-entrenched as part of higher education pedagogy" Carless et al. (2017). However, the concern that is pointed out is to what extent the evidence of AfL is seen at the course-level (Boud, 2014) because of the over-powering interest in summative assessment (Carless et al., 2017).

However, over the years, although so much research has been carried out in the area of assessment and feedback, the changes have been considerably slower (Bloxham, 2016; Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Heywood, 2000). Although Carless et al. (2006) mentioned the need for well-planned assessment integrating measurement, standards and learning, the extensive automatic focus of time and energy on summative assessments by both teachers and students seems to "snatch" away the additional purposes of the assessment other than for measuring and grading.

With these internal as well external challenges faced by HEIs, the gap between theory and practice is evident (Haughney et al., 2020; Tight, 2020; Jarvis, 2012). Hence, using a TDE approach, this study helps close this gap by systematically reviewing the issue at hand to build a bridge between assessment and learning. Walshe (2007) explains the purpose of utilising the TDE approach:

> "The aim is not to find out 'whether it works', as the answer to that question is almost always 'yes, some times'. The purpose is to establish when, how and why the intervention works, to unpick the complex relationship between context, content, application and outcomes, and to develop a necessarily contingent and situational understanding of effectiveness" (Walshe, 2007).

Therefore, this study aims to integrate assessment practices and learning using a TDE approach to provide a systematic outlook on the challenges teachers and students face in implementing and experiencing assessment practices that support student learning.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the current assessment system at Sunway University to understand how the assessment practices support learning. This study examines deeper into the local practices that reveal institutional tension and the reality of HEI from a broader viewpoint. This purpose can be further divided into smaller objectives. Firstly, by completing this study, I am able to understand the teachers and students' perspectives on assessment practices that support students' learning. I believe it to be essential to attain their perspectives in order to gain insight into their beliefs and practises, as well as how they perceive learning in relation to assessment practice. Besides giving me input on the aspects that I just mentioned, this study, most importantly, provides a platform for teachers and students to discuss the dilemmas and struggles they face as well as the support they receive in implementing or carrying out assessment practices that support learning. Finally, from the TDE approach, this study captures the need for interventions and change initiatives. This study's findings are able to bridge the gap between theory and practice in terms of assessment and learning, which have long existed as separate spheres in higher education. More details on the theory and practice gap will be discussed in chapter 2.

Therefore, this study has been designed on the foundation of these research questions:

1. How do the different stakeholders (teachers & students) within a business school in a Malaysian University perceive the ways in which their assessment practices support students' learning?
2. What elements within this business school context hinder / support assessment practices serving the function of supporting students' learning?
3. What are the implications, in light of theory-driven evaluation, for the research findings in the implementation of assessments that support students' learning at this and other Higher Education Institutions?

The research starts with the fundamental concepts presented by Gibbs & Simpson (2004). Through this evaluation, I highlight the challenges the participants have faced, representing their voices and aiding in developing initiatives to bridge the gap between assessment and learning. Throughout this research, change and action models are used for a comprehensive analysis and to improve comprehension of a complex intervention, as shown in Table 1 earlier in this chapter.

The insights and discussions I had with participants, and my engagement with the literature assisted me in interpreting the research findings and in the co-construction of knowledge and ideas in the context of assessment and learning. This process contributed to a deeper understanding of HEI realities and resulted in change strategies for implementation.

1.5 Frameworks of the Study

This section describes the framework used in this study, mainly adopted for the methodological and analytical frameworks.

1.5.1 Methodological Framework

Firstly, Gibbs & Simpson (2004) research was adopted as an initial methodological framework for this study. They proposed 11 conditions that support students' learning, as shown in Table 2. A three-year project called The FAST project (Formative Assessment in Science Teaching) in the UK adopted these conditions (Brown et al., 2003) to examine the potential for improving student learning by making changes to the way formative assessment and feedback are presented (Glover & Brown, 2006). I found these conditions comprehensive and detailed to be used as my framework. These conditions do not limit this study, but these conditions worked as a catalyst for my thought process to reflect on assessment practices that support students' learning. These conditions work well as a benchmark, but can they be implemented in a practical manner within a higher education context? Hence, this explains my interest in further understanding the dilemma and struggle teachers and students face. In the next chapter, more details on these conditions are provided, where each condition was analysed based on other literature to gain a better understanding. Based on this understanding, I created the semi-structured interview questions for this study to evaluate how these conditions function in the reality or the world of the participants. These conditions helped me realise why I framed the interview questions in a particular way.

Assessment Tasks (Conditions 1-4)	
1.	Capture sufficient study time and effort (in and out of class)
2.	Are spread evenly across topics and weeks
3.	Lead to productive learning activity (deep rather than surface learning)
4.	Assessment communicate clear and high expectations
Feedback (conditions 5–11)	
5.	Is sufficient (in frequency, detail)
6.	Is provided quickly enough to be useful
7.	Focuses on learning rather than marks
8.	Is linked to assessment criteria/expected learning outcomes
9.	Makes sense to students
10.	Is received by students and attended to
11.	Is acted upon to improve work and learning

Table 2:Conditions under which assessment supports learning, Gibbs & Simpson (2004)

1.5.2 Analytical Framework

Using a TDE framework, this paper evaluates the existing assessment practice based on an existing theory (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004) and current assessment policy in effect by integrating the stakeholders' (teachers and students) view to understand the struggle faced and support received. Birckmayer & Weiss (2000) emphasises that such a framework adds structure to the interpretation of outcomes, helps define how a programme is expected to function, and helps focus the evaluation on critical results. The duo added that, ultimately, TDE approach serves as a basis for considering the program's operation, regardless of the effectiveness of the initial theory. Hence, integrating such a framework helps me to view the complex elements of assessment practice in relation to supporting students' learning. As mentioned, I adopt Chen's (2012) action and change model for a comprehensive analysis in this study. The action model captures the evaluation of the underpinning theories chosen, the interviews with teachers and students and the current assessment policy in place. Based on the findings from the action model, the change model captures the change and intervention initiatives.

Theory-driven research efforts "provide an immediate bridge to other areas of impact, and constitute a first step towards best practice" (Cash, 2018, p.102). Gibbs & Simpson's 11 conditions that support students' learning were used as the initial underpinning theories. Based on these elements, I analysed the participants' struggles, dilemmas, and meaningful insights, revealing institutional tensions that HEIs (refer to Figure 8) face in their policy implementation. The integration of the TDE approach supports my argument in this study that a detailed exploration such as this is needed to connect the dots between theory and practice.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This qualitative evaluative research was carried out because the change in assessment practice has been rather slow (Haughney et al., 2020; Bloxham, 2016; Boud & Falchikov, 2007) when extensive research work has been carried out in this area. The gap between theory and practice is evident (Haughney et al., 2020; Tight, 2020; Jarvis, 2012).

This study identified three areas of institutional tension in assessment and feedback that require immediate attention to bridge the assessment-learning gap. First, students prioritise graded assessments due to time constraints. It was found that students prioritise graded assessments over formative assessments almost automatically because of the time limitations they face. Although literature reveals formative assessment is helpful for learning (Sambell, 2016), students, in reality, struggle to engage in formative assessment tasks because race against time is a real issue for them. Hence, if the graded assessment tasks are not designed with formative elements, assessment tasks do not optimise the purpose of assessment in terms of learning.

Second, it was found that teachers struggle to develop relevant and meaningful assessment tasks. Assessment tasks are designed to map the learning outcomes of a particular course. This prompts the subject of constructive alignment. According to Biggs (1999), constructive alignment helps students and teachers achieve consistency in learning and teaching and facilitates learning systematically. However, this study found that teachers had difficulty staying on track with constructive alignment because they often encountered challenges in effectively incorporating the learning element into this framework.Finally, this study reveals the imbalance Student Staff Ratio (SSR) and lack of student feedback literacy make feedback challenging. Feedback is a fundamental component of learning (Paterson et al., 2020). It was found that teachers struggle to provide helpful feedback because of their heavy workload, while students struggle to make sense of and act on feedback received because of the lack of feedback literacy.

The institutional tensions that exist within HEIs were gathered from the voices of the participants of this study. These results shed more light on the reality of HEIs across theory, policy, and practice, opening up additional avenues for discussion regarding the theoretical and practical implications of bridging assessment and learning. Chapter five of this thesis covers the implications in more detail.

Although the setting of this study is in the Malaysian context, the insights revealed through this study apply to a broader context, helping other HEIs achieve needed changes in assessment and feedback.

This is because, in reality, there will always be a need for improvement. After all, higher education contexts and settings are changing rapidly to suit different needs and students from various backgrounds and cultures.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Before moving on to the next chapter, I would like to highlight the structure of this thesis. In this chapter, which serves as an introductory chapter, I provided a general overview of this study by introducing key terms and a brief context for this study. Following the context of the study, I address the problem statement, purpose of the study, framework used, and significance of the study.

The next chapter covers an overview of the literature on assessment and feedback in the context of Higher Education. From this overview, I then narrowed down my focus on the assessment practices that support students' learning. The overarching idea that brought about the construction of this section is Gibbs & Simpson's (2004) 11 conditions that support learning. I scrutinised every condition in view of other works of literature, which helped me understand where each element stands in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Through this analysis, I could then highlight the research gap of my study. Besides that, this exercise helped me to develop my semi-structured interview questions. In chapter two, I also cover the literature on institutional change and evaluation, focusing on TDE used as this study's analytical framework.

The third chapter focuses on the research paradigm within which I have positioned this research from an ontological and epistemological standpoint. I had the opportunity to share not only my reflection on my assumptions and biases but also my reflexivity practice in this chapter. I also address the recruitment method employed, the data collection method used, and the data analysis method applied. Ethical consideration applied in this study is also discussed in this chapter, and finally, I end this chapter by highlighting the limitation and risks involved in this study.

The results and discussion sections are found in chapters 4 and 5. In the fourth chapter, I focus on three of the struggles mentioned by the participants in this study, where I relate to the action model. These insights shed light on the tensions within the institution that teachers and students must navigate, drawing attention to the realities of higher education and the need for change.

Chapter 5 provides the visual representation of the action and change model. This chapter further analyses the findings, which provide theoretical and practical implications for HEIs when a change model is presented. This chapter serves as a platform for other HEIs to assess their standing in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

In the final chapter, the conclusion, I summarised the research findings, answered research questions and provided knowledge contribution. Finally, I provided limitations of the research and offered direction for future research to encourage future researchers to embark on evaluation research.

1.8 Conclusion

This study aims to provide a critical contribution to other higher education providers through new practical interpretations. This evaluation helps HEIs to understand the current situation and its challenges, which will eventually help the institution take the right steps to become more strategic in designing and implementing assessment practices that support students' learning. This research is not carried out to obtain a single correct answer but to create a platform for more changes in assessment, notably to support student learning.

Chapter 2 Synthesising Diverse Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

HEIs have educated society's leaders, developed new technologies, and driven economic growth (Antony, 2020). They are also responsible for the most rapid social change in human history (Hesburgh, 1969), which has resulted in more significant institutional reform in recent decades (Ansell, 2008). There is no question that the higher education system now serves a more critical and valuable purpose in society. Hence, higher education has become competitive as universities compete for statuses and ranks, which can sadly lower academic mission, community, and values (Antony, 2020). Trowler (2001) describes that the new higher education is influenced by managerialism, where the discourses used can begin to influence the practises that students, teachers, and others engage in, changing the nature of daily life in higher education and the assumptions and values that exist there. As things have shifted in the world of higher education, more guidelines have been put in place for ensuring the quality of education, including assessment criteria. Consequently, measures of quality at HEIs are dependent upon the standard guidelines that are in place, which are dependent upon the local practises of assessment in turn (Yorke & Vidovich, 2016). This indicates that local practice at the institutional level must be considered while considering the existing standards in place. Hence, this study begins with the initial underpinning theories in place in relation to assessment practice that supports learning and delves deeper into the local practises that disclose institutional tension and the reality of HEI from a broader perspective.

According to Carless (2015a), the primary objective of assessment in higher education is to improve students' educational outcomes. So much time and energy is invested in assessment, so he argues it should be more effective at enhancing the learning processes and results that matter most to students. However, the development of assessment ideas and changes in practice has been slow, although assessment is an integral element of higher education (Bloxham, 2016; Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

Having said that, both Carless et al. (2017) and Chan (2023) affirm that AfL has become widespread in today's HEIs, with the shift from viewing students as the passive end of assessments to appreciating students' capacity to make decisions about the quality of work of self and others. However, Chan (2023) also confirms that assessments and research have not been focusing on holistic competencies like 21st-century skills, soft skills and transferable skills in the last few decades. It can be observed that there is a change in the purpose and the direction of assessment orientation, but they are still slow because the evidence of the practice at the course level is not clear Boud (2014) as a result of the preponderant interest in summative assessment (Carless et al. 2017).

Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate the challenges that teachers and students face, as well as the support that is available to them, using a theory-driven evaluation (TDE) approach in order to evaluate the existing assessment system and gain an understanding of the ways in which assessment practises support learning.

Defining theories is always challenging and complex (Smith et al., 2021). Davidoff et al. (2015) explored the characteristics of grand, mid-range and programme theory. According to Davidoff et al. (2015), grand theory is developed at a high level of abstraction, allowing for generalisations that can be applied across various domains. In contrast, mid-level theories serve as valuable frameworks for problem understanding and guides for developing specific interventions. Lastly, programme theories also referred to as small theories, are intentionally practical and easily accessible. They are tailored to each specific program or intervention (Davidoff et al., 2015).

The initial underpinning theories evaluated in this study derive from Gibbs & Simpson (2004). They sparked my interest in discovering how HEIs can use assessment practice to help students learn and what help or problems teachers and students might encounter.

Llewelyn (2003) equates the terms "theorising" and "conceptual framing" to illustrate that theory may be understood in the context of common conversation. Hence, in this study, I refer to conceptual frameworks as theories. I am using this set of theories as the conceptual framing to design this theory-driven evaluation research study. “Theory-driven evaluation first attempts to map out the programme theory lying behind the intervention and then designs a research evaluation to test out that theory” (Walshe, 2007, p.53).

Hence, by using Gibbs & Simpsons, I am simplifying the complexity, providing an area to focus on and start. This is in view of:

> “So if the social world is real and complex, what of our knowledge of it? The position adopted here is that it is not possible to have direct and unmediated access to the social world and therefore it cannot be known directly. Rather, the world can only be known through our constructs of it. For analysing teaching– learning interactions in higher education, this means that such interactions have to be approached with some conception or theory of what is going on. These theories are inevitably simplifications, in that they cannot deal with the complexity of the social world but instead focus on certain aspects and not others” (Ashwin, 2009, p.17).

In this chapter, I analyse the 11 conditions proposed by Gibbs & Simpson (2004) in relation to existing literature. This analysis is conducted before conducting interviews, aiming to ascertain the viewpoints of both students and teachers and to identify the challenges encountered and the support received in supporting learning through assessment practice. Gibbs (2019) expressed his longstanding interest in Synder's (1971) research findings, which revealed that evaluation had a significant impact on students' overall experience, which affected the direction of Gibbs' research. Gibbs and Simpson (2003) collaborated on a project titled 'Enhancing the efficacy of formative assessment in the field of Science', receiving a grant of £250,000 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. For this project, the duo developed the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) as a tool for educators to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment in their course in facilitating student learning. The purpose is to enable informed modifications to the assessment process. Gibbs and Simpson (2003) investigation has identified 11 conditions that support student learning – the conceptual framework used in this study.

These theories used in this study identify a set of evaluation criteria that align with how a programme or policy is intended to function (Davidson, 2005) and are evaluated through discussion with stakeholders to promote evaluation use (Rogers, 2014). These theories also shed light on how specific activities function to achieve particular results (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Newcomer et al. (2015, p.37) define stakeholders as:

> "individuals, groups, or organisations that can affect or are affected by an evaluation process or its findings. The definition is purposefully broad so that the full range of possible stakeholders is considered. Key stakeholders are a subset of this group, but who is key will always be a judgment call and a matter for negotiation".

In this thesis, the key stakeholders or intended users involved in the discussion are – teachers and students. As Newcomer et al. (2015, p.38) mentioned, "No evaluation can answer all potential questions equally well". Hence, the findings of the thesis could be further evaluated in locating other stakeholders or intended users to make this thesis maximise its evaluation use.

The first part of this chapter explores the shift in assessment orientation in the higher education setting, discussing not only the time factor but also the changes in assessment needs. The subsequent section reviews the conditions under which assessment practice supports students learning based on Gibbs & Simpson (2004) in relation to other works of literature that contributed to greater clarity to the purpose of this research. Then, the next part examines the theory-to-practice literary works to understand how theories are put into practice in higher education, highlighting this study's research gap. In the following section, I introduce the TDE lens, which bridges the research gap and this study's findings. Finally, institutional evaluation, institutional change, and resources are all explained through the TDE lens' consideration of these issues. Knowledge gained from this literature review analysis helped throughout the data collection and analysis process.

2.2 Assessment Orientation

This section focuses on the assessment orientation seen in higher education, underlining changes in assessment purpose across time to meet various needs while addressing concerns and challenges. The purpose of assessments was often exclusively referred to as evaluation, measurement, or judgment (Hartle, 1985). However, in recent years, research shows that examiners are broadening their educational goals; therefore, assessments could also be referred to as any information on student learning (Guskey & Jung, 2013; Ashwin et al., 2020; Carless, 2015a).

Hartle (1985, p.1) highlighted that assessment in higher education is used for the following purposes:

1. multiple measures to track students' intellectual and personal growth over an extended period of time;
2. state-mandated requirements for evaluating students and/or academic programs;
3. a focus on the value added," whereby students undergo pre- and post-testing and the gains in general education and skills are measured;
4. general standardised testing;
5. making decisions about funding by rewarding institutions for performance on established criteria; and
6. measuring changes in student attitudes and values.

Hartle highlighted these purposes 35 years ago, and the purposes of assessment remain almost the same to date. However, when comparing these goals to those of Ashwin et al. (2020), it is evident that the educational goals have broadened. It is clear that one of the primary goals of assessments as shown in the list below (Ashwin et al., 2020, p.280), is to be used as a tool for learning, which is beneficial to students:

1. Judging whether students are ready to study particular subject matter
2. enabling students to judge whether they need to study further in a particular area.
3. determining who should progress to an advanced course
4. providing information to enable students to improve their performance
5. Generating marks and grades that are weighted to contribute to a final assessment
6. Ensuring that all students have met minimum standards
7. Diagnosing particular student difficulties
8. Helping students track their overall performance
9. Demonstrating to students what really counts
10. Building students' confidence that they are being successful in their studies
11. Developing students' capacity to make judgements about their own learning
12. Developing students' skills in applying appropriate standards and criteria to their own work

Clearly, this comparison shows the need to place more emphasis on AfL has expanded. Ashwin et al.'s (2020) emphasis on points 1–6 was echoed by Hartle (1985). Point 7-12, highlighted by Ashwin et al. (2020), reveals how assessment plays an integral role in learning other than merely using them for measuring. These are commonly known as AfL approaches specifically designed to improve students' learning (Sambell, 2016; Sambell et al., 2013).

Assessment orientation started to shift in 1998 when Black & Wiliam highlighted the importance of assessment for learning or formative assessment, mainly focusing on quality feedback. The duo reviewed around 250 research articles to understand assessment orientation and concluded that improving formative assessment raises student achievement. Black and his colleagues further analysed the idea developed from the 1998 study through King's-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP). One aspect that they repeatedly highlighted is the fact assessment should be integrated with teaching and learning and should not be viewed as a separate entity:

> "Some have argued that formative and summative assessments are so different in their purpose that they have to be kept apart, and such arguments are strengthened when one experiences the harmful influence that narrow, high-stakes summative tests can have on teaching. However, it is unrealistic to expect teachers and students to practice such separation, so the challenge is to achieve a more positive relationship between the two" (Black et. al, 2004, p.13).

I also observed that assessment orientation changed in response to the need for quality assurance and standardisation. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1, higher education providers in Malaysia and other parts of the world strive to achieve constructive alignment by implementing Outcome-Based Education to improve quality assurance (OBE). This constructive alignment assists both students and teachers in attaining consistency in learning and teaching (Biggs, 1999). OBE necessitates that teaching and learning begin with a clear objective and that curriculum and assessments follow suit. Students are placed in a system to learn effectively based on the objectives set. Definitely, assessment plays a significant role in identifying and measuring if the constructive alignment is met for a particular module or course.

However, Trigwell & Prosser (2014) highlight that constructive alignment may not be sufficient, although it is a necessary element. This is because the quality of each aligned element may differ depending on teachers' conceptions and approaches to teaching as well as assessment design. If higher education providers' top priorities are to guarantee quality and raise standards, then quality improvement and student learning must also be their key objectives. Measuring standards and promoting learning should not compete with each other for attention but should be established together. Huxham et al. (2015) attempted to re-imagine curriculum design by emphasising co-creation, where students are invited to the decision-making process throughout the course instead of setting the learning outcomes and assessments before the course. Despite the challenges faced, Huxham and the team reflect that this new approach "requires re-learning how to behave as learners and teachers" (p.16), which, to a great extent, reflects the impact of assessment practice in learning.

Looking beyond the reason for quality assurance and measurement, researchers like Trotter (2006) and Carless et al. (2006) have identified specific purposes for assessment. In fact, Trotter (2006) lists – student learning, motivation, and feedback – as the three primary educational purposes of assessment to adopt and embrace. As seen in Figure 1, Carless et al. (2006) also echoes Trotter (2006). A well-planned assessment practice integrates the three functions shown in Figure 1.

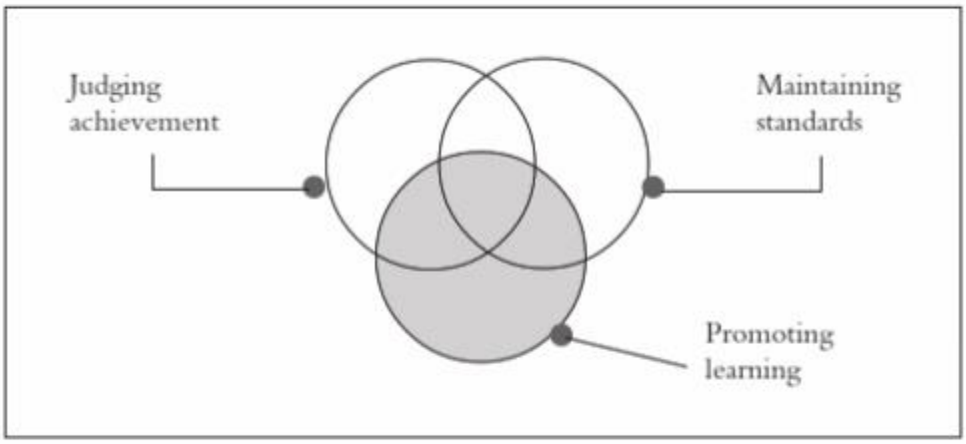

Figure 1: The main purposes of assessment, Carless et al. (2006)

Carless et al. (2006) highlighted challenges in finding a balance. Firstly, assessment practice, most of the time (grading and learning), carries a double role. It is not easy to fulfil these two aims all the time. Secondly, feedback, large classes, and marking load can cause frustration among the teachers. This never-ending dilemma is a genuine problem that needs to be addressed.

Carless (2015b, p. 964) suggests that the 'right kind' of summative assessment is key to developing highly valued learning dispositions and behaviours. In other words, Carless emphasised that learning-oriented summative assessment encourages deep learning. Summative assessments paired with formative assessments and feedback bring about the most effective types of assessment. However, this balance is frequently difficult to achieve because higher education institutions are typically slanted towards high-stakes tests (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Knight, 2006; Leathwood, 2005). Because of the nature of the assessment, students are also motivated to complete summative assessments (Kohn, 2012; Sambell, 2016). If these assessments are not carefully designed, they will be merely used for accountability and measurement purposes without focusing on students' learning (Guskey & Jung, 2013).

Many researchers have contributed excellent suggestions for finding a balance between learning and grading (Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Gilley & Clarkston, 2014; Knight, 2002; Archer, 2017). Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether or not these are actually implemented. Tight (2020) highlighted that this gap between theory and practice may be seen because of institutional diversity or cultural differences. More details on the mismatch observed between policy and practice are discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Broadfoot (2009) pointed out that despite a growing awareness of the need for a more humanistic and context-sensitive approach to assessment, the 21st century is struggling to move beyond 20th-century assessment purposes, ideas and practises. As a result, the goal, style, content, and organisation of examination and assessment practises worldwide today are startlingly similar to those of a century or more ago, despite the massive changes in society. Having said that, it is also important to highlight that the pandemic has accelerated changes to a certain extent. It can be observed that more high-stakes exams are being abolished so that assessments can suit online learning (Twist, 2021). However, whether this assessment changes to support students' learning is still not confirmed.

Even after a significant amount of research has been conducted and facts have been uncovered about the role of assessment and learning, the orientation of assessment is still a topic of debate. Boud (2018) raised a concern that the issue higher education faces is having an unclear notion of what assessment should seek to do and how it should do it. High-stakes assessments that count toward the final grades are often prioritised compared to low-stakes assessments (Ashwin et al., 2020). At this point, it is obvious, that low-stake assessments are often related to AfL, which contributes to students' capabilities and learning (Sambell et al., 2013). AfL contributes to learning development instead of merely revising for an end-point test (Sambell, 2016).

Recently, Boud (2000) has shifted the assessment orientation to sustainable assessment. Sustainable assessments effectively spotlight learners' ability to judge their present learning needs while acquiring the ability to meet their future needs (Boud, 2000; Boud & Soler, 2015). Assessments should not just contribute to short-term goals to fulfil the learning outcomes but also take advantage to develop lifelong learners. If higher education providers are moving towards sustainable assessment, then there is a clear need to integrate AfL instead of being dominated by Assessment of Learning (AoL). Students capable of operating independently and managing their own learning and work must possess the essential skill of evaluative judgement (Tai et al., 2018). In other words, Tai and her colleagues emphasise that HEIs must prepare students to possess the ability to evaluate one's own and others' work for quality instead of being dependent on others to assess the quality of work.

I notice an obvious need to shift from being dominated by AoL to integrating AfL in assessment orientation. Sadly, the balance is difficult to achieve, and the proof of the imbalance is the delay in assessment changes, as mentioned above. In reality, as Brown (2015, p.20) mentions, "promoting effective student learning in higher education is often spoken about as if it is a straightforward and unproblematic matter, but those concerned with doing so find that this is clearly not the case".

Hence, this study's findings identify participants' struggles faced, and the support received to assist HEIs in building a concrete bridge between assessment and learning in reality.

From the points mentioned thus far, I am glad that the purpose and value of assessment practice do not stay stagnant. Changes are happening to suit current demand and students' needs. The essential question that all the stakeholders of HEIs need to consider is whether or not the modifications in assessment aid in student learning. I believe the current assessment system strives to achieve what is necessary, especially in coping with unprecedented times such as these past few years. However, it is essential to realise that supporting students' learning must not be neglected.

The following section further examines the 11 conditions under which assessment supports students' learning, as Gibbs & Simpson (2004) proposed. As I mentioned earlier, this study is not limited by these 11 conditions. Examining these conditions thoroughly against the other works of literature helped me further understand each condition. This eventually helped me develop my questions to identify why changes are not evident when learning becomes the concern of assessment. This evaluation goes beyond just monitoring the system and process but strives to identify the elements that hinder and support assessment practices to support learning. Ultimately, I intend to maximise supporting learning through assessment practice while maintaining the other purposes of assessment.

The following section reviews the conditions under which assessments support students' learning.

2.3 Assessment Practice: Supporting students' learning

As mentioned earlier, the underpinning theories of this study are the 11 conditions under which assessment supports students' learning, as proposed by Gibbs & Simpson (2004). A theory explains a set of conceptual relationships by defining concepts, structures, and principles; specifying the application domain; explaining how and why relationships exist; and predicting what might, should, and would happen in certain situations (Wacker, 2008). As a result, this part is dedicated to closely studying each condition in light of existing literature in order to acquire a better understanding of each.

These conditions are used as a benchmark to evaluate the current practice at SUBS.

Assessment Tasks (Conditions 1-4)	
1.	Capture sufficient study time and effort (in and out of class)
2.	Are spread evenly across topics and weeks
3.	Lead to productive learning activity (deep rather than surface learning)
4.	Assessment communicate clear and high expectations
Feedback (conditions 5–11)	
5.	Is sufficient (in frequency, detail)
6.	Is provided quickly enough to be useful
7.	Focuses on learning rather than marks
8.	Is linked to assessment criteria/expected learning outcomes
9.	Makes sense to students
10.	Is received by students and attended to
11.	Is acted upon to improve work and learning

Table 2: Conditions under which assessment supports learning, Gibbs & Simpson (2004)

Table 2 shows that out of the 11 conditions mentioned, seven of them discuss feedback styles. Gibbs & Simpson (2004) highlighted that their research is about learning, not measurement. It is best to highlight that measurement is essential for grading and standardisation. However, assessment practice that merely measures without feedback may not be useful for students' learning (Clarke & Boud, 2018). Gibbs & Simpson's (2004) 11 conditions have been used and tested in a range of courses internationally as well as across the UK (Nicol, 2009). The model was proven reliable when it was used in the Formative Assessment in Science Teaching (FAST) project in 2006 (Swithenby, 2006). The 11 conditions focus on two main ideas: 1) assessment tasks that encourage deep learning by communicating clear and high expectations while allowing students to spend sufficient time and effort on the task provided and 2) capture the effectiveness of feedback based on assessment tasks. These 11 conditions provide a comprehensive framework for analysing and evaluating the current assessment practices at SBS. The purpose of this current study is not to create or develop another set of conditions but to understand the struggle faced or support received by teachers and students.

Other than proving to be comprehensive, these conditions provide a balance among the three entities highlighted by Carless et al. (2006) in Figure 1. Although Gibbs & Simpson (2004) mentioned that these conditions are merely for learning, not measurement, this study intends to integrate both learning and assessment. The Venn diagram (Figure 1) suggested by Carless et al. (2006) can be integrated with the 11 conditions that support learning as proposed by Gibbs & Simpson (2004). I begin this study with the 11 conditions as the *standards/theories that need to be maintained* to *promote learning* while *judging achievements.* The findings reveal that these theories did not limit the study; rather, they helped me to identify three areas that are crucial in reality for HEIs to integrate theories and practice. The findings of this study echoes Ashwin (2012) as he explained theory development and how important it is to move away from the first set of ideas in any empirical research, even though those ideas are a key starting point.

The following sub-sections analyse each condition to determine how assessment activities assist learning processes. Using Gibbs & Simpson's framework, the interview questions are designed, which is the guiding principle of the methodological framework of this research. While analysing each condition, the interview questions are created to understand how all the stakeholders perceive assessments that support learning while analysing the elements within the business school context that hinder / support assessment practices that support students' learning.

2.3.1 Assessment Tasks

Based on the conditions introduced by Gibbs & Simspon (2004), this section describes and highlights important literature on assessment tasks to understand further the characteristics of assessment tasks that support students' learning. This section covers the assessment task criteria, design, timeline, breadth, and depth. The purpose of analysing the conditions in relation to other works of literature is to view how these conditions are implemented while creating assessment tasks as a tool to support learning.

Condition 1: Assessment tasks capture sufficient study time and effort (in and out of class)

This condition emphasises the importance of time spent on assessment tasks, which may be a determining factor in confirming learning has taken place. Students' motivation, given their limited time, is critical in capturing time on task and learning (Kember et al. 1996). Besides, learning hours and the number of credits spent on a certain topic (Berliner, 1984), and even the engagement of students who work on a part-time basis (Stern & Nakata, 1991) may have an impact on this condition to be successful.

Although assessment tasks, by right, should capture sufficient study time and effort put in by students, this, to a certain extent, depends on how teachers design the task or engage as well. Kuiper et al. (2015) discovered that teachers in an intensive mode setting must consider the cohort's diversity and needs, promote commitment, motivate students through design clarity, incorporate a well-sequenced assessment by including timely feedback, and use learning technologies to motivate students to learn to make the most of the time available.

It seems there is a need for both teachers and students to engage if the time on task needs to be successful. As Michel et al. (2021, p.74) pointed out, it is more than just a need to complete the task: "The conversation about student time use should include how much time students spend engaged in behaviours that allow them to contend with subject matter in informal ways, instead of merely focusing on time spent studying". At times, students may even complete the assessment task without learning much (Bryan, 2015) or putting in the effort and spending sufficient time on a particular assignment when it is "worth" – the marks (Sambell et al., 2013).

However, there is no doubt that assessment is a crucial concern for all the stakeholders involved because this determines how students build a sense of who they are as undergraduates and graduates, which is actually determined by how they spend their time and how they do this (Knight, 2001).

Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner (2004) examined the time-use patterns of 2000 first-year students at a liberal arts college. They mentioned that identifying time use patterns is not as straightforward as it seems to be. Although Thibodeaux et al. (2017) discovered that when students manage their time to optimise academic performance, it promotes self-regulated learning, it is still unclear whether better use of academic time or self-regulated learning directly led to better performance or whether success changed how students studied.

It can be concluded that assessment time, duration and engagement are all intertwined. Literature shows that time and duration support students' learning. Hence, this study further unpacks the struggles faced and the support received by students and teachers in this area. More details are provided in Chapter 4.

Condition 2: Assessment tasks are spread evenly across topics and weeks

Carless (2015a) related this condition to the breadth of curriculum coverage. Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet (2007) highlighted that teachers must be tactful in setting the summative assessment task to avoid students being selective about elements of the syllabus or components they want to devote their time to.

A solution that may seem challenging is teachers may end up carrying out high-stakes assessments in order to avoid over-assessment (Sambell et al., 2013). However, Bennett (2000) highlighted that emphasising one type of assessment over another also creates over-assessment. Hence, there is a need for diversifying.

Dagilyte & Coe (2019) highlighted the use of take-home exams among Law undergraduate and postgraduate students in the context of UK higher education and revealed that the most significant change made over the course term was spacing out course assessment deadlines during end-of-semester assessment periods, which improved students' health and physical ability to take other module exams. Besides that, the duo found tutors could also drop in smaller tasks as time went on.

Making time periods for each smaller task even shorter than the overall assessment period minimises the risk of academic misconduct.

Interestingly, various studies have found that students perform better in coursework than in final exams (Richardson, 2015; Chansarkar & Raut-Roy, 1987; Gibbs & Lucas, 1987). Students prefer coursework over final examinations and engage in only assessed topics. Therefore, it is best to have assessments and topics to be evenly spread. However, for this condition to be met, teachers might face various challenges, which is why this study is being carried out, to identify the challenges and intervention using the TDE lens.

High-stakes assessments count greatly towards grades or certification (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Bennett (2000) highlighted that the increase in summative assessment is quite obvious in higher education. He also stated that, sadly, the increase is not accompanied by formative assessment, reducing the opportunity to receive feedback necessary for learning.

Students and teachers might face issues in the end-of-semester high-stakes assessments. Students may not even receive feedback for such assessments when the value of the grades is needed the most for this type of assessment. Assessment takes time, so not using it to inform students of their performance and how to improve seems like a waste (Trotter, 2006; Brown et al., 1996).

It can be concluded that spreading the assessment task evenly across the study period not only helps students to engage in diversified assessment tasks but also receive the needed feedback. Hence, this element certainly supports students' learning. This research investigates further if teachers face any hindrances in setting assessments evenly distributed across topics and weeks.

Condition 3: Assessment tasks lead to productive learning activity (deep rather than surface learning)

Students are known to be strategic in devoting their time and attention to certain assessments compared to others when they are pressured for time (Race, 2019). This might have something to do with the fact that students are studying smarter instead of harder. Identifying a learning approach is indeed an outstanding achievement. However, according to Carless et al. (2006), a well-planned assessment practice should fulfil three purposes, as shown in Figure 1 above – promoting learning, judging achievements and maintaining standards. Hence, students who ignore certain assessments and focus on others are not completely taking advantage of them.

However, students are not to be blamed entirely because poorly planned evaluation discourages deep learning, while good assessment encourages it (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). Sometimes, students tend to get the wrong impression that the surface learning approach helps them to learn just because it works for them to achieve that particular grade. This misconception encourages some students to use rote learning even though this type of learning does not help and support their learning but only contributes to their academic achievement (Trigwell et al., 2013; Knight, 1995).

Therefore, higher education providers encourage assessment tasks that are related to real-life to encourage deep learning. Some researchers also call this an authentic assessment (Carless, 2015b; Herrington et al., 2010; Jenkins et al.,2007). Students are allowed to experience real-life scenarios where they can perform and demonstrate the competencies, attitudes, knowledge, and skills similar to the professionals in their field (Gulikers et al., 2006). However, McArthur (2022) expands on the term "authentic assessment" that assessments should not only be related to work-life but should be more inclusive, with the focus not on the work but on how the students relate to the task by putting it in the context of the social world and issues of social justice. Assessments should contribute to lifelong learning skills where students gain the ability to make evaluative judgments of their current assessment tasks and carry forward the ability to future tasks in their lives (Boud, 2000; Tai et al., 2018).

Indicators of Deep Understanding You can . . .	**Indicators of a Little Knowledge but Not Deep Understanding You can . . .**
1. Explain things clearly and completely. 2. Teach others effectively. 3. Apply your understanding flexibly in new situations (transfer). 4. Analyse and evaluate information and sources.	1. Give back what you were told. 2. Plug in. 3. Remember. 4. Select the “correct” answer from given alternatives 5. Apply a skill only in the way it was learned; you cannot transfer your learning to a new situation… and you

5. Justify and support your ideas/ positions. Interpret meaning of things such as text, data, and experiences. 6. Generate new questions 7. Recognise different points of view on an issue. 8. Empathise with others. 9. Diagnose errors and correct them. 10. Self-assess and monitor your progress. 11. Adjust midcourse. 12. Reflect on your own learning.	are less able to do the things listed under Indicators of Deep Understanding

Table 3: Indicators of Deep Understanding, McTighe & Wills (2019)

Table 3 (McTighe & Wills, 2019) shows a list of pointers students will be able to engage in when learning takes place. McTighe & Wills (2019, p.23) pointed out that "superficial learning at the expense of exploring ideas in greater depth and allowing authentic applications" may happen when teachers are engaged in test preparation. This scenario is genuinely saddening because all the stakeholders may believe learning has taken place, but do students genuinely possess the ability and capability to perform the indicators in Table 3? Over-assessment can sometimes lead to surface learning. Hence, deep learning is best achieved using the full range of an assessment toolkit, including formative and summative, continuous and examination, peer and self, essays, presentations, projects, portfolios, learning journals, and more (George, 2009, p. 168).

At this point, I believe it is crucial to relate to what Weiss (1998) pointed out – It is not advisable to simply inquire as to whether or not the programme was effective; rather, inquire as to why the programme was successful or why it was unsuccessful. Because of this, I believe that a better question to ask would be "why" and "why not" rather than "do our graduates possess the list of points mentioned in Table 3?"

Therefore, this research investigates the elements that support or hinder teachers from setting assessment tasks that lead to a productive learning activity. Through this research, students are given a voice to share their thoughts, which makes this research inclusive.

Condition 4: Assessment task communicate clear and high expectations

According to McCabe & Meuter (2011), teachers can inspire their students to succeed if they set expectations that are both difficult and feasible. Having said that, Ashwin et al. (2020) pointed out an apparent assessment dilemma in this area. It was mentioned that students must understand how they will be assessed and the criteria for good work. However, "if standards, outcomes, and criteria are always provided, how will a student be able to cope with the real world in which these need to be identified by the learner in deciding whether their work is appropriate?" (Ashwin et al., 2020, p.261). Norton (2004) recommended that instead of using marking criteria, learning criteria should be used to avoid students ending up focusing on superficial elements of the assessment task instead of engaging in meaningful learning activities.

In fact, it is an advantage for the students when the assessment criteria promote learning to help them survive in the real world, where criteria, standards, or measures are not always provided. With much more transformation predicted ahead of time, students have to be evaluative and make judgments for themselves. McAlister (2000) emphasised that the critical and creative skills needed can be achieved from authentic assessment, which challenges students to apply, integrate, and synthesise knowledge and skills in ways that reflect the actual world and beyond the classroom. McArthur (2022, p. 96) highlighted that "the concept of authentic assessment becomes not one of joining an existing world out there but of being part of the transformation of that world, in all its manifestations within and beyond higher education." Hence, assessment criteria must not only support students within the higher education context but help them survive beyond that.

From the research works highlighted in this section, it can be concluded that assessment tasks with clear and high expectations are helpful. This research further investigates the perspective of teachers and students on this condition to understand the struggle faced or support received in implementing such a condition in designing assessment tasks.

2.3.2 Feedback

The previous sub-section describes assessment tasks and learning in light of other literary works. This section further explores feedback and learning. As shown in Table 2, Gibbs & Simpson (2004) recommend sufficient, timely, meaningful feedback that focuses on learning rather than marks, links to assessment criteria/expected learning outcomes, makes sense to students, is received and attended to, and improves work and learning. Gibbs (2019) simplified these conditions into three overarching areas to support students learning: 1) quantity and timing of feedback, 2) quality of feedback, and 3) student response to feedback.

When supporting students' learning is emphasised, feedback is undoubtedly included. Assessment and feedback are crucial elements in order to create the support that is needed for learning. Eraut (2006):

> When students enter higher education, the type of feedback they then receive, intentionally or unintentionally, will play an important part in shaping their learning futures. Hence, we need to know much more about how their learning, indeed their very sense of professional identity, is shaped by the nature of the feedback they receive. We need more feedback on feedback. (p. 118)

Capturing and understanding feedback conditions in detail is rather crucial. As Winstone & Boud (2020, p.657) found, "assessment often 'strangles' the learning function of feedback. We need to reposition feedback as more than an afterthought, to something that is meaningful in its own right, not just something that happens alongside assessment". Boud (2015) also recommends not to view feedback separately, but as an integral part of all learning processes.

One often recommended aspect is for feedback to be dialogical to share interpretations and meanings among teachers, students and peers (Boud, 2015; Carless, 2015a; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Winstone & Carless, 2019; Winstone & Boud, 2020). Askew and Lodge (2000) used a broad definition of feedback that includes all dialogues that help learning, whether formal or informal. They compared the feedback process to the ping-pong game, where the discussion must flow to and fro for feedback to happen. This area is also further discussed in this sub-section.

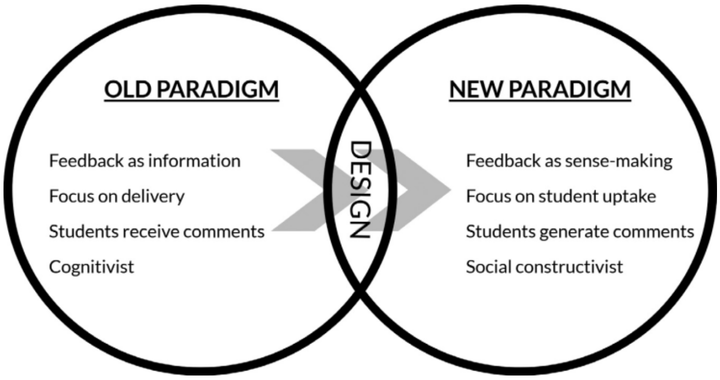

Figure 2:Old and new paradigms of feedback, Winstone & Carless (2019)

Figure 2 shows the new paradigm shift Winstone & Carless (2019) proposed in relation to feedback. They proposed a new paradigm shift focusing on empowering students and ensuring the feedback makes sense to them. Student engagement and student response are also discussed further in the following sections.

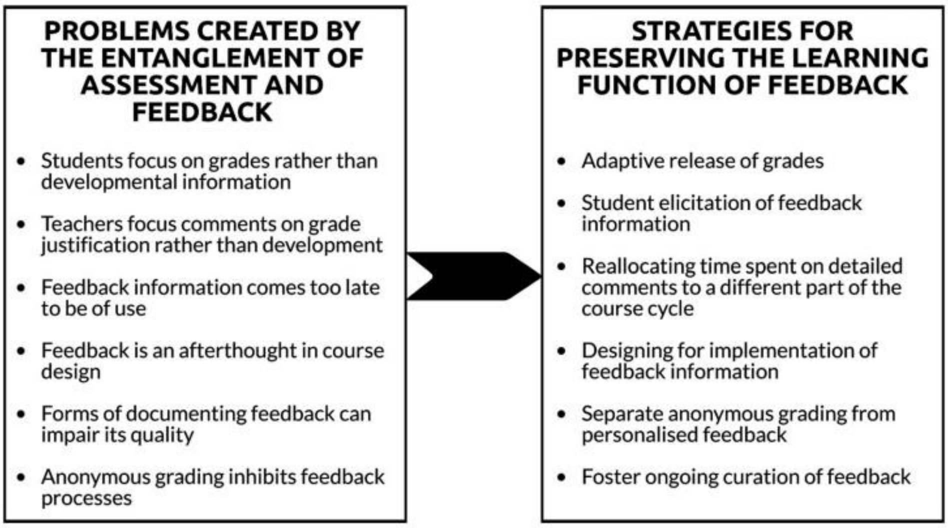

Figure 3: The entanglement of assessment & feedback, Winstone & Boud (2020)

Winstone & Boud (2020, p. 665) stated, "feedback practices in higher education have remained stubbornly similar and habitual for far too long, and things do not have to be this way". Hence, they suggested strategies for preserving the learning function of feedback, as seen in Figure 3.

The next three sections highlight literature related to conditions like quantity, timing, quality and responses to feedback. As mentioned earlier, this literature review aims to understand the extent of literary works in this area, relate these analyses to assessment practice, and identify the actual struggles faced and support received by the teachers and students.

Condition 5 & 6: Quantity and timing of feedback

In order to support students' learning, feedback does not only have to be sufficient and detailed but also must be immediate and useful so that it makes sense for students (Ashwin et al., 2020; Henderson et al., 2019a; Henderson et al., 2019b; Pelgrim et al., 2012; Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). The feedback process with these many conditions to support students' learning can be time-consuming for teachers, especially when large classes are involved. "The provision of detailed comments takes a great deal of time, and this is compounded when class sizes are large and time allocations for marking are restricted (Henderson et al., 2019a, p. 1242).

Large class sizes are becoming the norm because of the increasing student enrolment, which has made massification at the undergraduate level an inescapable fact of academic life today (Arvantikas, 2013). In order to fulfil the need of large student numbers, recruiting part-time tutors or sessional staff may be the solution (Crisp, 2007). However, they might have difficulty meeting the students as often as full-timers. Part-time faculty members face many challenges; one is not having an office for themselves (Charfauros & Tierney, 1999) or even not being able to provide effective feedback because of lacking broad experience (Henderson et al., 2019b).

Knight (1995) highlighted the predicament of the quantity and quality of feedback. He emphasised that there is a need for less assessment to process and mark if the teachers are required to give quality feedback. As mentioned earlier, one of the issues always discussed is the number of students and feedback. Therefore, various research studies have been carried out in the area of feedback (Henderson et al., 2019b; Winstone & Carless, 2019; McArthur & Huxham, 2013; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Black & William, 1998; Butler & Winne,1995;) so that feedback can be more holistic by still maintaining the quality of feedback.

Hattie & Timperley (2007, p. 87) proposed a feedback model that focuses on three main questions: 1) where am I going? 2) How am I going; 3) Where to next? They mentioned that "an ideal learning environment or experience occurs when both teachers and students seek answers to each of these questions" (p. 88). Hence, the quantity and timing of feedback can be maintained so both teachers and students understand their roles. Having said that, detailed procedural feedback may not always support student learning. Students may become overly dependent on feedback instead of feeling empowered by the feedback given (McArthur, 2018) when, ultimately, higher education aims to produce and empower lifelong learners.

When discussing the timing of feedback, there may not be any opportunity for feedback for the end-of-semester examination (Knight, 1995; Butler & McMunn, 2014; McArthur, 2018); however, feeding forward (McArthur, 2018) may be an option for students to work around the timeline of the assessment within the semester. McArthur & Huxham (2013, p.92) proposed the "conception of feedback as dialogue implies its integration throughout the learning process". The duo proposed six feedback moments that can be used throughout the learning process to empower students and give them opportunities to reflect and receive feedback from teachers and peers.

This analysis of the quantity and timing of feedback reveals that many research papers have contributed a variety of suggestions that can be used in real life. Having said that, the analysis also reflects that the challenges with timely and sufficient feedback are still evident in the higher education context. Hence, this research focuses further on the types of feedback teachers provide and their struggle to support students learning within the semester's timeframe. Obtaining students' voices in this area provides a deeper understanding of this matter to identify the difficulties encountered and assistance received.

Condition 7-9: Quality of feedback

The importance of meaningful feedback, its connection to assessment criteria, and its emphasis on learning are all discussed in this section.

Although these are the best practices of feedback, the process of providing and receiving feedback has always been a challenging one. Previous studies have highlighted issues such as students not understanding the feedback given by teachers (Weaver, 2006), not having time to make sense of the feedback, and not appreciating feedback but being more focused on marks (Knight, 1995).

Teachers may use their best ability to provide feedback that makes sense to students. However, it is believed that students will lack the ability to make sense of the feedback or use any of it if they are not self-regulated and attentive to the feedback provided (Carless et al., 2011; Butter & Winnie, 1995). The next part will discuss more details on students taking responsibility for their own learning.

The time frame and quality of the feedback are somewhat connected. Gibbs (2019) categorised time factors and quantity of feedback together while separating the quality of feedback from other conditions. However, it can be said that the time factor of feedback always affects the quality of feedback. Haughney et al. (2020) examined 70 works of literature on the quality of feedback and found that feedback timing is crucial in determining the quality of feedback. When there is close proximity between the feedback time and assessment, then the quality of feedback is perceived as higher by both students and teachers. Having said that, it can also be emphasised that the quality of feedback is more crucial than the quantity of feedback.

According to Gibbs & Simpson (2004), one of the conditions for providing quality feedback is feedback should focus on learning instead of marks or grades. "It is the feedback information and interpretations from assessments, not the numbers or grades, that matter" (Hattie & Temperley, 2007, p.104). This is emphasised by many other researchers as well, that simple feedback rather than grades improved performance (Black & William, 1998; McLaughlin, 1974). However, grades could increase involvement because grades are a dominant aspect of students' learning (Knight, 1995). Most of the time, assessment is carried out to capture what has been learnt, which is mostly graded. Students motivated to achieve good grades usually show significant involvement in such a test or assignment. However, grades alone will not help in learning. Therefore, Knight (1995) & Boud & Soler (2015) emphasised that both aspects must always be considered in teaching and learning. This is further emphasised by Clarke & Boud (2018). They provided the perspective of sustainable assessment that any assessments being carried out should include and encompass the characteristics of formative, summative, and sustainable assessment. In other words, assessments in higher education must be designed to enhance learning, capture grades, and provide the opportunity for learners to link to their future as well. All these factors must be integrated into every assessment that is being carried out to save resources and time and emphasise learning.

Another way of determining quality feedback, as Gibbs & Simpson (2004) suggested, is through finding a link to feedback and assessment criteria. Finding this link is not something students can do in isolation by just reading the assessment criteria in the assignment brief or observing the learning outcomes in the course outline. As Boud (2015) & Boud & Molloy (2013) mentioned, effective learning requires dialogue, which is the most crucial process to help learners identify the link. This dialogue can happen between teachers, students, or peers as long as there is some kind of engagement in the module. Boud & Molloy (2013) described this as a feedback loop that has been closed accordingly.

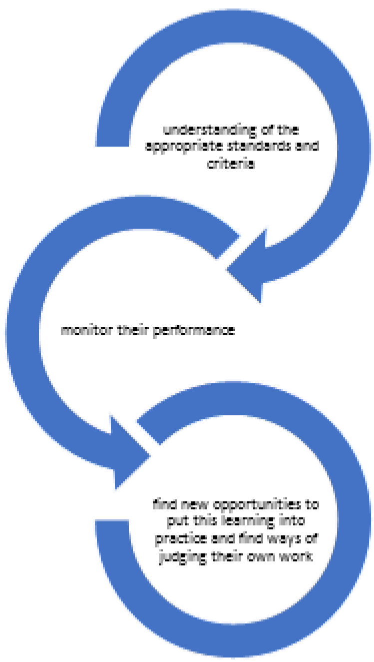

Figure 4: Feedback loop, Boud & Molloy (2013)

While this feedback loop is in progress, dialogue must occur so that learning can happen while students take advantage of the assessment given to become more self-regulated. "The real value may lie in students internalising the standards expected so that they can supervise themselves and improve the quality of their own assignments prior to submitting them" (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004, p.20). This reflects that when feedback links to assessment criteria set prior to assessment, it helps students who are receiving the feedback to incorporate and understand their learning through the assessment. The act of students internalising the assessment criteria and feedback received links to the other conditions highlighted in the next section.

After understanding all of the factors required for quality feedback, the issue I cannot wait to answer is whether this is possible in teachers and students' reality and whether they can comprehend these conditions and implement them in their context.

Condition 10 &11: Student response to feedback

This section highlights the last two conditions from Gibbs & Simpson (2004), which conceptualise students' responses to feedback. The first condition in this section emphasises that learning happens when feedback is received by students and attended to. The second condition refers to the fact that students respond to the feedback to improve themselves. Referring to Figure 4, students must play their role in closing the feedback loop. The ultimate goal of any assessment is for the learners to respond to feedback. This is emphasised by Henderson et al. (2019b, p. 114)

> "Current thinking in this field concludes that feedback is more than educators just giving information to students. It is a process in which the learner needs to attend to, and make sense of, information about the quality of their performance in order to improve future work or learning strategies".

Carless & Boud (2018) explain this as a process of students enabling the uptake of feedback. They highlighted that students would be able to respond to feedback when there is student feedback literacy, which is defined as "the understandings, capacities, and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (p. 1316).

In order for student feedback literacy to be effective, students must possess tacit knowledge. We use tacit knowledge every time we do something, but it is not something we can easily put into words or even be consciously aware of (Polanyi, 1966). Carless and Boud (2018) mentioned that this is the knowledge that a person may not be aware of having or may not be able to explain how to use. Students in higher education need to learn how to make sense of feedback based on the teacher's opinion or reasoning. This is called tacit knowledge. “Tacit knowledge acquisition can follow from joint participation in evaluative activities, such as constructing and using criteria, and discussion of exemplars of different levels of performance” (Carless, 2015a, p.132). This knowledge helps students become more self-regulated learners by appreciating feedback given and developing the ability to make judgments about their work.

Designing sustainable assessments helps develop such abilities among students. Sustainable assessment 'meets the needs of the present and [also] prepares students to meet their own future learning needs' (Boud 2000, p. 151). This only further emphasises what Bloxham and Campbell (2010) highlighted about the development of tacit knowledge on feedback, which emerges through observation, imitation, participation and dialogue. This shows that teachers and students have to play their roles in order to ensure assessment supports learning. This research study delves deeper into the possibilities for such assessment implementation from direct users of assessment – teachers and students.

2.4 Research Gap: Bridge needing construction

Overall, from the previous section that highlights assessment practice that supports learning, it can be concluded that the effort and research on assessment tasks and feedback features to support learning is ongoing. Shift in assessment orientation in terms of research to empower students’ learning and to instil the capacity to make evaluative judgement can be observed. However, sadly, MacKay et al. (2019) reported that a nationwide analysis of the National Student Survey (NSS) still shows that assessment and feedback is the most difficult part of higher education in the UK because students are less satisfied with it overall than with other parts of the NSS. Carless et al. (2011) also reported the same case in both the UK and Australia. This calls into question the relationship between theory and practice.

There are several studies that have shown a gap between theory and practice. O'Donovan et al. (2016) reported a discrepancy between the theory and practice regarding the usefulness of feedback. Haughney et al. (2020) reported that there is a discrepancy between how students and teachers view feedback and how its features are actually used in the classroom. Haughney et al. (2020, p.7) highlighted that "even when instructors understand the elements of high-quality feedback, the effective implementation of those quality elements can remain elusive". This merely serves to illustrate how difficult the implementation process can be. Tight (2020) pointed out that whether quality assessment leads to increased student engagement in the learning process is rarely considered in the practice of quality assurance. This resonates with (Coates, 2005, p. 35):

> "…determinations about the quality of university education are often made without information about whether students are engaging with the kinds of practices that are likely to generate productive learning and about whether institutions are providing the kinds of conditions that, based on many years of education research, seem likely to stimulate such engagement. Despite its value, information about what students are actually doing at university is largely ignored in discussions about the quality of university education"

Even though these works of literature show a gap, McArthur (2013) used Theodor Adorno's works to talk about higher education. She highlighted that theory and practice cannot just be connected without much thought, but they also cannot be separated. Hence, McArthur (2013, p.134) argues that there is a need to rethink how theory and practice are viewed: "The usefulness of an area of study or a research project involves an interaction between theory and practice that renders them both more nuanced and potentially more profound than they may sometimes appear."

Jarvis (1998) emphasised that the relationship between theory and practice is evolving, and with the decline of the concept of grand theory, we are now beginning to see arguments about theory coming from practice rather than the other way around. The primary distinction that exists between theory and practice that Jarvis (2012) identified is while we may agree with the values in theory, we may not do so when it comes to putting them into practice. Tight (2020, p.196) emphasised, "We may expect the clash between the theory and practice of quality in higher education to continue for some time, giving further opportunities for evaluative research”.

This is where my research contributes to the existing literature on pedagogical knowledge. Using the Theory-driven evaluation (TDE) lens, I am evaluating a set of theories that are already in place to review if these theories are the advocated behaviour or result achieved in the practice of the higher education setting. I am not separating theory and practice, but rather establishing a link by identifying the difficulties encountered and the support received by the participants in this study, who are also expected to be the practitioners of these theories.

The next section explains why I opted to incorporate the TDE lens.

2.5 Evaluation & Theory-Driven Evaluation

As a result, I propose evaluating the issue at hand using the TDE lens, taking into account the insights provided by students and teachers on assessment practice that supports learning, as well as examining the current assessment policy. Before I dive into this aspect further, I must discuss the significance of evaluation or evaluative research (these terms are used interchangeably in this study) to policy development and program improvement.

Evaluation challenges rules and standards established by providing room for new perspectives. According to Weiss (1999), evaluation gives direction on what to do next by improving plans, policies, and practices. "Evaluation may aim to provide good information to practitioners so that they may reconsider what they are doing and improve their individual practice" (Weiss 1999, p.470). One of the critical roles of an evaluator is to provide the opportunity for all the stakeholders to view the evaluation results and identify the values and priorities (Kushner, 2017). Similarly, Cronbach (1980, p.4) also highlighted, "What is needed [from evaluation] is information that supports negotiation rather than information calculated to point out the 'correct' decision’ ".

Therefore, this study intends to evaluate assessment practices that support students learning so that the plans, policies, and practices can be monitored and reviewed in detail to ensure the information gained from this study provides direction for improvement. This study provides a platform for further discussion among the stakeholders. As mentioned earlier, the development of assessment ideas and changes in practice is very slow, although assessment is an essential element for higher education (Bloxham, 2016; Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the current plan in place, the policies implemented, the issues faced, and the support obtained by teachers and students to make further improvements.

Theory-driven evaluation (TDE) can be traced from the 1930s but was popularised by Chen in the 1990s (Coryn et al. 2011) and gained popularity again at the European Conference of Evaluation in 2002 (Knaap, 2004). TDE is sometimes referred to as program-theory evaluation, theory-based evaluation, theory-guided evaluation, theory-of-action, theory-of-change, program logic, and logical frameworks (Coryn et al., 2011). In recent times, an increasing number of research studies in the area of evaluation have been introduced, as shown in Table 4:

- traditional experimental and social science approaches (Bickman & Reich, 2015; Henry, 2015; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002);
- transdisciplinary approaches based on the logic of evaluation (Donaldson, 2013; Scriven, 2003, 2013, 2015, 2016);
- utilisation-focused approaches (Patton, 2021);
- participatory and empowerment approaches (Cousins, 2019; Donaldson, 2017; Fetterman et al., 2017);
- equity-focused approaches (Donaldson & Picciotto, 2016);
- culturally responsive approaches (Bledsoe & Donaldson, 2015; Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2014);
- feminist and gender approaches (Podems, 2010, 2014);
- values engaged approaches (Greene, 2005; Hall, Ahn, & Greene, 2012);
- environmental sustainability approaches (Parsons, Dhillon, & Keene, 2019; Patton, 2018);
- realist approaches (Lemire et al., 2021; Mark, Henry, & Julnes, 2000; Pawson & Tilley, 1997);
- theory-driven evaluation science approaches that attempt to integrate concepts from most of the other approaches (Chen, 2015; Donaldson, 2007, this volume; Donaldson & Lipsey, 2006; Leeuw & Donaldson, 2015; Rossi in Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991; Weiss, 1997, 2010); and
- many other approaches that can be found in recent catalogs by Alkin (2012) and Mertens and Wilson (2018).

Table 4: Diverse research works on evaluation, Donaldson (2022)

Considering all of the different phrases that may be used to talk about evaluation, I decided to call the focus of this study Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE), but I will also occasionally refer to it as program theory. TDE is based on the idea that the creation and use of evaluation should be guided by a set of ideas called program theory (Chen 1990, 2005). Astbury & Leeuw (2010, p.364) assured that "although the focus and form can vary, one key aim of theory-driven evaluation is to unpack programmatic ''black boxes'' and explain how and why programs work (or fail to work) in different contexts and for different program stakeholders".

Stufflebeam & Coryn (2014) describe program evaluations usually begins (1) a well-developed and validated theory of how programmes of a certain type in similar situations produce outcomes, or (2) a starting stage to approximate such a theory within the framework of a particular programme evaluation. 11 conditions under which assessment supports students' learning as Gibbs & Simpson (2004) proposed is used as the initial underpinning theories in this study. Donaldson (2001 & 2007) and Coryn et al. (2011) emphasised that using prior research work is a potential source of program theory.

As mentioned earlier, I view theory as a lens through which a research framework might be seen or described, providing simplification as an area to focus (refer to Ashwin (2012 & 2009) for a similar view of perceiving theory). I use the 11 conditions proposed by Gibbs & Simpson (2004) as the basic assumptions, expectations or underpinning theories. The participants' data help to examine these assumptions, and the co-construction of knowledge may even develop into new theories. Besides, reviewing policy documents as supplementary material also helped me understand the existing assessment system. Chen (2012, p.27-28) highlighted five advantages of employing theory-driven evaluation:

1) Delineation of a strategy to consider stakeholders' views and interests
2) Holistic assessment
3) Comprehensiveness of information needed to improve programs
4) Balance of scientific and practical concerns
5) Advancement of evaluation theory and methodology

These advantages that Chen (2012) mentioned include taking into consideration stakeholders' input by discussing important evaluation concerns and creating an evaluation that takes their interests into account. Besides, holistic programme evaluation is made easier by this kind of evaluation. A program's execution and influencing processes can be shown through theory-driven evaluation to support its results. A theory-driven evaluation can help stakeholders improve a programme by revealing how its design, execution, and causal processes function in practice, helping to close gaps between different communities. For many years, theory-driven evaluation has tackled problems in science and services. Lessons on the implementation can enhance evaluation theory and methodology.

I believe this study yields these advantages as it incorporates an action model and change model in an effort to overcome gaps in assessment practice and learning, and it does so by working closely with the stakeholders to produce a holistic and inclusive evaluation. The action model in this study includes the basic underpinning theory, the interviews with teachers and students, the existing policy reviewed, and the findings identified, and the change model includes the points to consider as the institution embraces change (refer to Table 1, Chapter 1). Chen (2012) points out the elements that make up a change model: 1) goals- unfulfilled needs; 2) determinants- factors affecting program outcome; and 3) intervention, which includes program actions that directly affect the determinant. More discussion on TDE in relation to the findings of this study may be found in Chapter 5 of this paper.

Weiss (1988) listed five reasons evaluation does not contribute to a noticeable difference. Evaluating the list helps me to make a difference in this study. First of all, Weiss mentioned, “they assume that one or a few key people determine policy” (p.7). In this study, both teachers and student agency’s perspectives are taken into consideration because when it comes to assessment practices, decisions are not dependent on a single person’s view. The second reason pointed out is that “the traditional good advice has limited reach because evaluation is never comprehensive or convincing enough to supply "the correct answer." (p.7). Based on this, I can conclude and acknowledge that this evaluation will not answer all the questions about assessment practices that support student learning but provide a platform for continuous improvement. “The third reason that the traditional advice falls short is that many program decisions do not come about through rational decision processes” (p.7). As such, formal evaluations like this study are crucial, and this study intends to promote the findings to all the stakeholders for further discussion. “Fourth, even when there are clear-cut decisions and readily identifiable decision makers, people don't always know what kind of information they need to know” (p.8). Hopefully, this study will not only help create awareness among the stakeholders of HEI so that they become more aware of assessment practices that support students' learning but also help to bridge the gap between theory and practice. “Finally, there are all the reasons we have known about for so long that have to do with the constellation of interests that set hard as concrete around a program” (p.8). Although I understand those decision makers are comfortable with the status quo most of the time, I feel this study is timely because it is about making sure assessment practices support students learning instead of merely measuring their performance.

Since the context of this evaluative research is within the higher education setting, the following part focuses on institutional change because higher education institutions are influenced by various factors when change is considered.

2.6 Institutional Change

Blythman & Orr (2002, p.169) highlighted that institutional change is not easy to achieve because ‘institutions do not exist in a vacuum’. The duo emphasised that for change to be successfully implemented, there is a need to recognise the motivational factors of all concerned parties, grasp the official and unofficial cultures, recognise where power is structural, understand how to access all types of resources, and leverage the many discourses.

Besides recognising these factors, Trowler & Knight (2014) pointed out the issue with institutional change: at times, change is oversimplified through contextual simplification, causal simplification, obliteration of meaning and affect or contextual occlusion. Instead, the duo provides an alternative perspective of viewing institutional change at the meso-level of social change. Trowler & Knight (2014) emphasised that the foundation of this viewpoint is social practice theory which views practices in line with ‘values, attitudes, ideologies that partly developed and communicated locally’ (p.177). Zapp et al. (2021) mentioned that, like other organisations, those in HE become subject to these pressures, turning universities into more rationalised, standardised, and strategic actors, obstructing changes at the meso level. Hence, meso-level or institutional level change is crucial for policy implementation to stay relevant. Although not inevitable, institutional change is not one-way either (Ansell, 2008).

Henderson et al. (2011) reviewed 191 journal articles on current scholarship about promoting change in instructional practices used in undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses. They found several overarching themes, including individual faculty conceptions of teaching and learning as both supports and barriers to instructional change; hence, it is important to understand the institutional local context as a baseline for change. Secondly, support for change must be on-going and it is not a one-time event. Finally, barriers to change include a lack of recognition and rewards for improved instruction, lack of time, and lack of support. Hora (2012) also emphasised that intervention to take local context:

> "Local ways of thinking, decision-making, and acting will influence how a particular reform or innovation is interpreted, adopted, or rejected; . . . and one way to increase the prospects for program success is to design interventions that reflect a grounded understanding of local practice and experiences" (p. 230).

When more than one group considers the same policy as directly essential to its own interests and has different opinions about it, policy implementation can lead to conflict between policymakers and policy implementers (Matland, 1995). Hence, Bamber & Anderson (2012) identified tensions between institutional evaluative needs and individual evaluative practices and suggested that the first step is to work with the tensions between top-down policy and bottom-up practices. There is a clear divide between top-down and bottom-up policy implementation conceptions, reflecting the tension between structure and agency (Sin, 2012). The initial works for the top-down approach are credited to Daniel Mazmanian and Paul Sabatier, whereas the bottom-up approach works are credited to Benny Hjern et al. (Sabatier, 1986). The top-down approach is the "central notion of the managerial approach to putting policy into effect: that leaders at the top of organisations should set goals within the framework of broader policy and, by pulling the right levers, secure their staff's commitment to them” (Trowler, 2003, p.124). Whereas the bottom-up approach is a process of “acknowledging actors' perceived issues when faced with new educational policies, and strategies developed to deal with them according to actors' objectives and constraints” (Sin, 2012, p.392). A synthesis (Sabatier, 1986) approach is also called as policy evolution (Majone and Wildavsky, 1978) – a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

As Trowler (2003) identified, at times, the views of those at the bottom of the ladder, who did the hard work of putting policy into action, were not taken into account. Hence, the synthesis approach reduces tension in policy implementation because the concern of all parties is taken into consideration.

> “In short, the synthesis adopts the bottom-uppers' unit of analysis – a whole variety of public and private actors involved with a policy problem — as well as their concerns with understanding the perspectives and strategies of all major categories of actors (not simply program proponents). It then combines this starting point with top-downers' ” (Sabatier, 1986, p.39).

Similarly, this study, using a theory-driven evaluation approach, considers the perspectives of teachers and students without ignoring existing theories and policies. Hence, this study is much needed to understand the voice of teachers and students. This evaluative research considers assessment practice supporting students’ learning to be one of the necessary institutional changes. The next section discusses institutional evaluation and the autonomy that HEIs have, particularly when it comes to assessment tasks.

2.6.1 Assessment Practice: Institutional Evaluation

National auditing authorities have increasingly permitted institutional quality assurance methods to guide external audits, emphasising the significance of institutional evaluation (Saunders, 2011). Therefore, governments have granted HEIs a greater extent of autonomy, and in the UK, for example, there is a trend of increasing institutional autonomy (Gordon et al., 2013). This prompts me to wonder why the shift in assessment practises is taking so long if institutions are able to adopt changes without difficulty.

Here is a chart that describes the discretion of institutional practice which applies to HEIs. According to Bamber (2011), the chart reflects different tensions the institution faces in various evaluative practices, sometimes pressured by political or cultural elements. Quadrant 1 at the upper left-hand side has both *focus and process to be tightly controlled*, meaning the quality assurance bodies closely monitor the process, and the institution is told what needs to be done. Quadrant 2, which at the upper right-hand side has *focus loosely in control but process tightly* in control where the institution decides what to evaluate, but the process of how to do it is told. Quadrant 3, on the other hand, has *focus tightly controlled but process loosely controlled* reflects what to evaluate is determined but the process to carry it out is not controlled. Quadrant 4 at the lower right-hand side is the total opposite of Quadrant 1, reflecting some practices to have both *focus and process loosely* held.

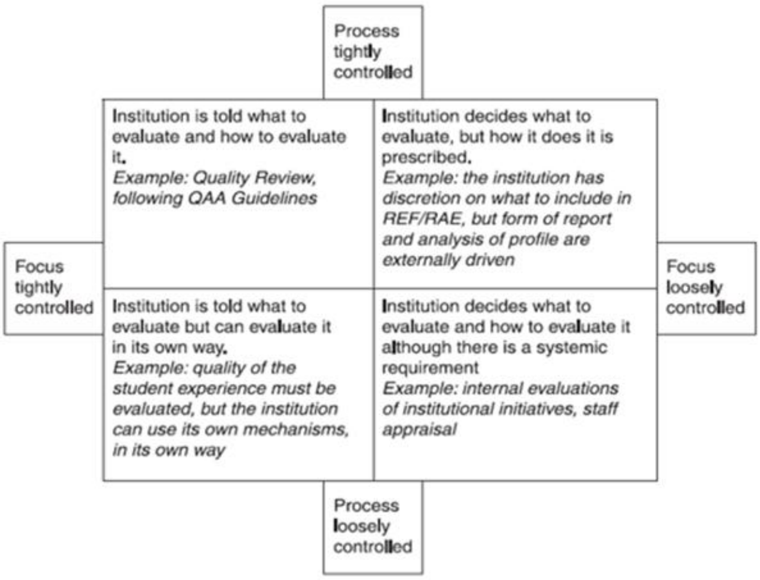

Figure 5:Discretion framework of evaluative practices in institutions, Bamber (2011)

In general, assessment practice falls into Quadrant 3 *(focus tightly controlled, process loosely controlled).* In the Malaysian context, the Malaysian Quality Agency (MQA) body has developed the Malaysian Qualification Framework (2021, p. 5) based on five domains:

i. Knowledge and understanding
ii. Cognitive skills
iii. Functional work skills with focus on:

a. Practical skills
b. Interpersonal skills
c. Communication skills
d. Digital skills
e. Numeracy skills
f. Leadership, autonomy and responsibility

iv. personal and entrepreneurial skills
v. Ethics and professionalism

These five domains are used as the framework to map all the learning outcomes and assessments. Hence, when it comes to evaluation practices, HEIs are told what to evaluate, but they can choose how to evaluate, which puts them in Quadrant 3 (where the focus is tightly controlled, but the process is less so). Bamber's model allows institutions to understand the autonomy of evaluative practices to understand their role in the decision-making process.

As a result, I feel that this study is crucial in order to comprehend the teachers and students' perspectives on HEI decision-making processes and the autonomy they have in supporting students' learning through assessment practice. To assist in the evaluation of this study, I reviewed documents that provide information on the Assessment Policy within Sunway University and documents from MQA. Essentially, I intend to establish a bridge between assessment and learning through this study, and the bridge will be solidly based on theory, policy, and practice.

Trowler (2003) emphasised policy implementation can be carried out effectively if institutions have clear goals, a strong culture, enough resources, and a knowledge of change. King (2019) emphasises that despite the significant transformations in higher education due to massification, marketization, and regulation, academics may remain up-to-date and ensure that their students engage in a productive learning, teaching, and evaluation process. Through this research, I hope to contribute to the institution's clarity of aims and awareness of the necessary shift in recognizing a link between assessment and learning. Before I conclude this chapter, the next part describes resources as resources are crucial to higher education.

2.6.2 Higher Education & Resources Use

The higher education system depends significantly on constant and adequate resource supply. Huisman & Tight (2019, p.92) illustrate this further, "quality and quantity of research/teaching staff and students, funding to enable them to work (pay salaries, build and maintain facilities, etc.), and the authority to provide education and degrees". Higher education institutions need this funding to function to their fullest potential while maintaining the quality of teaching and learning. Matland (1995) highlighted, among many other aspects, having sufficient resources plays a vital role in decreasing policy conflict.

OECD (2020) explains three terms to understand better resourcing in higher education.

> 1)resources mobilisation, which means the process of raising funds needed to finance higher education activities
> 2)resources allocation, which refers to the processes through which the funds mobilised are then assigned by governments and higher education institution management to finance types of activity or beneficiary
> 3)resources use means the final deployment of the allocated funds by the final beneficiaries - to pay for staff, buildings, goods and services – the different rules, accounting practices and reporting requirements that are associated with this deployment

Student Staff Ratio (SSR) is usually a common point of consideration when resource use is discussed in higher education. Halvorson (2016) reported that teaching staff increased by 28% from 1989 to 2007 compared to the increase in student recruitment by 65% between 1987 and 2011. This certainly causes an imbalance in SSR, and the need for fairer resourcing in higher education becomes more and more crucial. "Maintaining the scale and quality of provision at a lower cost is unlikely to be achieved through increasing student-to-staff ratios, relying more on temporary staff or reducing spending on support services – all of which negatively affect study outcomes" (OECD, 2020, p.12).

This imbalance in SSR creates a domino effect seen in teachers having less contact time with students, eventually reducing time for designing assessments or even marking (Thomson, 2013). Besides that, research indicates an additional administrative burden (Halvorson, 2016), which may reduce the time teachers spend on teaching, creating assessments, and providing feedback. SSR may also be affected when the focus of the HEI is on research; therefore, increased budget allocation on R&D may result in more teachers overall. Still, these research-focused teachers tend to have a reduced teaching load (Buckner & Zhang, 2020). It also means that other teachers must take the load of teaching, leading to large classes or massification issues in higher education.

According to Hornsby & Osman (2014), massification is a trend in higher education these days, and this trend inevitably frames large classes, which certainly affects students' learning and quality education. Exeter et al. (2010) found out that large classes can be engaging with proper collaboration tools. However, engagement of tools or other resources used in the classroom for teaching and learning requires resources allocation.

The dilemma faced by policymakers is that they are constantly bombarded with this question, "how can we do the same with fewer resources?", rather than "how can we do more with additional resources?" (OECD, 2020). If the question decides to reduce costs by increasing SSR or increasing part-time or temporary staff, these strategies only adversely affect students' learning (OECD, 2020). McDonald (2013) also pointed out that educational institutions will always have conflict as they aim to make more efficient use of their resources and make financial gains by increasing SSRs.

Hence, the study is timely as the theory-driven approach is aimed not only to address the struggle and support received but also to take into consideration the context of the institution, especially when resources are a concern.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter explores the evolution of assessment orientation in the higher education context and focuses mainly on the literary works of assessment practice that support students' learning. This literature review revealed the knot that needs to be untangled – the gap between theory and practice of assessment practice in the higher education setting. Although the literary work is comprehensive, there is a clear gap in practice. Hence, the connection and the bridge I propose for this research is evaluating the issue using the TDE lens. Since local practice is equally essential to policy implementation, I have included a discussion of evaluative research in this chapter regarding institutional change that leads to institutional evaluation.

I began this research with the 11 conditions of assessment that support students learning proposed by Gibbs & Simpson (2004). I did not merely follow them but inspected each condition in detail to further understand the practicality of the conditions in the higher education context. With this understanding, I evaluated the perspective of teachers and students and the policy in place. Consequently, I identified three institutional tensions that need urgent attention, which are discussed in chapters four and five.

Understanding the research gap further confirms my take on the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm for this study. I believe the participants of this study have provided meaningful insights based on their reality. In the next chapter, I will further share my ontology, epistemological, and methodological perspective based on this study.

Chapter 3 Exploring the Approach to Research

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to evaluate the current assessment system practised at Sunway Business School (SBS) to understand how the assessment practices support learning, particularly to identify the struggles faced or the support received to implement change initiatives. Interviews with teachers and students were conducted to understand their perspectives and insights on how they interpret their own experiences. Including students' voices as well in this study provided a holistic view. Saunders (2006) mentioned approaching the programme recipient as one of the ways to ensure participants' voices are heard. The difficulty here is the degree of programme knowledge recipients may possess (Saunders, 2006). Hence, in order to participate in this study, participants of this study needed to meet specific criteria. This allowed the participants to connect and share their thoughts and experiences about assessment and learning. More information on the participants of this study will be shared in this chapter.

This chapter further discusses the participant recruitment process, data collection method, data analysis procedures, and reflexivity practices adopted while adhering to the appropriate research ethics measures.

3.2 Research Paradigm

In this section, I describe my philosophical position and emphasis while conducting this research study. My ontological and epistemological position certainly influenced this study's research design, data collection method, and data analysis.

This research falls under the interpretivism-constructivism paradigm, a reality constructed through people's perceptions and the belief in multiple realities rather than a single objective of the social reality. Embedded in each other are constructivism and interpretivism (Walt, 2020; Ponterotto, 2005). This evaluative research takes into consideration the perspectives of different groups of people – students and teachers – from the recipients to the implementers. The multiple realities gathered in this research are what make this research unique.

> "Diverging from the variance-oriented tradition, interpretivist case studies attempt to understand participants' sense-making of events or phenomena. Rooted in a social constructivist notion of reality, they emphasise symbolic aspects of experience, asking how and why people act in certain ways, and exploring the meanings they generate" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p.32-33).

As seen in the extract above, although constructivism and interpretivism share the same belief of having multiple realities, they differ in how the realities are conceptualised. Constructivism aims to understand how different realities are constructed, while interpretivism aims to understand how individuals experience these realities (Andrew, 2012).

In this research, I sought clarification from the participants about their experiences, perceptions, beliefs and values on the assessment that supports learning, which is based on constructivism. However, I definitely did not want to stop there, and I wanted to know the meaning the participants constructed as they engaged with the world in which they were participating in, which relates to interpretivism. I carefully observed the participants' choice of words and requested further clarification on why they say what they say.

The evaluative research that I have begun is definitely not to identify one single answer but to provide multiple platforms to decision-makers and implementors to assist them in further evaluating the change initiative required based on their context. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I find myself constantly wanting to know the participants' experiences and how they know what they know. The change strategies highlighted in chapters four and five of this study are based on the justification of meaningful insights provided by the programme recipients or direct users of assessment, where they were given a voice to discuss the issues they face. In light of this, it is clear that I approached my research from both a constructivist and an interpretivist perspective.

In view of this, the research design employed is a qualitative case study approach to provide a comprehensive and holistic analysis of assessment practices that support learning. Yin (2018) highlighted that the case study approach helps to obtain a more extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon. Gilham provides a wider perspective of the case study approach:

> “A case can be an individual: it can be a group - such as a family, or a class, or an office, or a hospital ward; it can be an institution - such as a school or a children's home, or a factory; it can be a large-scale community - a town, an industry, a profession. All of these are single cases; but you can also study multiple cases: a number of single parents; several schools; two different professions. It all depends what you want to find out - which leads us on. A case study is one which investigates the above to answer specific research questions (that may be fairly loose to begin with) and which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers” (Gillham, 2000, p. 1).

In this study, I am evaluating the practice at a private higher education setting in Malaysia, but that does not mean the results of this study only apply to this setting. As Gillham (2000) mentioned above, this study seeks case-specific evidence, but the findings of this study are also abstracted and compiled to a larger audience. In other words, through inductive-deductive reasoning, in which I see myself zooming in and zooming out to view the findings, viewing the perspective from the bottom-up and top-down approaches, I realise I am able to provide a broader perspective that takes advantage of the uniqueness of conducting case study research.

The most exciting aspect is that it does not just stop at my perspective of the case study but continues to evolve with the reader. Future researchers continue to use current knowledge by "modifying, extending, or adding to their generalised understandings of how the world works" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 115).

In this research, I adopted the role of an evaluator. Schwandt (2015) described the tension evaluators face in choosing the method of research – quantitative or qualitative.

> “On the one hand, there are evaluators who view policies and programs as “thing-like” objects with identifiable properties (e.g., inputs, processes, outcomes, impacts) that can be readily defined and measured using methods for collecting and analysing quantitative data. On the other hand, there are evaluators who view programs as multifaceted compositions of human experiences permeated with multiple meanings” p.22.

For me, the dilemma or tension was not very evident because I was indeed on the other end of the continuum described by Schwandt (2015), supporting the need to view the assessment practice by the participants through their eyes and perspective. Although I begin with underpinning theories in this study, a set of conditions to support students learning, I want to see the reality through my participants' eyes and their context.

I am sharing the research questions of this study before moving on to further describing the sample recruitment method:

1. How do the different stakeholders (teachers & students) within a business school in a Malaysian University perceive the ways in which their assessment practices support students' learning?
2. What elements within this business school context hinder / support assessment practices serving the function of supporting students' learning?
3. What are the implications, in light of theory-driven evaluation approach, for the research findings in the implementation of assessments that support students' learning at this and other Higher Education Institutions?

3.3 Sample Recruitment Method

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. As Cohen et al. (2011) mentioned, this type of sampling helps the researcher to identify participants with particular characteristics for specific needs. Although this seems to be straightforward, in reality, I had put a lot of thought into deciding the samples for the case carefully, just as Silverman (2013) proposed. King et al. (2019) pointed out that the participants chosen for the qualitative study must be able to provide meaningful insight based on the chosen topic. Therefore, in this research, the teacher-participant and student-participant had specific criteria they needed to fulfil to be the participants for this research.

The teacher participants must have taught SBS courses for at least two semesters to provide a comprehensive view of their assessment practices. At the time of the study was conducted, SBS comprises five Academic Departments: the Department of Accounting, the Department of Business Analytics, the Department of Economics and Finance, the Department of Management, and the Department of Marketing. The interviews were carried out with participants from four departments only because one of the departments had few staff members, and it was impossible to maintain confidentiality for that particular department; hence, it was removed from the scope of this study.

Four staff members were interviewed from each department, making it 16 teacher participants altogether. The purpose of choosing participants from every department is to ensure their voice is represented in this study but, not to make a comparison between departments.

The student participants must be at least in their 2nd year of study, completing two semesters prior to participating in this research. This helps the student participants to provide a comprehensive perspective of the assessment practices that they have gone through. The number of participants ranged from three to five student participants from each department. In total, 17 semi-structured interviews with student participants were carried out.

Besides deciding the criteria of the participants, it was crucial to determine the method of gaining access to the participants ethically. Therefore, after receiving the ethics approval (Appendix 1), the gatekeepers were contacted before the interviews to gain access to contact student participants. The gatekeepers are the HODs of each department. They obtained the permission of the Dean and Associate Dean (Research and Postgraduate Studies) before providing the students' email addresses (Appendix 2). Then, with the information obtained, the student participants were contacted via email.

Finlay (2002) mentioned power imbalances in research interactions attend to tensions that arise during the research process. I made sure that the students who participated in the study were not the same set of students I was teaching during that particular term in order to eliminate any instances of favouritism or injustice. This helped me avoid undue influences that could have caused a power imbalance. I would consider this as one of the reflexive practices.

Since I was considered an "insider", I could easily contact the teacher participants for participants' recruitment. Emails were sent out to the teachers and were selected based on the criteria mentioned above on a voluntary basis. However, there were some dilemmas faced as an insider researcher. More details on the dilemma faced as an insider researcher are provided at the end of this chapter.

3.4 Data Collection

Other than document analysis of policy statements, interviews are the primary means of data gathering in this evaluative study. The three key policy texts that I resorted to for this analysis are: 1) Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 by MOE, 2) Guidelines of Good Practice by MQA and 3) Assessment Policy by Sunway University. According to Bowen (2009, p. 32), "document analysis involves skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation". Bowen (2009) also mentions that it is crucial to know the purpose of these documents. I used these documents to verify specific assessment terms in the local context, which is also relevant when I discuss policy implementation from a wider perspective.

Based on the research paradigm discussed earlier, interviews are the appropriate data collection method for this research. Interviews are useful "for gathering facts, accessing beliefs about facts, identifying feelings and motives, commenting on the standards of actions, exploring present or previous behaviour and eliciting reasons and explanations" (Silverman, 1993, p.92).

I chose to carry out semi-structured interviews for this study. Semi-structured interviews have a better knowledge-producing potential because of the dynamic exchange of ideas, which gives interviewees more freedom to follow up on whatever angles they think are essential, and the interviewer has more control over focusing the conversation on issues that are important to the research project (Leavy, 2014; Roulston, 2010b).

In order to prepare a basic guide for the interview session, I analysed in detail the 11 conditions under which assessment supports learning by Gibbs & Simpson (2004). Based on this analysis, I created a set of questions for the teacher participants and a set of questions for the student participants. These questions (Appendix 5) were designed after making a detailed comparison of what Gibbs & Simpson (2004) mentioned in relation to all the other works of literature discussed in chapter two. My supervisor provided input on the questions before I conducted the pilot interviews.

I carried out pilot interviews with one student participant and one teacher participant. I transcribed them first and shared them with my supervisor for further discussion on the flow and set of questions. Only then I proceeded with the rest of the interviews.

The data collection and analysis happened throughout the year 2021. Each interview session lasted 30-60 minutes and was undertaken at mutually convenient times. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to analyse and identify themes.

In the initial preparation stages, it was decided that face-to-face interviews would be carried out. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, online interviews were chosen. Safe platforms were used to carry out the interview. For example, I used a licensed Zoom platform to ensure a secured platform for discussion.

I contacted the participants first by emailing the teachers and students to invite them to participate in the study. This email was accompanied by a participant information sheet (Appendix 3), consent form (Appendix 4), and ethical approval letter from Sunway University as well as Lancaster University. Those who gave their consent to be part of the study were then contacted for a semi-structured, online interview session. Prior to the interview, both written and verbal consent was obtained to ensure that participants understood that this research is entirely on a voluntary basis.

For student participants, I provided some preliminary information via email prior to the interview so that they are able to reflect on some points for discussion:

1. Summative assessments – Assessment which counts towards a final grade for a course.
2. Formative assessments – Assessment which is intended to provide feedback to students to improve their work (sometimes formative assessment can also be summative assessment)
3. Time given in completing assessment tasks
4. Assessments that are engaging – engaging here means assessments that needs you to be active, involved and motivated in completing the tasks
5. Approaches that you use to complete the assessment task – whether you reflect, memorise or understand or etc.
6. Understanding assessment expectations set by your lecturer
7. What feedback means to you?
8. Assessment and feedback – examples of useful and not so useful feedback , feedback that make sense to you and examples of feedback that does not make sense to you

Providing information prior to the interview helped students recall crucial moments that happened throughout their studies. The additional information includes some definitions I believe students may not understand because they do not use them in their daily tasks. However, this additional information was not given to teachers because they are familiar with jargon like formative assessment, summative assessment, and student engagement.

Interviews are meant to be reflective in every phase (Mann, 2016 & Love, 2012). I had to carefully reflect on the interview participants and prepare an interview guide to achieve consistency. During the interview, I was careful not to influence the interviewee but to allow more room for discussion and expansion of ideas because I believe every individual has his or her own meaningful experience to share and add insight to the research topic. Besides, Mann (2016) highlighted that reflexivity is enhanced if the interview is carried out on an online platform as the researcher can view himself or herself while interviewing, and hence is able to improve the posture to appear more enthusiastic. In the next section, I describe my reflexive practice while engaging in this research.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the researcher's ability to self-consciously refer to him or herself in knowledge development (Roulston, 2010b). This process demands self-reflection on how social background, preconceptions, positioning, and behaviour affect research (Finlay & Gough, 2003). I observed reflexivity in every phase of my research throughout these three years of my engagement in this research. Gibson (2021, p. 243) mentioned that reflexivity is a process of “critically exploring the relationship between the writer and the words they are writing or claims they are making with the context, people, problems being researched’. Kamler and Thomson (2008) associated reflexivity with the metaphor of hosting a dinner party. I am linking my practice of reflexivity to the wooden nesting dolls.

When I began this research, I had to view my belief, position, culture, and context on the subject matter in relation to the world and wider perspective. My reflection became reflexive when I started questioning assessment practices that support students' learning for the purpose of this research. Being a teacher for the past 15 years in higher education has brought subjectivity that I had to view separately. The analogy of matryoshka dolls, the wooden nesting dolls that reduce in size, as shown in Figure 6, can be an illustration of my reflexivity.

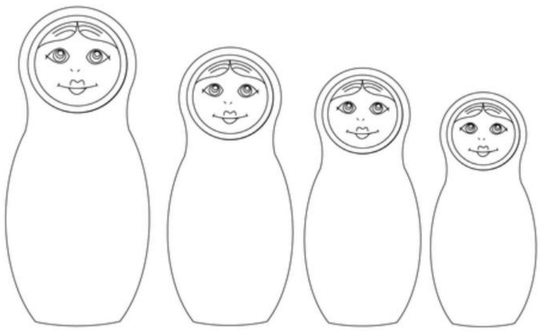

Figure 6:Connecting reflexive practice to Matryoshka Dolls

Note: I relate Figure 6 to my reflexive practice.

I always had to question my thought process before every decision was made. Like this nesting doll, I sometimes had to remove the hidden thoughts, concerns, or beliefs to evaluate if my subjectivity affected my decision-making. For example, while interviewing my participants, a total of 33 participants, towards the last few of my participants, I realised I was getting almost the same responses from them. I was concerned if I was on the right track, and at that moment, I had to “question the question”. I had to ensure I was not making any decisions because I was overwhelmed by the data or bored with the participants' responses. Discussing these issues with my supervisor and fellow PhD peers helped me in my reflexive practice. I also realised that reflexivity is not a checklist that I tick; it is a process I have to engage in continuously. Reflexivity requires researchers to outline "what I know" and "how I know it" throughout the study process (Hertz, 1997).

Roulston (2010b) urged qualitative researchers to know who they are in connection to research projects and how that relates to their epistemological and theoretical ideas about knowledge generation. Examining the subjectivity I bring into the research helped my reflexive practice. I would like to highlight several reflexive moments in this research journey.

Firstly, while creating the list of questions for the semi-structured interview, I had to be careful not to influence the interviewees with my beliefs. Having read many journal articles and book chapters on the subject matter, I already had preconceived thoughts on some areas. However, I was also eager to discover my participants' viewpoints because I firmly believe that I must be prepared to receive various worldviews instead of expecting a single answer to every problem. I also wanted the immediate users of assessment – students and teachers – to provide their insights on assessment practice so that this research becomes more relevant to the problems they face. Hence, when I find contradiction or agreement with my belief, I write comments on the transcription of the interviews. Later on, these notes helped me while I was also working on the data analysis, where I added more notes.

Next, being involved in the transcription process helped me practice reflexivity, although this process was time-consuming. Slowing down and engaging (Hammersley, 2010) in the text let me reflect on my position as a teacher regarding the replies shared to co-construct the meaning that might otherwise be lost in the hurry of interviews (Shelton & Flint, 2019).

Besides, understanding why I embarked on this journey was also crucial. Completing this thesis as Part 2 of my PhD journey was not as straightforward as Part 1. The pandemic, multiple lockdowns, working from home, family commitments, and my full-time job as a teacher did not help me stay on track. I had to question myself constantly about why I had begun this journey. One instance that made a difference for me was when I had to work on developing findings and discussions several times after receiving feedback from my supervisor. At that point, I decided to video record the reason I embarked on this journey, what sparked my interest and where I am now on this journey, which truly helped me to gather my thoughts.

3.6 Data Analysis

Early analysis steps are important as simple data coding using the software will not be sufficient. After each interview session, I wrote memos. This ongoing analysis "don't just report data but they tie together different pieces of data into a recognisable cluster” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.72). Besides that, the following data analysis steps shown in Table 5 were the guiding principle:

Data Analysis Steps	
Data Reduction	The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions.
Data Display	An organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action.
Conclusion Drawing	Notting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions.
Verification	The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their confirmability – that is their validity

Table 5:Data analysis steps, Miles & Huberman (1994)

Miles & Huberman's model helped me to reflect and draw connectivity between the data and research questions without depending on the software available. Maxwell (2013) highlighted that such software may lead one to ignore the narrative or miss out on other connective approaches. Therefore, as Miles & Huberman (1994) suggested, writing memos after each interview was useful, and using the four steps mentioned above as an ongoing data analysis process.

Then, the themes were drawn based on research questions and recurring themes. Themes were identified by considering the following guidelines proposed by King et al. (2019, p.200):

1. Theme involves the researcher making choices what to include, what to discard and how to interpret participants’ words.
2. The term “theme’ implies some degree of repetition.
3. Themes must be distinct from each other.

As mentioned earlier, transcribing the interview data was helpful for me to immerse and understand the participants’ viewpoints and perceptions clearly. With that, I could reflect and make decisions based on the guidelines above.

The data collection and analysis happened at the same time. I did not wait to complete transcribing the recorded interviews to analyse. In the initial stages, I wrote a short memo (Appendix 6) after each interview. After the transcription stage, I had a few additional rounds of re-reading the transcription and re-listening to the audio. In that process, I wrote as many comments as occurred to me (Appendix 7). This data condensation process "refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials. By condensing, we're making data stronger" (Miles et al., 2019, p.13). These comments include what made a difference, what made me sad or happy, what made sense, where I see an emphasis or where I see a contradiction. I commenced coding by considering the research questions, the challenges encountered by the participants, the support they received, and their perspectives on different aspects of assessments and feedback. At this point, I also coded the intriguing elements despite not being directly related to the research questions of this study.

I employed an Excel spreadsheet to transfer all the coded notes, referred to as data display. "A display is an organised, condensed assembly of information that allows analytic reflection and action" (Miles et al., 2019, p.13). At this point, I still had two copies of separate Excel sheets for teachers and students (Appendix 9). Going back and forth several times, looking at the notes I made on the transcript, and moving these notes to Excel helped. The first Excel draft was called as raw data (Appendix 9, Sample 1), which was shown to my supervisor to seek advice. With the feedback received, I used this Excel sheet as my data display, and at this stage, I could observe and notice there were many overlapping themes and patterns, which I further reduced to avoid redundancy (Appendix 9, Sample 2).

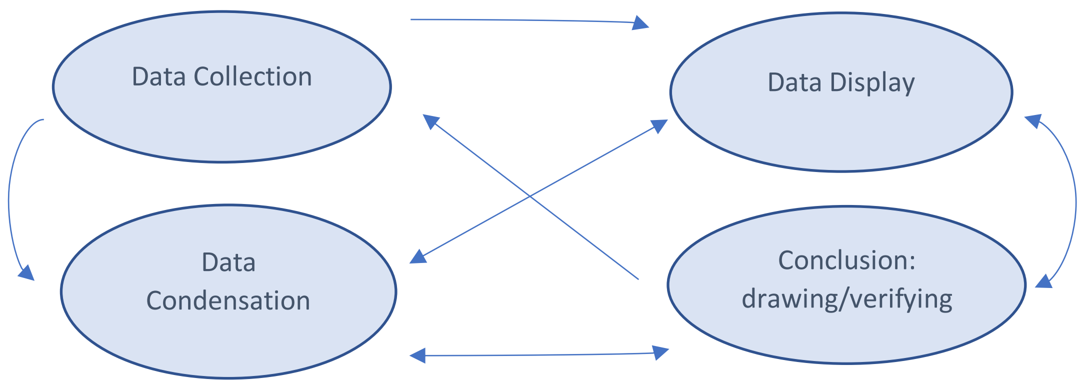

Figure 7:Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model, Miles et al. (2014)

Figure 7, the Interactive Model (Miles et al., 2014, p. 14), is accurate in my data analysis process.

> "The coding of data, for example (data condensation), leads to new ideas on what should go into a matrix (data display). Entering the data requires further data condensation. As the matrix fills up, preliminary conclusions are drawn, but they lead to the decision, for example, to add another column to the matrix to test the conclusion (Miles et al., 2014, p. 14)."

This was a complex yet enriching stage of my research journey. The cyclical process of moving from one stage to another and returning to the previous stage to add ideas was necessary. The quotes from the transcript were chosen upon identifying the idea that most effectively encapsulates the overarching theme. I could observe connections and patterns between teachers and students' responses to the themes. I also shared this information with my supervisor for further feedback. With that, I started writing the following chapters of this study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research is approved by both Sunway University and Lancaster University research ethics committees. BERA (2011) guidelines were adhered to throughout the research by fully informing the participants of the research details, providing the participants with the right to withdraw from the study, and treating the data with confidentiality.

Ethics was given due consideration at every stage of this research –while accessing participants' information, recruiting participants, collecting and analysing data as well as storing data. Student participants' contact details were obtained from gatekeepers and these individuals are not in a position of authority or influence over the potential participants. Prior to collecting data, the participant information sheet, consent form, and ethical approval letter were emailed to all the potential participants.

Once the participants fully understood the nature of the research and volunteered, the interviews were carried out. In order to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, throughout the study, their identities were de-identified, as each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Any references to participants' identities that would compromise their anonymity were removed or disguised before the research reports and publications were prepared. All information gathered from the study will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised persons.

In the initial stages, face-to-face interviews were planned, but because of the pandemic, I opted for online interviews and also extended my data collection period. I also ensured I did not record the video but only recorded the audio, although I wanted to see the participant during the interview for better engagement. Before the interview, I informed the participant that I was using the Zoom platform because I could only record audio, although the video was on. If the participants felt uncomfortable with the video, I also gave them a choice to switch off their video. I applied for ethics amendment approval to inform the ethics committee of these changes.

At the end of the interview, participants received RM20 (3.75 GBP) credit via a cashless payment App (GRAB app) to appreciate the time spent on the interview session. This is certainly a modest compensation as it does not influence participants in any way. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time before or during the interview and up to two weeks following their interview without giving any reason. No penalty was imposed for withdrawal from the study, and participants need not give up the remuneration received if they withdraw from the study.

All data is stored in a password-protected folder. Audio of the interviews will be destroyed or erased at the completion of the study.

3.8 Limitations & Risks

Firstly, as an insider researcher, I had better accessibility towards the resources (SBS' teachers, students, documents) available. As Brannick & Coghlan (2007) highlighted, although I have the main access as an insider researcher, I may or may not have secondary access to essential portions of the organisation. This is accurate in my case. In order to contact student participants, I still had to get the approval of the gatekeepers, just like the outsider researchers.

Besides that, I also had to constantly remember to maintain the ethical dimension of the research by not making assumptions about the participants' viewpoints but clarifying to them accordingly whenever necessary. This helped to make unbiased judgments. Applying one's prior understanding is a question of moving from closeness to distance and back again (Nielsen and Repstad, 1993). This is where my reflexive practice was put to good use. I had to re-construct what I knew by giving a voice to the participants to make the knowledge production more meaningful. I felt like I almost had to withdraw for the moment from the shore (tide recedes) and make a comeback to shore (high tide) when I got the insights from the participants.

Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was one of my priorities. As an insider researcher, it was crucial to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Even if the study results show that a particular department within the school encounters a problem designing and implementing assessment tasks that support learning, the participants' privacy was carefully maintained.

Moreover, this case study research is limited to one particular school in the institution. However, recognising the complexities of the assessment practice, a case study type of research must be carried out. Then a richer and more complete data can be obtained.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced my research paradigm and the methodological underpinnings of this research. I felt consistent and at ease while writing this chapter. I particularly liked the moments I reflected on my reflexivity practice and created an analogy of how I felt in this PhD journey. Recollection of moments, when I struggled during the data collection and analysis stages makes this research study more meaningful to me.

The next two chapters are my findings and discussions, divided into two chapters. Chapter four describes the struggles participants face that need urgent and immediate attention, while chapter five connects the findings to institutional evaluation, further discussing the practical implications of this research study.

Chapter 4 Unveiling the Insights

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings and analysis of this study. Using a Theory-Driven Evaluation (TDE), this analysis begins with the initial underpinning theories used in this study – Gibbs & Simpson (2004). Funnel & Rogers (2011, p.26) highlighted that some are uncomfortable with the term "theory", presuming it refers to academic analysis detached from practice or practical usage, or they become side-tracked in their attempts to relate it to a vague grand theory. The initial underpinning theories used in this study are not grand theories; rather, these theories are evaluated if they are the advocated behaviour or outcome in the practice of higher education. The evaluation was carried out among the direct users of assessments – teachers and students. Their voices brought about a discussion on various institutional tensions, further revealing the realities of HEI from a broader view. This discussion subsequently led to the development of change strategies, identifying elements that are becoming increasingly important for HEIs to adopt.

This study aims to evaluate the current assessment system practised at Sunway Business School (SBS) to understand how the assessment practices support learning. Although this case study focuses on the setting of private Malaysian universities, the results discussed apply to other HEIs worldwide because assessments have always been and will always be a vital part of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, considering the local context is also crucial because each HEI's culture, resources and aim may differ. More discussion on local context is highlighted in the following chapter, which provides further insight into the discussion started here.

Using the TDE lens, the action model and change model are adapted in this chapter. Visual interpretation of these models is presented in the next chapter. The action model starts with the initial underpinning theory, then the emerging theme of this study, which is aimed to obtain the struggles participants face and the support received. Then, this model moves on to the bigger picture of discussion affecting the realities of HEI, which brings about three change strategies (further analysis of these strategies is presented in chapter 5) to focus on:

1. Allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment
2. Learning outcomes must stay constructive
3. Develop a feedback model for assessment task

This chapter focuses mainly on three primary struggles students and teachers face in connecting assessment and learning. The next chapter focuses on the bigger picture of HEI and the change model.

In this chapter, I unpack the stakeholders' struggles and support received in achieving assessment practices that support students' learning. I briefly run through a list of the most pressing problems or struggles that the participants of this research were experiencing. These problems and struggles are discussed in greater depth in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Firstly, this study reveals that students struggle with assessment time; they end up prioritising graded assessments. Secondly, teachers find it a struggle to stay constructive in terms of assessment activities. Finally, this study found that assessment feedback is ineffective because of an imbalance in the Student-Staff Ratio (SSR).

The findings of this research make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge by 1) bridging the gap between theory and practice of assessment and feedback in the context of HE and 2) highlighting the struggle and support received by participants in pursuing assessment task that supports learning. As explained in Chapter 2, this qualitative evaluative research was carried out because the change in assessment practice has been relatively slow (Haughney et al., 2020; Boud et al., 2018b; Bloxham, 2016; Boud & Falchikov, 2007) when extensive research work has been carried out in this area. The gap between theory and practice is evident (Tight, 2020; Jarvis, 2012).

This study demonstrates the argument highlighted by McArthur (2013) that theory and practice cannot be separated "theory is itself always a form of practice and practice always requires the input of thought or theory" (p. 44). The argument of this study is that a comprehensive analysis such as this is needed to connect the dots between theory and practice. This detailed exploration reveals the need for both a top-down and bottom-up approach – a synthesis approach – in the policy implementation process. Without this approach, theory and practice will continue to stay isolated as separate spheres when the literature proves there is a need for these spheres to integrate. This study also reveals institutional tensions that HEIs (refer to Figure 8) face in their policy implementation.

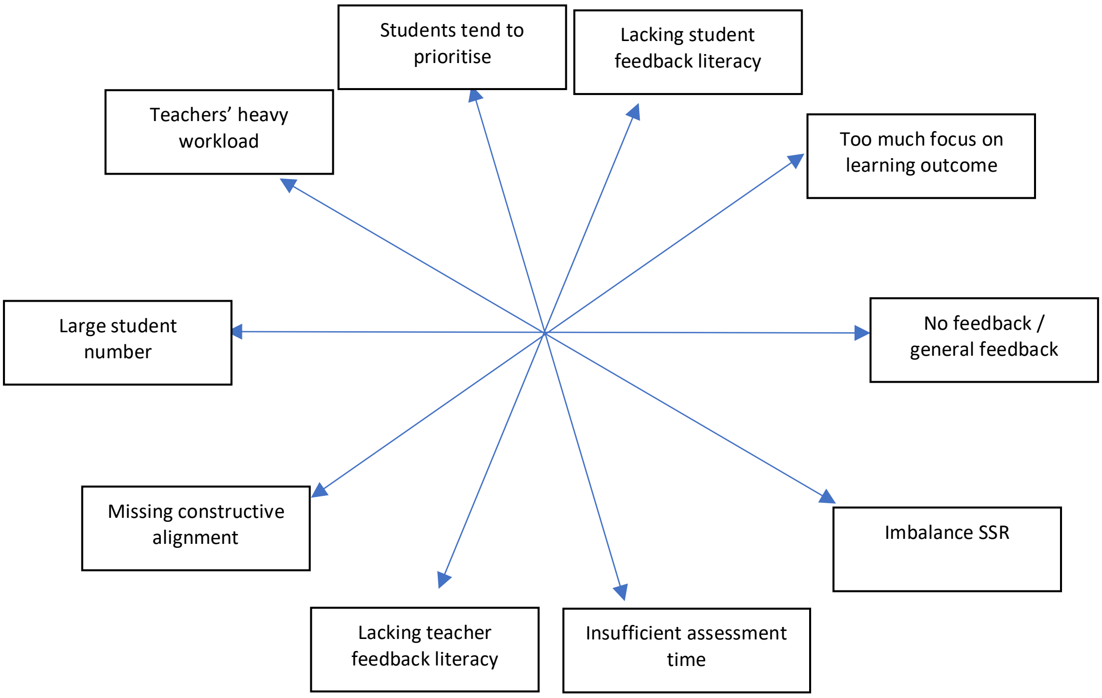

Figure 8:Institutional Tensions addressed in this study

Note: Figure 8 illustrates the institutional tensions addressed in this study. This is a collection of all areas of struggle highlighted by the participants of this study.

This study paves the way for additional discussion in the field of policy evolution for higher education institutions to focus on further. Utilising the theory-driven evaluation approach provides a more explicit angle of the struggles faced and support received by participants of this study. Hence, this study offers a clearer and more focused perspective on assessment practice to support students' learning. More details on the contribution are highlighted in Chapter 6.

All the sections below are illustrated by interview quotations to support the discussions. For easier identification, the quotations are indented. The pseudonyms' initials represent the interviewees' roles within parentheses after the excerpts. Teachers begin with the letter T, while students begin with the letter S.

4.2 The Race Against Time

The first theme developed from this research is related to assessment tasks and time. This section reveals the issues faced by the participants of this study regarding assessment time and duration in supporting students' learning. I begin by highlighting the findings, and the following section is where my analysis and argument is made. Overall, it is sad that students do not get the 'gift' of time.

4.2.1 Findings: The Struggle

This study identifies a mismatch between teachers' perceptions and students' reality when time is considered. Most teachers feel students do not have any issues with study time or time utilised to complete an assessment task simply because they perceive that students should be able to complete the assessment task if they plan well. A sample here resonates with other teacher participants' perspectives as well:

> If they know how to plan it appropriately, they have sufficient time (Taylor).

Meanwhile, here are a couple of extracts from student-participant on the allocation of time and duration of assessment:

> I feel lecturers don't see that we have other subjects with assessments and coursework too, so it's not just that. So, when it's like towards the end, everything comes together simultaneously, plus final exams. So, basically, in my case, at the very least, it reduces the time I have to prep for final exams, and then like I get anxious about completing everything because it's like, let's say the whole week out, there will be submissions and deadlines to meet. Anxiety builds up and lack of sleep, and then you have to pull all-nighters throughout the week. And I'm like, at that point, feedback doesn't matter because it's towards the end (Sally).

> After the coursework submission, the next thing will be the final exam. So, there is no time for the lecturer to go through, and there is no effort on the students, and because we have... we are already preoccupied with the final exam (Steven).

> If I look at one specific assessment, like for one subject, I feel the durations are enough. But if you look at it as a whole semester 'cause we have different subjects and assessments together, I feel like it's a bit hectic sometimes (Sarah).

From these extracts, it can be observed that teachers and students have different perceptions of assessment time and duration. Student participants raised a valid point about the time factor in the assessment. They feel assessment tasks sometimes are set too late towards the end of the semester when students feel swamped with all the assessment tasks, and the need to obtain feedback does not matter anymore. This feeling leads to students prioritising what is essential, primarily focusing on graded assessments and not paying closer attention to formative assessments. This situation occurs because graded task generates a sense of achievement and motivation (Sambell, 2016 & Boud, 1995). Students admit that they have no choice but to prioritise, just like Selene reported here:

> Of course, I would pay more attention to the graded one. But once I'm complete with that, if I have extra time, I will go back to the ones that are non-graded (Selene).

Similar to Selene, other students in this study have reported that they are in a dilemma having to choose to allocate their time between embedded assessment (graded tasks) and add-on tasks (formative assessment). As Theresa and Tora mentioned below, teachers perceive students to only focus on embedded tasks because of marks or grades at stake. Hence, I observe that teachers strongly feel that the students are motivated by marks:

> Students heavily rely on marks for me, I'm from the old school, so I would think that because summative the students get the marks, yeah awarded with certain marks. So, if I give them a formative assessment, especially those that I don't really force them to do it. I don't check them award marks. The take-up rate is actually quite low, they don't really do it because they know that there's no marks, and I'm not going to scold them anyway. So, summative wise, because if they don't do it, it will affect their grading (Theresa).

> Students are motivated by marks yeah, so definitely, especially in the Asian context. I think the marks motivation the grade is really strong but what I do is like whenever I give them a formative activity, I tell them OK. This is going to be very useful if you do it for your final exam (Tora).

Theresa and Tora reported that students are inclined towards summative assessment because of the grades, and some even relate to culture. However, in reality, student participants revealed they do appreciate formative assessments (add-on tasks) as seen in Sonny's comment below, although formative assessments do not relate to grades.

> I feel formative assessments will help the student the most, because summative is just a piece of paper, but it's like a very short time, like 2-3 hours to complete the assessment. Sometimes, like you will underperform, and you wouldn't really know what's your real performance. But when it comes to formative assessment right, sometimes when you listen to the lectures already right, you think that you understand ready, but when it comes to the actual assignment, like the in-class discussion, when we do application like on the real-life cases

> right? Then we will only realise for me, I will only realise that OK. Actually, what I understand it's not like fully understand, but when I apply it in real life only, I will understand and for me summative assessment is that usually theory basis, like what lecturer saying class and then I just write inside right in it. I feel like formative makes me apply more in the real case, especially to assignment, yeah? (Sonny)

There is this constant tug of war when it comes to finding a balance between formative and summative assessment for both teachers and students. Students understand that they need to complete formative assessments because it only helps them achieve their summative assessment, but the time factor confines students to engage in this type of task.

It is understandable why students are more inclined to summative or, in other words, graded assessments or embedded assessment tasks because they can divert their limited attention and energy to what is most important to them – grades. This study found that the students had no choice but to focus more on summative assessment and less on formative assessment.

Understanding the dilemmas students face, one of my interview questions directed to student participants was, What if Sunway University moves towards gradeless teaching? Would you be happy? The student participants of this study admitted that grades motivate them, reflecting the outcome of the following studies as well: Stan(2012); Harackiewicz et al.(2000); Midgley et al.(2001). However, the student participants emphasised that it becomes constructive when they receive the grades together with feedback. Hence, this study reports that grades still play an essential role in motivating students, but assessments become more effective when feedback is added.

The extracts by Silas and Storm below show that a heavily weighted exam that happens at the end of the semester, carried out merely for evaluation and testing purposes, demotivates students. However, students appreciate the continuous assessment (embedded assessment) process that happens within the semester.

> So, through continuous assessment, I would get more knowledge on what the assessment trying what the subject is trying to tell me. It would be easier to understand the subject instead of doing the final exam (Silas).

> Like final exams or midterm exams, I don't think they actually teach you or they make you learn anything. It's just like tests what you know. And yeah, if they're like close-book, then they basically just test like what you know. Because for exams is like if you don't know the answer so you don't know and then like you like mostly you don't really like go back to lecturer and say especially final exams like you don't go back in like. Well, I didn't know this. I mean, I don't know it is like can you tell me like the right answers? (Storm).

In other words, Silas, Storm, and other students appreciate the embedded assessment in the course within the semester, especially if they get feedback. However, the term-end heavily weighted assessment that restrains feedback does not motivate them.

Finally, student participants of this study highlighted the assessment re-try opportunity given to them in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Re-try assessment allows students to re-take a particular assessment component if they have failed the course, provided they have shown effort in completing the course by attending classes diligently. This policy implementation allowed students to engage in an assessment task again, which means they get another opportunity within the semester. Once again, time given to let students engage in an assessment task after making mistakes and obtaining feedback is rewarding. As reported here, students were so pleased with the introduction of this policy, but unfortunately only to be carried out for a brief moment.

This policy implementation is quite different from the standard policy, where re-sits are only allowed based on specific conditions (refer to Appendix 8).

Here is what the student participants reported about the assessment re-try:

> Re-try assessments, basically, I think that's pretty good actually. And if Sunway were able to do this for our students we would really appreciate it because I know. many, many instances where students want to re-try because they feel like they did not do well enough. (Samuel)
>
> Yeah, and especially business law. I think I fell short a bit of it last year. But during the finals, I didn't really know what I what was like or where I went wrong and stuff, so I had I was given a chance to re-try the exam and during that duration my lecturer actually posted a video of like Common mistakes people do during the final exam and I felt like that really helped me 'cause I can score better during the re-try. And now that I know what went wrong on the first try. (Samiya)

From these responses, I can observe that students appreciate the opportunity to re-try assessment components. They can identify what went wrong and correct it the next time they do. The thoughts, feelings, and actions that go into re-attempting assessment components are related to self-regulated learning (SRL) skills because students need to adapt their strategies and especially their emotions towards attempting the assessment again. Personal initiative, perseverance, and adaptable skills are some of the obstacles for students to demonstrate when SRL is addressed, according to Zimmerman (2008).

4.2.2 Summary & Discussion

Firstly, the findings reveal the struggle that students face, forcing them to be strategic in their focus on what is most important. Hence, the findings show students are found to neglect formative tasks, which is a sad reality in higher education and is similar to what was pointed out by Bennett (2000). Although research studies like Broadbent et al. (2018) have pointed out the need for formative assessment, which helps to provide continuous feedback to improve and expedite students' learning, this study reports that students find this type of assessment an add-on element within the semester and face time constraints to focus and complete them. Previous studies have discussed this crucial matter of time and assessment tasks. For example, Michel et al. (2015) pointed out how students' engagement in assessment tasks is vital as, at times, students tend to complete tasks without learning much (Bryan, 2015) and only spend time and put in effort when assessment is worth (Sambell et al., 2013). Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet (2007) pointed out that teachers must be tactful in setting the summative assessment task to avoid students being selective about elements. Harlen (2005) discovered that, while the purposes of assessment differ, there is a need to identify a common ground between summative and formative assessment, which might be accomplished by employing the same assessment for both measurement and feedback.

The struggle with heavily weighted year-end exams is another concern the students pointed out in this study. Focusing on traditional evaluation methods such as examinations does not help lifelong learning (Knight, 2002). Dagilyte & Coe (2019) found that spacing out assessment deadlines during the course with smaller tasks is effective. Assessment tasks that are grouped together near the end of the semester restrict students' ability to apply the comments to subsequent assessment tasks (Henderson et al., 2021 & Carelss et al., 2011). Students are penalised more severely by these exams since they are heavily weighted and are considered high stake examinations. Students' struggles demonstrate that such exams appear solely for marking purposes, with little need for encouraging or supporting learning.

Finally, this study found that re-try policies with proper conditions help students. As McArthur's (2017, p.156) pointed out, it is sad that some institutions completely opted out of the need to consider re-try:

> It seems odd to me that we build in room for trial and error, making mistakes, iterative learning at the doctoral level, for example, but arrangements for undergraduates or taught postgraduates are sometimes far less forgiving. Driven by instrumental proceduralism, some institutions have closed down the options for those who fail – no opportunities for resit.

With enough time to reflect on the feedback given, re-attempting assessment will help students better understand the subject matter, eventually allowing them to develop SRL skills. This only helps students to engage themselves in an assessment and learn. In fact, I believe HEIs desire students to achieve these skills. McArthur (2017) calls it an act of forgiveness that "offers a supportive path between present and potential achievement. It is particularly important in the context of higher education because the knowledge we are – or should – be dealing with is complicated, contested and dynamic".

Past research on re-sit policy has raised a red flag against re-sit assessments. Scott (2012) highlighted the case where A-level students are allowed to re-sit unlimited times for the English exam, which improved the results significantly, but she believes it may be unfair for some re-sitting students who may have gained more support and guidance compared to others. It was also highlighted that students improved their understanding, writing and analytical skills through re-sit. Pell et al. (2009, p. 247) listed several factors that make re-sit assessment unfair or complicated:

- Most re-sit students have had additional assessment practice in examination conditions.
- Usually the re-sit assessment is not undertaken in conjunction with any other assessment, so students can concentrate on this assessment alone.

- Students receive extra intensive tuition between the original and re-sit assessments. (Schools A and B both run extra classes for clinical re-sit students.)
- Fear, loss of face with contemporaries and family, financial costs of failure, etc. may drive students to increased effort in comparison with the main assessment

It is worth considering Scott (2012) introducing re-sit assessments with no limitation of attempts or carefully analysing the reason for re-sit for high-stakes exams can cause unfairness. However, with proper guidelines in place, I believe allowing re-sit assessment components only supports learning.

This change strategy challenges the institution to provide students with sufficient time and duration for making mistakes and getting corrected when engaging in any assessment task. Basically, it provides the chance for students to indulge in the assessment task.

The findings of this study reveal that there is a gap between theory and practice. To support students' learning through assessment tasks, Gibbs and Simpson (2004) recommend that sufficient study time and effort be captured and that assessment tasks be distributed evenly across topics and weeks. However, this study reveals that both students and teachers are unable to do so. This study reveals that, in reality, time in higher education study is limited. Providing the chance for students to devote in the assessment task is not an easy task, although various research works have emphasised that this an element to promote learning.

Hence, this evaluative research found the issue at hand and urges HEIs to allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment. The institutional tension is evident in terms of the assessment tasks and how students engage with the task in relation to time. More discussion on this aspect is discussed in the next chapter. The following section discusses another theme developed from this study.

4.3 The Challenge of Staying the Course

This study reports the challenges teachers face to ensure learning outcomes stay constructive when alignment is the primary concern. Besides, this section also discusses the large student number issue as well as the need to adhere to professional bodies, which makes it even more difficult for teachers to design assessment tasks that are authentic and engaging. The following sub-sections highlight the struggles the participants of this study face.

4.3.1 Findings: The Struggle

I found that teachers have challenges in fully maximising the potential of outcome-based education because of internal and external elements like large student number and adherence to professional bodies, which limits the design of meaningful assessment tasks.

It is an advantage that teachers in this study are fully aware of learning outcomes. It was observed that very often, the teachers talk about learning outcomes when the purpose of assessment is mentioned.

Here is one of the extracts of the academic participant that resonates with the other teachers:

> I believe the whole idea of assessment is to ensure the students have achieved whatever we need to teach them the learning objectives, the learning outcomes. And I in a way, the way we are taught or we learn how to set the assessment, I have learned how to set it according to the learning outcomes (Taffy).

However, it is disheartening when the focus of assessment is solely on alignment, ignoring the constructive side of learning due to internal and external factors.

Firstly, teachers are found to be careful about not over-assessing students and following what is determined in learning outcomes. Not only Taylor and Thunder but other teachers have raised their concerns about over-assessments. They reported the need to think and choose the assessment task to overcome over-assessment carefully.

> So, whatever we measure must be related to the learning outcome of the subjects. So, every time I plan for any assessments, I need to relate to the learning outcome first. For example, if my learning outcome is nothing talks about communication skills, so I do not require students to have any presentation because it will say what we call over-assess (Taylor).
>
> So, all the teachers have to comply with MQA and standards that are given by the government. I don't like to over-assess my students (Thunder).

The problem observed is not that the teachers are cautious about over-assessment, but that they are challenged by the fear of over-assessment while still having to do meaningful assessment tasks and meet the needs of stakeholders, as mentioned by Toby in this extract.

> challenging and complex type of assessments that are more evaluative in nature that invites more reflection. Deeper sort of considerations about the issues. So, when we design aside from trying to align it with the learning outcomes, we have to keep these things in mind you know. And then we're also not supposed to over-assess the students. I would like to have coursework that stimulates or allows for some measure of creativity and allow the students to not like maybe do the conventional kind of report or essay, but at the same time, I also have to take into account the academic rigors needed and sometimes is trying to balance this aspect to make the learning enjoyable while trying to ensure a certain level of challenge and also to satisfy the requirements or stakeholders that can be tricky (Toby).

Toby's dilemma influences the design of the assessment task that is chosen. It can be observed that Toby is trying to make sense of the assessment design to suit the students' needs, but the struggle is real.

Secondly, teachers are observed to settle down with more traditional assessment tasks as Taffy mentioned:

> Yes, the first-year student, first-year subject. We have about 600 to 700 and sometimes in a particular semester. For that particular class, we do not have assignments, only written exams or now online exams because you do not have time to consult them first of all too many students. Secondly, we will not have enough time to mark the assignment. So we have agreed. And Lancaster has agreed that we can have exam. One mid-term exam 50% and final exam 50%. I am a strong believer in assignment. I feel the student learn a lot from the assignment. Much more than what they learned from the midterm exam. Initially, when I joined Sunway, we used to have assignments for that group with two to 300 students. But it just got the numbers started getting so big, and we just didn't have time. Because the students are mostly students first semester students, they are really new to university life. They really need a lot of holding hands and they could not manage the time. We could not meet the deadline. Like they submit the assignment right, We cannot be formed before the final exam, we were not able to mark the assignments and give their feedback so it was then when we proposed that yeah, can we have and we saw that Lancaster has for certain subjects in year one they have that they do not have assignment, I think we have an exception for that subject. (Taffy)

It is unfortunate to know large student numbers are one of the causes of settling with traditional assessments. Although traditional assessment helps with administration (Lustgarten, 2022), such an assessment only focuses on the lower order thinking skills and recalling of memorisation (Law and Eckes, 2007).

The problem at HE is that instead of worrying about student numbers, promoting SRL should be the main point of discussion in HE to match the expectations at the workplace by allowing students to take responsibility for their learning (King, 2019). However, this study found that the large student number has deterred teachers from creating engaging tasks. Students can achieve such skills to critique and analyse their own work from alternative assessments more than traditional assessments like time-based exams or essays (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

Finally, the external element, the need to adhere to professional bodies, adds to the struggle. Some professional bodies require an individual component to be heavier, and the solution is opting for examinations. Again, coming back to the issue of large student numbers assigned to teachers, the choice of assessment strategy for the individual component becomes limited. The extracts below show the responses of the academic participants in this study:

> I think we have something like six professional bodies now to work with at any point in time. So, let me tell you how important it is that six. So if you want them to continue giving you all the full exemption, your exam must be 65%. How you run, you conduct the 65% is up to you. You want to have two exams that make up 65 or single exam make up 65, It's up to us. So, because of that particular professional body, So what we do is our final exam is 50% right? So, we have that 50% coursework component, isn't it? So out of the 50% coursework component, 30% will be group assignment, 20% will be a midterm test. So the mid-term test, plus the final exam together 70% (Thistle).

> Yeah, but now we have another stakeholder in a Business School, we have the Charter Management Institute. Yeah, and they seem to want to keep adding on you see all these professional bodies. So, it is adding to the complexity. Because CMI wants to see a stronger individual component. But that's an issue for the Business School when you have large classes. We tend to do group assignments, right? So, if you add individual components in the group assignment now, you have an even bigger workload. Organisation like CMI would love to see you know like a strong mid-term which is what I've tried to do with some of my subjects I put like individual components and midterm exam. But of course, it means more work for me, and I have to mark individual work. So, if the cohorts are small in a relatively between 50 to 80 students, it's manageable. Above 100, right I'm rushing for time (Toby).

In this study, the learning outcome is often brought about when the purpose of assessment is discussed. The teachers are seen to be well-versed in the alignment and ensuring learning outcomes are met. Still, unfortunately, curriculum mapping is not maximised to its fullest potential if meaningful task and learning is not the focus of assessment.

4.3.2 Summary & Discussion

From the section above, it can be concluded that teachers struggle to maintain constructive assessment tasks in relation to the learning outcome due to the fear of over-assessment, large student numbers, and the need to adhere to more and more professional bodies.

Biggs (2003, p.2) identified two characteristics of constructive alignment. To begin with, the 'constructive' aspect refers to the notion that students generate meaning through relevant learning activities. Second, the alignment feature positively impacts curriculum design because it encourages consistency, as all teaching activities and assessment tasks are carefully constructed to meet the learning outcomes. The following extract is a meaningful comment made by Biggs (2003, p.2) about constructive alignment:

> 'Constructive alignment' has two aspects. The 'constructive' aspect refers to the idea that students construct meaning through relevant learning activities. That is, meaning is not something imparted or transmitted from teacher to learner, but is something learners have to create for themselves. Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning … The 'alignment' aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that the components in the teaching system, especially the teaching methods used and the assessment tasks are aligned with the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes. (p. 2)

If teachers can maintain the focus on both aspects – constructive and alignment – then I believe outcome-based learning is positive. However, with the fear of over-assessment, as reported in this study, it is not easy to maintain the constructive element. Interestingly, Boud (2007) questioned the fear of over-assessment, which is often discussed but not too much on over-helping students to learn. Just take some time to ponder; if assessments are considered too much, the assumption that students are learning too much should automatically be questioned. However, over-assessment is always related to too much measurement for certification purposes. Therefore, the ultimate question is why an assessment task is carried out. Determining the purpose of assessment practice helps teachers understand alignment better, as teachers can no longer see assessments as a tool to check if learning outcomes are met.

Biggs (1996, p.361) relates constructivism and instructional design to appropriate performance based on learners' context. Hence, outcome-based learning must be designed with good understanding so that learners' context and performance are considered. Gibbs & Simpson (2004) also calls for assessment task that leads to deep learning instead of surface learning. However, in this study, teachers are unable to do so because of the internal and external elements mentioned earlier.

Bloxham and Boyd (2007) highlighted that students are not to be blamed completely because ‘poorly planned evaluation discourages deep learning, while good assessment encourages it’. Referring to the findings of this study, teachers are found to settle down to more traditional exam-based assessment because of the large student number issue and the need to adhere to professional bodies.

Higher education providers are encouraged to set assessment tasks that are related to real-life to encourage deep learning (Carless, 2015b; Herrington et al., 2010). Some research studies call this an authentic assessment. When authentic assessment is discussed, most of the time, incorporating real-world elements is highlighted (Wiggins, 1990; Joughin, 1998; Wiggins, 2006; Rust, 2007). However, McArthur (2022) expands on the phrase authentic assessment, stating that assessments should provide more inclusive forms of assessment procedures, with the focus not on the work but on the students' relationship to the task. In fact, this idea of authentic assessment makes me reflect that students should not be seen as a static element, but assessments must include human value.

Hence, teachers need to change their perspective instead of treating assessment as a task to gain marks where another learning outcome can be checked when students gain the required marks. Therefore, teachers need to evaluate the purpose of the assessment task that is given to students. As McArthur (2022, p.9) encourages, "We move from a focus on the task, to the reason for doing the task and how that validates the social belonging of the student".

Of course, as mentioned earlier, large student number or the need to adhere to professional bodies that need more individual components only makes teachers settle with traditional assessment. Now, every HEI needs to ask, "Are we striving to support students' learning where they can construct meaningful learning with every assessment, or are we satisfied just to know that learning outcomes are being achieved?"

As a result, this study challenges all HEIs to construct engaging and authentic assessment tasks in addition to focusing on linking learning objectives to outcomes. In other words, HEIs are urged to ensure learning outcomes stay constructive. I believe outcome-based learning is a double-edged sword with both positive and negative effects. The effect depends highly on how the teachers perceive and link assessments and learning outcomes.

These tensions reveal the implementation gap. Objective-based education is not only about aligning curriculum but also providing the opportunity for learners to carry out meaningful tasks that encourage deep learning. However, the struggle teachers face revealed in this study shows there is a gap between policy and practice. Further discussion on the implementation gap will be discussed in the following chapter. The next section reveals another major theme of this study.

4.4 The Complexity of Feedback

This section highlights another important finding of this study. It was found that students lack feedback, and teachers struggle to provide feedback because of the large student number. Assessment and feedback are intertwined; therefore, if these two entities are separated, then learning may not be as effective as possible. The first sub-section highlights the findings, and the subsequent section leads to the analysis and discussion.

4.4.1 Findings: The struggle

This study reveals that obtaining feedback from teachers is not an easy or straightforward task. Both students and teacher participants have given their perspectives on this aspect. Firstly, students find that they are not supported enough through feedback.

For example, Stella, a year-2 student, mentioned in the extract below that she did not even know she was supposed to receive feedback. She believes that she cannot improve further unless she receives feedback:

> Feedback is very important because it is for my improvement because when I do something wrong I would expect you tell me what I should improve in the future so I can remember it because when we do something wrong it is easier to remember but sometimes many assignments come back without any feedback so it is very hard for me to know why I get this mark and how should I improve. I thought it was normal that we didn't get feedback (Stella)

The voices of Samuel and Steven are shared by many other participants in this study. They indicated that teachers just end up providing marks instead of written or verbal feedback. Obtaining only marks does not help students make sense of the assessment.

> Feedback from your lecturers, It really helps you improve, because if they don't give you feedback, You don't know what to improve one. Yes, I have a lot of lecturers, they just don't care, I wouldn't say they don't care, they just they just give you a Marks and then that's it, and there's nothing else anymore (Samuel)

> We will only receive the feedback for the content in the form of marks. We will not be told what you did right, what you did wrong? All my assessments from Year 1 to 2, all my coursework, there was no form of research or no form of self-study or no form of studying your coursework with the lecturer to understand what we did wrong. All of it comes in the form of marks. (Steven)

This is disheartening because these students are not even referring to the heavily weighted year-end examination, which is usually known for not allocating opportunities for feedback for the end-of-semester examination (Knight, 1995; Butler & McMunn, 2014; McArthur, 2018).

Teachers in this study are observed to struggle with feedback because of the imbalance student-staff ratio (SSR). Although teachers are provided with support, such as tutors, to help them with the workload, I observe from what Toby mentioned below that it is still insufficient to support students' learning, especially when needing to provide in-depth feedback:

> for the short semester they've given me tutors, it's a pretty good team. I'm quite thankful for them. But even if all of us give feedback to 400 students, we already feeling how daunting it is. So, I don't think the feedback is going to be as in-depth as we would like it to be. Nice to have 8 tutors you know. And then we could have maybe 50 students per tutor rather than 100. It's crazy and seven weeks, you know. What feedback? By the time we're done marking right? The subjects over so yeah. 50 is doable. As long as you're not teaching too many

> subjects. If you are teaching four subjects and it's 50 students, is just as the same thing, back to the same old story. If you are teaching one or two subjects, 50 students, 30 students I think it's OK and if you have. Maybe there's one subject that has different sections and different teachers are involved then fine, but if the University is not willing to spend the money on hiring the number of instructors needed to keep classes small. I don't know how to ensure quality feedback. It will be very touch and one line or two lines. And you know, really, I also feel frustrated, not yeah. Sometimes I find myself typing 'good job'. And then realising that that doesn't mean. You know, I'm like how la. So it's a dilemma. I don't know how to solve this. I know ideally what they should receive logistically is not possible. (Toby)

As Toby and other teacher participants reported, because of the large student number, feedback is either provided in a general way or not at all; in these cases, just grades or marks are awarded.

Teachers are also observed to voice out their dissatisfaction with providing feedback to a large student number with a couple of negative connotations, such as the feeling of throwing up after marking so many scripts or even relating giving feedback to factory output:

> Marking at that time right, honestly to say, mark their coursework at that time, I want to vomit not because their work is not good but when you need to mark too much right, you feel bored already and at that time I feel like I want to vomit (Taylor).
>
> I'm very fast because we're like factory worker (Tabitha)

Many other teachers opted to provide generalised feedback based on a selected sample to the whole class instead of returning the individual assessment task to the students with comments. They choose a sample of good performance and share it with the entire class. From the extract below, Tora appears confident that her general comments help students, especially the weak ones. Tamara focuses on the large number of participants and believes the students can receive feedback at one go with such feedback.

> Yeah, so basically, I used to record my screen with someone's work over there, and I show them, so look at this post so you can see like OK, it's colorful, so in terms of poster design, it will get high marks. But what makes it also get high marks? You can read the content you can see OK? They explain theory, they apply this so you know so looking at the weaker students who didn't do so well, they can reflect on their own poster and go like Oh yeah, mine doesn't really look like that. I missed out this thing. It makes sense now I know what I need to do better (Tora)

> But if you ask me how I give feedback, I would take a very, very good assignment, and then I will share with people in lecture. So like the samples. So 500 of them we get to see what is good assignment is, And then they will compare with theirs (Tamara)

In the following extract, Thyme justifies the need for short, standardised comments. Thyme uses the rubrics as a guide for comments, and the comments for students are the same for a particular category.

> So I have approximately two weeks to finish the entire marking, which is barrable. So what I did in the past for that one assignment, I'll try to make sure that I still give comments but not as detailed. So it was actually during that time that I found it really useful if we go back to the rubric. When we go back to the rubrics, and there is already a standard to follow, our comments could be pretty standardised. So, when you get that quality of the group, you know that okay, it falls under this rubric, and then those are the kind of comments. So that's for me, it is a shortcut way of doing it. But then other than that, I can't really write too many additional comments because of the time yeah (Thyme)

Based on what Tora, Tamara, and Thyme reported, this study's academic participants are inclined to provide general comments based on samples chosen or standard phrases from rubrics. However, students from this study find general comments unhelpful, which is also echoed by previous studies (McCarthy, 2015; Price et al., 2010; Ferris, 1997; Weaver, 2006).

Students find general comments to be unhelpful, as reported below:

> I feel like their feedback sometimes are not that constructive is very general, like oh good approach, good work. And then, like I feel like there's not enough for us to become like a to help us improve to become a good, better or more positive outcome. So, I kind of wished they sometimes they put more effort into, like actually, giving feedback, going through, yeah, giving feedback and going through our paper. (Susan)

> So that's the like feedback. Like very general, like very surface feedback such as like you are too careless, you are not hard-working enough, I don't think these are useful. I think lecturers could tackle more specifically on that. (Sean)

Susan and Sean clearly mentioned that the short and general comments do not help. The students find specific and personalised comments are more helpful.

Another couple of examples show how it does not help to give general comments to the whole class as part of an in-class feedback session. Samiya says when a sample paper is discussed, she does not even know if it was her mistake. Sean explains further that he does not even know the mistake that the teacher is talking about is something he made.

> Like Business Law, they don't give you feedback; they just discuss what went wrong and stuff, but it's not really your mistake. Like generally at once. That's not very useful. (Samiya)
>
> The lecturers, so far, they would just they will come to class and then they will have a session where they just talk about the paper and then but they will address the students in general, they won't address them individually. They will say oh, this would like a couple of you guys were very careless and so I don't know why you guys very careless. You know, this one is easy and then you know those That's targeted to a group of people you know you don't know if you are in that you're in that category or something (Sean)

These comments from students like Sean, Susan and Samiya show that general feedback may save teachers' time, but it does not help students to go further, especially if they do not get the opportunity to have further discussion.

Earlier, it was noticed that Tora was confident that general comments given to students in class are helpful, especially for weak students, but the problem is some students are unsure what to do with feedback like Silas here:

> I do get feedback, but I will not remember it after a long time 'cause I don't really try to on the feedback. I will not actually look at it, but after a few days a few weeks, I will forget it. (Silas)

Students would be able to respond to feedback when there is student feedback literacy, which is defined as "the understandings, capacities, and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 1316). However, in this study, it was found that students are in need of such knowledge.

I also noticed that many teachers found it hard to answer the questions asked if the feedback they gave made sense to students or if they knew students utilised the feedback. Teachers either say they do not have a framework to do that or blame the timeline of assessments, which is set very much later in the semester. Here are the extracts that reflect this point:

> but I do not have a mechanism set to make sure that they follow the feedback that I leave to them, I only go as far as telling them what they could have done better or what they did good and to continue doing that and that's it, I do not really monitor whether they follow (Taffy).

> I don't, yeah, because sometimes the feedback comes in near the exam. You know, I think their focus then would be the exam, you know, because it always they always say give students feedback but we don't see whether the student actually act on their feedback. Yes, the only time I can check is when repeaters repeat my module. They have to do the assignment. Then I may call them and ask why you making the same mistake in the first attempt and making the same mistake now. (Thistle)

From Taffy and Thistle's extracts, I noticed that the feedback loop is missing, which is undoubtedly a vital element for learning. Providing comments without ensuring students understand the comments cannot be termed feedback. Feedback is not a one-way street; it must come from many directions, and teachers must create these pockets of opportunities for students.

4.4.2 Summary & Discussion

The main goal of this evaluation is to identify the struggle teachers and students face in fully utilising the purpose of assessment. Instead of utilising assessment only for grading and measurement, assessment should also support students' learning. The findings in this section report that students and teachers find the area of feedback is challenging. By just obtaining marks or generalised comments, students find there is no opportunity to move ahead with learning. Some students are also seen to lack feedback literacy, preventing the uptake of feedback. On the other hand, teachers reported an imbalance in SSR, deterring them from giving effective feedback.

According to Paterson et al. (2020, p.1) "feedback is a fundamental factor within the learning process for students. However, it is widely known that students generally report that feedback is done sub-optimally in higher education". The findings of this study resonate with Paterson's viewpoint. The feedback process is found to be challenging and affects students' learning.

The feedback process must be embedded in any assessment design to support students learning. If students do not receive feedback, the entire assessment system merely evaluates the perfectly aligned learning outcomes. However, this alignment does not make sense for students, especially the weak ones, if the system does not provide the opportunity for improvement by providing insights for students to achieve the learning outcomes that were not achieved in the first place.

It was reported in this study that teachers find it difficult to provide feedback with the large student number and also because of the timing of the assessment. Feedback does not necessarily happen at the end of a learning sequence. If it does happen at the end of the learning sequence, Dawson et al. (2019) emphasised that the teaching and learning lean towards a teacher-centered approach, leaving the students with no opportunity to use the feedback received.

It is time for HEIs to relook at feedback timing, incorporate different opportunities for students to receive input throughout the assessment task, and avoid only providing feedback at the end. Feedback can be very powerful if done well" (Brookhart, 2008, p.2). Hence, the first step to this is to incorporate feedback at the right time.

As Boud (2007, p.18) emphasises, "most comments on student work, even if students read them, occur at times that are the least propitious in terms of influencing subsequent student learning – such as at the end of a unit of study when they are moving on to do something different".

For this change initiative to take place, HEI must consider the large class issues that have been a common occurrence in the HE setting. This study reports that assigning a large number of students to teachers is undoubtedly one of the hindrances teachers face, which eventually affects students' learning. Students receive limited feedback because teachers cannot cope with their student numbers. Therefore, as one of the participants pointed out, the feedback provided could be very generic, which is not helpful for students.

Henderson et al. (2019b) and Falchikov (2006) also highlighted the same dilemma found in this study that staff in the educational context face where they have to provide timely feedback, yet they are stuck with large student numbers. McDonald (2013) pointed out two sides of the coin of large classes: 1) large classes do not promote individual attention, which consequently affects student achievement, satisfaction, and enrolment negatively (Cuseo, 2007; Davern et al., 2006; Dillon et al., 2002); 2) large classes are cost-effective, and there are no proven effects on students' learning (Maxwell & Lopus, 1994). This situation is an ongoing problem faced by teachers at HE (Winstone & Boud, 2020; Henderson et al., 2019b; Falchikov, 2006).

Teachers need to understand that there is "no 'one size fits all' feedback model when it comes to assessment in higher education" McCarthy (2015, p.166). Nevertheless, feedback model planning is crucial on the teachers' end. They can decide the feedback mode to suit their time and delivery method. McCarthy (2015) compared audio, video, and written feedback methods that individual teachers can explore for their students' needs.

Another crucial factor that should be considered is that feedback does not necessarily come from teachers alone. In order to achieve a 21st-century graduate skill set, students need to develop learner autonomy at HE (Moir, 2011). Therefore, students also have an important role to play in engaging actively while completing their assessment tasks and during the feedback process. As suggested by Carless et al. (2011), students must have opportunities to familiarise themselves with the notion of sustainable feedback: "dialogic processes and activities which can support and inform the student on the current task, whilst also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks" (p.397). In fact, I find the following extract to be meaningful, and I agree with Nieminen et al. (2022) that it is time for all the stakeholders at HE to reevaluate the outlook of feedback:

> "Feedback in this view is a situated process in time and place, within which agency ascribed to the student is constructed by a number of actors. These include humans (teacher, peer, colleague, family, the student themselves) and their role in relation to the student; and material and intangible objects which participate in the feedback process, such as learning management systems, rubrics, feedback templates, the rooms and chairs in which the feedback occurs, the webcam and video software that allows online face-to-face feedback consultations. Thus, agency in feedback is constructed through the interplay of these actors and does not solely 'belong' to a student. There is a need to reconsider the way in which materialities are positioned, especially where they have previously been silenced". (Nieminen et al., 2022, p. 101)

Teachers and students should utilise every possible opportunity in every possible way to create feedback moments, as suggested by McArthur & Huxham (2013):

Moment one: establishing feedback as dialogue before a course begins
Moment two: the first lecture of a course
Moment three: introducing the teacher as learner
Moment four: establishing the course as a safe learning space
Moment five: large classes – bursting with potential for feedback as dialogue
Moment six: looking beyond the course

Table 6:Feedback Moments, McArthur & Huxham (2013)

Instead of forming a one-way feedback design, it is crucial to use the moments listed in Table 6 so that teachers do not feel pressured about providing feedback in terms of large student numbers. As a matter of fact, if students can participate in these moments, they will become active learners and develop self-regulated learning skills eventually. Ajjawi & Boud (2018) also suggested that feedback dialogues that happen before assessment submission greatly support students, especially if the assessments have a shorter turnaround time.

In this study, it was also found that teachers are unsure if students are able to make sense of the feedback. It is observed that the feedback loop is missing. After providing comments, the discussion opportunity given to students is referred to as a feedback loop, a term proposed by Boud & Molloy (2013), discussed in chapter two. "Feedback should be a regular occurrence. When learners are provided with the opportunity to experience regular and varied feedback loops, the likelihood of important information being understood and acted upon increases" (Henderson et al.,2019b, p.1410).

By creating a regular feedback loop, students have the opportunity to make mistakes and obtain feedback. They also must be willing to ask, reflect, and go back and forth, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Effective learning requires dialogue, which is the most crucial process to help learners identify the link between assessment criteria and feedback (Boud, 2015 & Boud & Molloy, 2013). This dialogue can happen between teachers and students or among peers on the condition that there is engagement along the way.

Through external (teachers & peers) feedback, students will have a chance to reflect on the feedback. This reflection process is called internal feedback, a crucial learning process (Butler & Winnie, 1995; Carless & Boud, 2018).

From here, I can conclude that the first step is students must attend to the feedback received; only then can it be determined if the feedback makes sense to them. However, feedback opportunities must also be given to students.

Students are expected to take responsibility for their learning and attend to the feedback. However, HEIs should not underestimate the importance of student feedback literacy, as student participants reported that they are unsure of what to do with feedback. Carless & Boud (2018) explain student feedback literacy as a process of students enabling the uptake of feedback. They highlighted that students will be able to respond to feedback when there is student feedback literacy, which is defined as "the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (p. 1316).

Molloy et al. (2020) highlighted the main ideas of feedback literacy from a data set drawn from 18-month research from two Australian universities.

Figure 9:Feedback Literacy category, Molloy et al. (2020)

Figure 9 can be summarised that learners should know that feedback is something they should receive in order for them to improve learning where they should receive and take. Besides, students should be able to identify the link between assessment criteria and feedback provided instead of looking at these entities in isolation. This could be achieved when students discuss with teachers after submission or even engage in genuine dialogues where there are opportunities for feedback exchange. Moving on, teaching students how to manage their emotions when relating to feedback received is also an important factor for students to be able to engage with feedback received. Finally, students should know and take the initiative that they need to act or utilise the feedback received. Feedback does not end at a single point but needs to be carried on to the next level.

Learners need to develop feedback literacy in order for them to seek, understand and utilise feedback (Molloy et al.,2020; Carless & Winstone, 2023). Learners must understand this is a cycle or process they must engage in. It can be concluded that students are the change agents for themselves. For learning to be productive, students have to take responsibility, but the initial knowledge of feedback is crucial.

Not only that but when both teachers and students are allowed to learn feedback literacy, more sustainable feedback opportunities can be created. However, every HEI must include these aspects in their training allocation for students and teachers and take this matter seriously so that assessment can be supported for learning instead of merely being used for measurement and evaluation.

All in all, discussion about the selection and method of feedback is crucial and should be planned by the teaching team, just like how the conversation about assessment design happens. The discussion here has provided an avenue for HEIs to re-look at the existing feedback model and develop a feedback model for assessment tasks. HEIs are unable to escape large student number issues. It is important to educate the teachers about various possibilities that are already in place (refer to Figure 10 for some examples). Other than calling out for feedback models, the SSR imbalance, which falls under institutional resources, is surely an ongoing discussion that needs further attention by HEIs. There is a need for both a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach. More details on this policy implementation approach are given in the next chapter.

4.5 Conclusion

This study's findings are separated into two tiers. The first layer is shown and discussed in this chapter. The following chapter goes through the next layer of discoveries.

The first layer is students and teachers' struggle in bridging assessment and learning. Supporting learning through assessment practice is challenging. Although literature works have provided various ideas on assessment and feedback, the changes in assessment have been slow. This study has helped zero in the three issues that need attention: 1) students find it challenging to manage time; 2) teachers are unable to maximise the potential of outcome-based education; and 3)both teachers and students find feedback is a challenging area. The struggles have been presented and discussed in detail in this chapter.

The next layer of the findings, discussed in detail in the next chapter, is the reality HEIs must face in navigating institutional tensions. This study found a disconnect between theory and practice, and the findings of this study assist HEIs in identifying the factors that contribute to the disconnect. Identifying the struggles teachers and students face in this study reveals the implementation gap. Not only does this study create a pathway for change and more discussion among stakeholders, but it also reveals that theory and practice cannot stay isolated; hence, there is a need for both a top-down and a bottom-up approach. More details on the second tier of findings are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Further Insights: Navigating the Reality of Institutional Tension

"When you learn to see your struggles as opportunities to become stronger, better, wiser, then your thinking shifts from 'I can't do this' to 'I must do this'." - Toni Sorenson (n.d)

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to continue the discussion begun in the previous chapter about the reality that HEIs face as a result of institutional tension. The conflicts expressed by teachers and students about assessment practice revealed a number of concerns: 1) gap between theory and practice, 2) gap in policy implementation and 3) need for a synthesis approach in policy implementation.

This study, using the TDE approach, backs up my claim that theory, policy, and practice should be complementary. This study adopts an action model in order to uncover the viewpoints of stakeholders on assessment and learning, with the goal of comprehending the success or failure, as well as the justification and rationale of the initial underpinning theory. Using the change model, this study proposes smaller steps of implementation in smaller phases to get from intervention to outcome, where policy, theory, and practice all integrate. The change model is presented as points for further discussion within the local context of HEIs. This research bridges learning with assessment.

5.2 Action Model

In the previous chapter, I highlighted and discussed the emerging themes from the findings of this study. Before the evaluation, I used Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) 11 conditions for assessment to support students' learning as the initial underpinning theories. Hence, these conditions were used as my methodological framework to develop my semi-structured interview questions to evaluate the hindrances faced or support received by teachers and students in line with these assumptions. I must emphasise that this study is definitely not confined to these 11 conditions.

The initial ideas that sparked this research and led it to this point are essential to understanding the results. According to Saunders (2011, p.8),

> "we suggest that theory can enter consideration at a very early moment in evaluation design. In other words, theories orientate evaluative practice in this programmatic domain and determine the kinds of claims that might be made on the basis of the evaluation".

Saunders' thoughts about theories and initial ideas are definitely relevant to this study. The theories presented by Gibbs & Simpson sparked my interest, but I am happy to report that they did not limit my thought process or the findings of this research. Ashwin (2012, p. 944) described theory development and emphasised the point how it is essential to break free from the initial set of ideas in any empirical research, although that is a crucial starting point:

> "… but the central point is that thinking about data analysis in this way requires an approach that is more than simply the 'identification' of theory within the data. Such an approach would in Bernstein's terms be 'circular', as there would be little or no space for the analysed data to contradict the theory. In this way the data need to have space to knock against the theory. In journal articles this space is usually provided in 'discussion' sections, where the outcomes of the research are brought into relation to the literature in order to discuss their wider significance".

From this quote, I particularly like the analogy, "the data need to have space to knock against the theory," which happened in this study. Using a TDE approach, I am able to draw insights from the findings that will help HEIs better comprehend the development of change strategies and the challenges faced by both students and teachers in connecting assessment and learning. These struggles must be seen as an opportunity to improve, as Toni Sorenson (n.d) suggested (at the beginning of the chapter).

The results of the previous chapter are presented in a visual manner in Table 7, which serves as an overview of the action model. As mentioned in the preceding chapters, the theory-driven evaluation approach in this study focuses on an action model as well as a change model. The action model is a framework for analysing the initial theory's success, failure, justification or rationale (Van Belle et al., 2010). Van Belle et al. (2010) also point out that the action model delves deeper into assumptions made by programme designers or policy designers because all parties or stakeholders implicitly take these assumptions without being tested for effectiveness. The expectations and assumptions evaluated here are Gibbs and Simpson's (2004) 11 conditions in which assessment practice supports students' learning.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">ACTION MODEL</th></tr>
<tr><th>Underpinning Theories
Gibbs & Simpson (2004)</th><th rowspan="4">Overview of Findings</th><th>Struggles: Institutional Tensions</th><th>The Reality</th><th>Change Strategies</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3"><u>Assessment Tasks (Conditions 1-4)</u>
1. Capture sufficient study time and effort (in and out of class)
2. Are spread evenly across topics and weeks
3. Lead to productive learning activity (deep rather than surface learning)
4. Assessment communicate clear and high expectations

<u>Feedback (conditions 5–11)</u>
5. Is sufficient (in frequency, detail)
6. Is provided quickly enough to be useful
7. Focuses on learning rather than marks
8. Is linked to assessment criteria/expected learning outcomes
9. Makes sense to students
10. Is received by students and attended to
11. Is acted upon to improve work and learning</td><td>The Race Against Time
1. Students are found to neglect formative task, focusing only on what matters to them
2. heavily weighted year-end exams do not support learning
3. students were so pleased with the introduction of re-sit policy, but unfortunately only to be carried out for a brief moment</td><td rowspan="3">gap between theory and practice

gap in policy implementation

need for synthesis approach in policy implementation</td><td>Allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment</td></tr>
<tr><td>The Challenge of Staying the Course
1. fear of over-assessment
2. large student numbers
3. need to adhere to more and more professional bodies</td><td>Learning outcomes must stay constructive</td></tr>
<tr><td>The Complexity of Feedback
1. obtaining marks or generalised comments, students find there is no opportunity to move ahead with learning
2. lack feedback literacy students preventing the uptake of feedback
3. imbalance student-staff ratio (SSR) deters teachers from giving effective feedback</td><td>Develop Feedback Model for Assessment task</td></tr>
</table>

Table 7:Action Model: Overview of Findings

The action model, shown in Table 7, serves as the basis for the change model, presented in Table 10 later on in this chapter. "Theory-driven evaluation would not provide an added value compared to result-based (outcome/impact) evaluations if the change model would be left unchecked. This step traces the mechanisms that link the actual intervention to the actual outcomes" (Van Belle et al., 2010, p.5).

The research begins with the underpinning theories, and the findings disclose the struggles that represent the participants' voices, revealing the realities of HEIs and bringing about change strategies for HEIs to consider. As an evaluator, I do not desire to offer correct decisions but rather valuable points for each institution to negotiate according to their priorities and local context.

Tight (2020, p.196) predicts there is a need for more evaluative research to be carried out: "we may expect the clash between the theory and practice of quality in higher education to continue for some time, giving further opportunities for evaluative research". As a result of this dilemma, this study pinpoints the core problem of supporting students learning through assessment tasks, bringing new insights that can inform theory and practice.

The previous chapter presented the institutional tensions revealed through participants' struggles and discussed them in detail. These institutional tensions further highlighted the realities of HEIs, serving as a wake-up call. The subsequent sections of this chapter discuss the realities in detail.

5.3 Gap between Theory and Practice

The results of this research show that there is a disconnect between theory and practice, especially when the time and duration of the assessment task is the concern. According to the underpinning theory that I evaluated by Gibbs and Simpson (2004), in order to support students' learning through assessment tasks, enough study time and effort should be recorded, and assessment tasks should be distributed equitably among topics and weeks. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that neither students nor teachers are able to do so. The results of this evaluation indicate the amount of time available for study while pursuing higher education is restricted. It is not a simple task to give students the opportunity to engage in the assessment task, despite the fact that numerous research works (Table 8) have highlighted the importance of doing so as an element to support learning.

Theory/Research works	Assessment Task: Time and Duration
Broadbent et al. (2018)	the need for formative assessment which helps to provide continuous feedback to improve and expedite students' learning
Bryan (2015)	students may even complete the assessment task without learning much
Dagilyte & Coe (2019)	During the end-of-semester assessment times, course deadlines were spread out, which made students healthier and better able to take other module exams. Tutors could add smaller tasks as time went on. This made the time for each smaller task even shorter than the time for the whole exam, which reduced the risk of academic dishonesty.
Trotter (2006); Brown et al. (1996)	Assessment takes time, so not using it to inform students of their performance and how to improve seems like a waste
Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet (2007)	teachers must be tactful in setting the summative assessment task to avoid students being selective about elements
Kuiper et al. (2015)	cohort's diversity and needs, foster commitment, inspire students through design clarity, implement a well-sequenced assessment with timely feedback, and employ learning technology to motivate students to maximise time.
McArthur (2017)	When retaking an assessment, the act of forgiving is a helpful way to get from where you are now to where you could be.
Michel et al. (2021)	conversations about student time use should include how much time students spend engaged in behaviours that allow them to engage with subject matter
Richardson(2015); Bridges et al. (2002)	students perform better in coursework than final examination
Sambell et al. (2013)	put in the effort and spend sufficient time on a particular assignment when it is “worth” – the marks

Table 8:Selected Research Works on Time and Duration of Assessment Tasks

Table 8 presents some of the research works that discuss the role of time and duration in assessment tasks. The findings of this study serve as a reminder for HEIs to recognise and admit that time and duration is a battle for both teachers and students. Through this research, I offer HEIs points for negotiation and discussion to address the issues: 1) students are found to neglect formative tasks, focusing only on what matters to them; 2) heavily weighted year-end exams do not support learning;

3) students were so pleased with the introduction of re-sit policy but unfortunately only to be carried out for a brief moment.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, student participants in this study stated that they have no choice but to focus on what is graded due to limited time within the semester, highlighted the disadvantages of heavily weighted year-end exams, but it is still being carried out and found that resit or reattempting of assessment, or in other words, forgiveness, is helpful for learning. However, in this study, it was only done for a short period of time. The critical issue of time and assessment tasks has been explored in prior research. On the other hand, students do not have this 'gift' of time to devote to the task. The findings of this study show the gap.

The findings of this study resonate with Jarvis (2012) that the most significant difference between theory and practice is what might be agreed with the principles in theory but not when it comes to putting them into practice. The challenges that the participants brought up need to be taken into serious account because it appears that these challenges are preventing the participants, who are also the people who put policy into practice, from completely maximising the role of assessments, which is not only to be used to measure performance but also to support learning.

Smith et al. (2021) pointed out that using theory to study how higher education systems work can help experts find patterns and keep their theories up-to-date. Hence, theory connects study and practice, giving us ways to understand and improve educational systems that are based on facts. Now that this study has identified a clear gap between theory and practice, it is important to integrate them instead of staying isolated. McArthur (2013, p.134) highlighted that there is a need to rethink how theory and practice are viewed: "the usefulness of an area of study or a research project involves an interaction between theory and practice that renders them both more nuanced and potentially more profound than they may sometimes appear."

There is a need for theory and practice to combine to maximise the function of assessment to incorporate learning. This will be discussed as a final point of this chapter, and then the practical implication will be given through the change model. The following section highlights the gap in terms of policy implementation found in this study.

5.4 Gap in Policy Implementation

The institutional tensions shed light on gaps in the execution and implementation of policy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, objective-based education is not just about aligning the curriculum but also about giving students the chance to do important tasks and help them learn more deeply. However, this study's findings about the challenges teachers and students face demonstrate a disconnect between policy and practice.

The initial theory evaluated claims that in order to support students learning, assessment tasks must lead to deep learning instead of surface learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). However, in this study, teachers are unable to do so because of internal and external elements – 1) fear of overassessment; 2) large student numbers; and 3) need to adhere to more and more professional bodies.

Biggs (2003, p.2) reminded us that students' learning must be supported through relevant and meaningful learning activities.

> The 'constructive' aspect refers to the idea that students construct meaning through relevant learning activities. That is, meaning is not something imparted or transmitted from teacher to learner, but is something learners have to create for themselves. Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning …

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the teachers in this study find it challenging to stay constructive by engaging in meaningful assessment activity because of the external and internal struggles. Learning outcomes become primarily a tool for measuring alignment, with less emphasis on the constructive part. I observed that the teachers are well-versed on how the Program Education Objectives (PEOs), Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), Subject Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and assessments must be aligned to a common and measurable objective. However, teachers find it challenging to design assessments with the goal of focusing on the students' relationships to the task (McArthur, 2022), enhancing evaluative judgement to develop independent learners (Boud et al., 2018a) or developing learners' abilities to identify their current learning needs and address their future needs (Boud, 2000). Teachers in this study are just unable to focus on these critical abilities for developing 21st-century skills because of the struggles they face.

There is a disconnect between how policies are intended to be carried out and how they are actually being carried out. Teachers are not to blame, but it is essential to recognise the struggles they face so that “we can shift our focus from 'I can't do this' to 'I must do this’" Toni Sorenson (n.d).

Quality Assurance Agency	**Policy Document**	**Assessment and Learning**
MOHE	Malaysian Education Blueprint Higher Education (2015)	Enhancing the student learning experience to **develop 21st-century skills** and to **enable more personalised learning.**
MQA	Guidelines to Good Practice (2023)	PLOs and CLOs are emphasised in the guideline, and it is emphasised that any assessment methods or outcome indicators used should be matched with them in a constructive manner. Making sure these goals are aligned will **motivate students to adopt approaches to learning that will lead to the achievement** of the CLOs and, in turn, the completion of the PLOs.
Academic Standards and Quality, Sunway University	Assessment Policy (2020, p.3)	Assessments should be designed to evaluate the extent to which students have met the Learning Outcomes. Summative assessments should not be primarily designed to test a student’s memory and should always **be structured in such a way to enable students to show their capacity for higher order thinking skills and to demonstrate their strengths, rather than to “search for weaknesses**".

Table 9:Policy Statements

Table 9 shows the policy statements from the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 by MOE, Guidelines of Good Practice by MQA and Assessment Policy by Sunway University. Each of these excerpts describes the optimal approach to learning and assessment as well as the objective that should be achieved.

The Malaysian Education Blueprint HE (2015) emphasises the need for students to acquire 21st-century skills. However, through this research, I found that teachers find it challenging to stay constructive with their assessment activities. They are able to align the activities to learning outcomes but are unable to fulfil the constructive aspect due to the difficulties expressed, which are presented and discussed in detail in the preceding chapter. These findings are consistent with those found by Chan (2023), who also affirms that assessments and research have not been concentrating on holistic competencies such as 21st-century skills, soft skills, and transferable abilities in recent decades. Broadfoot's (2009) point also matches my findings that despite a growing awareness of the limitations of a scientific approach to assessment, the 21st century is struggling to move beyond 20th-century assessment ideas and practises.

The Guideline of Good Practice (2023) points out the approach students take to complete the task is crucial, which in turn relates to the assessment design. Assessment Policy (2020) highlights the importance of shifting the educational focus away from rote memorisation tasks for students. The outcomes of this study, on the other hand, demonstrate that this is not the case because of the challenges that teachers encounter. It is disheartening to place teachers in a position in which they are aware that they need to provide meaningful tasks for students to enable students to develop meaning and knowledge on their own but are unable to do so due to both internal (fear of overassessment and large student numbers) and external factors (need to adhere to more and more professional bodies).

As Trowler (2003) highlighted, the policy may not be implemented effectively when the teachers' views are not evaluated.:

> "The values, attitudes and perceptions of those lower down, who were doing the donkey work of putting policy into practice, had been ignored. These people often use strategies which in effect *change* policy. They inevitably have discretion in order to cope with uncertainty; as a result, policies tend to evolve through the interactions of a multiplicity of actors. Consequently, policy becomes *refracted* as it is implemented, that is, it becomes distorted and less coherent as it is interpreted and put into practice by ground-level actors, such as teachers" (Trowler, 2003, p.128).

It is clear that there is a gap in the execution of policy, as indicated by Trowler (2003), which is visible in this research as well. As Krause (2011) emphasised, institutional transformation requires bridges between national policy framework, institutional strategic plans, and local actions in classrooms, online, and on campuses. The following sections highlight the need for a synthesis approach of policy implementation – a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

5.5 Synthesis Approach: Inspiring Change

The findings of this study show there is a gap between theory and practice as well as a gap in policy implementation. Hence, there is a need for a synthesis approach to reducing institutional tensions. This urges an integration of theory, existing policies, and perspectives from teachers and students – the people who are putting policy into action. Understanding the perspective of direct users of assessment and the struggles they face is a critical strategy for a bottom-up approach, and assessing the theories and policies in place in accordance with the input obtained from teachers and students is a top-down approach. This is in view of Sabatier (1986, p.39):

> "In short, the synthesis adopts the bottom-uppers' unit of analysis – a whole variety of public and private actors involved with a policy problem — as well as their concerns with understanding the perspectives and strategies of all major categories of actors (not simply program proponents). It then combines this starting point with top-downers' "

To illustrate this further based on the findings of this study, I present Chart 9, notably in the area of feedback; however, the same approach can be applied to the other two areas that I have addressed in the previous sections (*time and duration and staying constructive).*

In Figure 10, I present some of the assessment and feedback theories that were discussed in this study. For the purposes of this analysis, I summarised some of the policy statements concerning feedback and learning. If teachers and students are just shoved with these ideas and asked to meet all of the standards listed, this is a top-down approach. However, a bottom-up strategy would involve identifying the challenges teachers and students encounter, as shown in Figure 10, and bringing that forward to theories and policies in an effort to create a balance, match, solution or further negotiation.

Bamber & Anderson (2012) pointed out difficulties between institutional evaluative demands and individual practices and proposed the first step is to work with the tensions between top-down policy and bottom-up practices.

Theory		Assessment & Feedback
• sufficient, detailed and immediate and useful Feedback (Ashwin et al., 2020, Henderson et al., 2019a; Henderson et al., 2019b; Gibbs & Simspson, 2004, Gibbs, 2019) • sustainable assessment (Clarke & Boud, 2018; Boud, 2000; Boud & Soler, 2015). • feedback moments (McArthur & Huxham, 2013) • evaluative judgement (Boud et al., 2018 • feedback Literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018) • feedback as a dialogue (Boud, 2015; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Winstone & Carless, 2019; Winstone & Boud, 2020); • feedback loop (Boud & Molloy, 2013) • feeding forward (McArthur, 2018)	**Top Down Approach** ↓	**Assessment Policy (2020)** • Feedback helps students improve and succeed, according to the statements. Continuous assessment should include timely formative feedback. Before summative assessments, students should evaluate their learning and receive feedback to improve. Formative assessments, prior papers, annotated examples, and individual feedback should guide students through summative assessments. **Guideline of Good Practice (2023)** • Formative assessment and feedback improve student learning and performance, as these assertions indicate. Students and teachers receive qualitative feedback on topic and performance through formative assessment. Assessment involves engagement and giving learners descriptive feedback to develop. Coursework and regular assessments allow teachers to give students critical feedback to improve their learning.

	Teachers & Students
Bottom-up Approach ↑	• imbalance student-staff ratio (SSR) deters teachers from giving effective feedback • obtaining marks or generalised comments, students find there is no opportunity to move ahead with learning • lack feedback literacy students preventing uptake of feedback

Figure 10:Synthesis Approach in Navigating the Complexity of Feedback

If both theory and practice are viewed as separate entities, then there will be an ongoing cycle of isolation that will never come to an end, which will also result in a gap between theory, policy and practice. As pointed out in Chapters 2 and 4, this qualitative evaluative research was carried out because the change in assessment practice has been rather slow (Haughney et al., 2020; Bloxham, 2016; Boud & Falchikov, 2007) when extensive research work has been carried out in this area. The findings of this study emphasise that there is a pressing need for theory, policy, and practice to complement one another.

The findings of this study, in the area of feedback, demonstrate that effective feedback is crucial for learning and serves as an integral component in supporting students learning, but teachers and students face significant challenges. The participants of this research, both teachers and students, agree that feedback is pertinent for learning. However, due to the difficulties depicted in Figure 10, neither teachers nor students can successfully engage in feedback exchange or interpretation. Hence, there is a need for change to happen, and this can only occur when HEIs adopt a synthesis approach.

> Change is more likely to be successful when there is consensus above and pressure below, a 'change sandwich', rather than when it simply flows from above. Writers in this tradition stress that the top-down/bottom-up relationship needs to be one of dialogue, negotiation and learning from experience. They believe that dialogue is best conducted on the basis of mutual comprehension; for managers it is particularly important to understand the nature of the cultural characteristics of their institution (Trowler, 2003, 136).

Through my research, I did not seek to deliver perfect decisions but rather to facilitate further conversation within each and every HEI in order to maximise the function of assessment, which is to support learning.

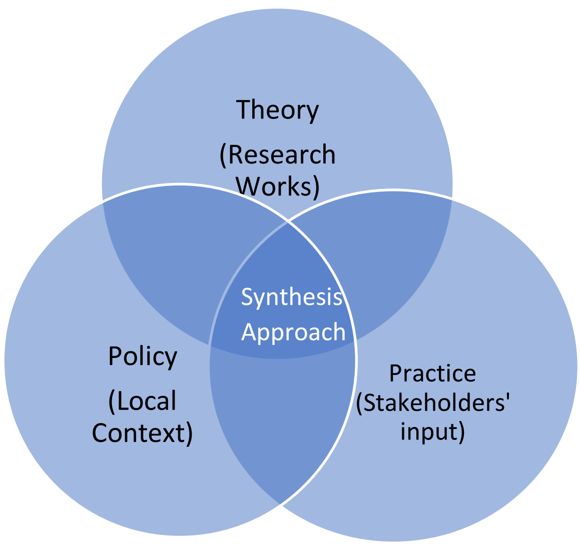

Figure 11:Synthesis Approach: Policy-theory-practice integration

Based on what has been discussed in this chapter, Figure 11 illustrates the critical synergy required in every HEI to address the challenges they face. Theories have provided evidence of best practices, in this case, referring to literary work on assessment and learning. Policy refers to policy statements produced by the quality assurance agency within the local context, while practices refer to voices of stakeholders, especially those who put policy into practice – teachers and students. This integration is a demonstration of how the synthesis approach should be used when implementing policies. Each entity must complement each other and should not be viewed in isolation. Research works must take into account local policy and shareholders' involvement. Policies must be practice-theory relevant. Finally, the voices of those who put policy into practice must be heard primarily to understand the struggle to implement what is required. Despite the perception that policy may limit assessment practice's function, there is ample opportunity for supporting students' learning with constant integration of these three entities. As illustrated in Figure 5 of Chapter 2 via Bamber's model, institutions possess the authority to determine their own assessment practices.

Therefore, the next question that has to be answered is how exactly we can incorporate all of these components so that change can truly take place. As was just said, the change model presents the causal chain that demonstrates how the outcome can be accomplished. This is elaborated further in the following section.

5.6 Change Model

These proposed theories are derived from the teachers' and students' voices as elements to be incorporated into assessment practices to support learning. In this introduction section, the change model provides both theoretical and practical implications of this study. Nevertheless, in order to get to this point, the insights drawn from the action model were required. This stage integrates theory, practice, and policy into the conversation while keeping the focus on the local context. As Hora (2012) pointed out, local thinking, decision-making, and behaviour will shape how a change or innovation gets embraced. Hence, through the TDE approach, this study urges HEIs to embrace change locally by considering theory, policy and practice. As Ansell (2008) highlighted, institutional change is never one-way. The goal of this step is to trace the mechanisms that link the actual intervention to the actual outcomes.

Table 11 shows how the action model has inspired the change model. Change models might vary in different organisations because of various policies in place or even resources available for the institution to embrace the change. Having sufficient resources plays a vital role in decreasing policy conflict (Matland, 1995).

The change model is crucial because it gives meaning to an action model. The change strategies are developed from the teachers and students' voices and are based on the reality of HEIs. The gear shifts at this point, where institutional change is seen at the meso-level of social change. After identifying the bottom-uppers' struggle, it is time to combine with top-downers.

This study urges HEIs to negotiate further these change strategies among stakeholders by taking into consideration the local context. Table 11 highlights an overlap between action and change models in terms of change strategies. The action model's final stage is the change model's beginning. The cycle then continues for continuous improvement for effective policy implementation.

ACTION MODEL					CHANGE MODEL			
Underpinning Theories Gibbs & Simpson (2004)	**Overview of Findings**	**Struggles: Institutional Tensions**	**The Reality**	**Change Strategies**	**Embracing Change**	**Determinants**	**Interventions**	**Resources required to implement the activities *(points for negotiation within local context)***
Assessment Tasks (Conditions 1-4) 1. Capture sufficient study time and effort (in and out of class) 2. Are spread evenly across topics and weeks 3. Lead to productive learning activity (deep rather than surface learning) 4. Assessment communicate clear and high expectations *Feedback (conditions 5–11)* 5. Is sufficient (in frequency, detail) 6. Is provided quickly enough to be useful 7. Focuses on learning rather than marks 8. Is linked to assessment criteria/expected learning outcomes 9. Makes sense to students 10. Is received by students and attended to 11. Is acted upon to improve work and learning		*The Race Against Time* 1. Students are found to neglect formative task, focusing only on what matters to them 2. heavily weighted year end exams do not support learning 3. students were so pleased with the introduction of re-sit policy but unfortunately only to be carried out for a brief moment	gap between theory and practice	Allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment		• opportunities for students to engage and learn from assessment tasks	• to provide various checkpoints for their assessment tasks • Develop embedded assessments where there are pockets of opportunities for students to make mistakes and learn where feedback is possible to be obtained • introduce or maintain assessment re-try policy with proper conditions.	
		The Challenge of Staying the Course 1. fear of over-assessment 2. large student numbers 3. need to adhere to more and more professional bodies	gap in policy implementation	Learning outcomes must stay constructive		• meaningful and relevant assessment task for students • Large classes	• Evaluate the purpose of the assessment task given to students if students can construct meaning. • Large student number issues must be addressed.	
		The Complexity of Feedback 1. obtaining marks or generalised comments, students find there is no opportunity to move ahead with learning 2. lack feedback literacy students preventing uptake of feedback 3. imbalance student-staff ratio (SSR) deters teachers from giving effective feedback	need for synthesis approach in policy implementation	Develop Feedback Model for Assessment task		• Feedback literacy • SSR	• Any assessment must include feedback as a dialogue with regular and different feedback loops. • The choice of feedback model can address academic workload issues. • Encourage students to be willing to take the responsibility to be engaged in this process. • Discuss strategies for students to understand and make sense of the feedback provided • Create opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with the notion of sustainable feedback.	

Table 10:Action Model to Change Model

The change model commences by outlining the change strategies, encompassing three key elements. Firstly, the goal refers to unmet needs that necessitate addressing. Secondly, the determinants are the factors that influence the program's outcome. These determinants are derived from the perspectives and experiences expressed by the participants. Lastly, the intervention is formulated based on both relevant theories and the input provided by the participants. I discuss further the intervention highlighted in this study in the next chapter under limitation to provide more options for future researchers.

5.6.1 Allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment

Based on the struggles participants pointed out and the discussion from the previous chapter and this chapter, it can be noticed that the theory and practice are not integrated. Hence, in order for policy implementation to be successful, HEI should consider this change strategy more carefully.

Providing the chance for students to engage themselves in the assessment task is not an easy task, although various research works have emphasised that this is an element to promote learning. This change strategy calls out HEIs to consider this matter seriously so that students can maximise the function of assessment which is also to support learning. This can only happen when enough opportunities are given to students to engage in the task. Hence, this is the determinant that HEI should focus on.

On the basis of this factor, I have proposed a small number of theoretical interventions. Firstly, providing checkpoints for assessment tasks. King (2019) emphasised that assessments provide information on whether students have met learning outcomes but do not clearly reflect the journey students have gone through to achieve the learning outcome. However, knowledge development over a certain period of time can be observed when teachers set different checkpoints in the assessment process. Walser (2009) also points out that self-assessment tasks can serve as checkpoints for both students and teachers.

Secondly, develop embedded assessments where there are pockets of opportunities for students to make mistakes and learn where feedback is possible to be obtained. Hence, finding the right assessment time frame within the semester is essential. Designing these continuous assessments where there are pockets of opportunities for students to make mistakes and learn is also necessary. This is highlighted in the section where the feedback model is discussed as well. Formative assessment is a type of assessment that provides continuous feedback to improve and expedite students' learning (Broadbent et al., 2018). There are so many advantages that can be observed through formative assessment. However, as reported earlier, students find this type of assessment an add-on element within the semester and face time constraints to focus and complete them. I believe the characteristics of formative assessment should influence the design of summative assessments (embedded assessments). Designing summative assessments with a similar feedback process that formative assessment promotes is crucial. Clarke & Boud (2018) provided the perspective of sustainable assessment that any assessments being carried out should include and encompass the characteristics of formative, summative, and sustainable assessment. In other words, assessments in higher education must be designed to enhance learning, capture grades, and provide the opportunity for learners to link to their future as well.

Finally, participants of this were so pleased with the introduction of this policy but unfortunately only to be carried out for a brief moment. McArthur (2017) calls it an act of forgiveness that “offers a supportive path between present and potential achievement. It is particularly important in the context of higher education because the knowledge we are – or should – be dealing with is complicated, contested and dynamic”.

These interventions must be discussed further with the relevant stakeholders, and necessary details can then be added to the policy practice of the teachers. As mentioned earlier, policies must be practice-theory relevant.

5.6.2 Learning outcomes must stay constructive

This study challenges all HEIs to construct engaging and authentic assessment tasks in addition to focusing on linking learning objectives to outcomes. In other words, HEIs are urged to ensure learning outcomes stay constructive. Managing the challenge of large classes and developing meaningful and relevant assessment tasks for students are the driving forces (determinant) behind this plan for embracing change.

The first theoretical implication is to rethink authentic assessment. Instead of just referring to authentic assessment for real-life scenarios, perhaps HEI can start providing more inclusive forms of assessment procedures, with the focus not on the work but on the student's relationship to the task (McArthur, 2022). Students are provided with a greater opportunity to create meaning to the work in which they are engaging when assessment assignments are tied to students' relationships with the tasks they are completing. This thus connects to the concept of evaluative judgement (Boud et al., 2018a), as well as sustainable assessment (Boud, 2000).

Second, HEIs need to take large classes seriously because they change how assessments and feedback are designed. Larger classes are one of the consequences of massification in higher education, which has a negative effect on both student learning and educational quality (Arvantikas, 2013; Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Exerter et al. (2010) discovered that when the right collaborative technologies are employed, even large classrooms can be interesting. However, using tools or other resources in the classroom for teaching and learning necessitates the allocation of resources. As such, I will conclude this section by encouraging HEIs to use resources for this purpose as well so that teachers can ensure learning outcomes stay constructive.

5.6.3 Develop Feedback Model for Assessment task

This study has opened the door for higher education institutions to reevaluate their current feedback model and develop a feedback model for assessment tasks. Feedback literacy and SSR are the determinants of this change strategy based on participant input.

The first theoretical implication that could be drawn from this change strategy is the suggestion to incorporate feedback into any kind of assessment. McArthur & Huxham (2013) proposed to take every opportunity to create feedback moments. Feedback does not only need to happen after the submission, but establishing dialogue throughout the course for feedback is crucial. Ajjawi & Boud (2018) also suggested that feedback dialogues that happen before assessment submission greatly support students, especially if the assessments have a shorter turnaround time. As Boud (2015) & Boud & Molloy (2013) mentioned, effective learning requires dialogue, which is the most crucial process to help learners identify the link. This dialogue can happen between teachers, students, or peers as long as there is some kind of engagement in the module. Boud & Molloy (2013) described this as a feedback loop that has been closed accordingly.

Although SSR is a factor that needs more discussion, the trend of large classes is here to stay at HEIs. Feedback models must also address academic workload. Feedback model planning is crucial on the teachers' end. They can decide the feedback mode to suit their time and delivery method. McCarthy (2015) compared audio, video, and written feedback methods that individual teachers can explore for their students' needs. Teachers need to understand that there is "no 'one size fits all' feedback model when it comes to assessment in higher education" McCarthy (2015, p.166). Through external (teachers & peers) feedback, students will have a chance to reflect on the feedback. This reflection process is called internal feedback, a crucial learning process (Butler & Winnie, 1995; Carless & Boud, 2018). Another crucial factor that should be considered is that feedback does not necessarily come from teachers alone. In order to achieve the 21st-century graduate skill set, students need to develop learner autonomy at HE (Moir, 2011). Therefore, students also have an important role to play in engaging actively while completing their assessment tasks and during the feedback process. As suggested by Carless et al. (2011), students must have opportunities to familiarise themselves with the notion of sustainable feedback: "dialogic processes and activities which can support and inform the student on the current task, whilst also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks" (p.397).

An effective feedback process is necessary for both teachers and students. For students to act on feedback, the knowledge of feedback literacy becomes crucial. According to Molloy et al. (2020), learners need to develop feedback literacy in order for them to seek, understand and utilize feedback. Learners must understand this is a cycle or process they must engage in. It can be concluded that students are the change agents for themselves. For learning to be productive, students have to take responsibility, but the initial knowledge of feedback is crucial.

Summing up the discussion in this section, the need to develop feedback models where teachers' workload and effective feedback methods to support and enhance students' learning is crucial. This consideration must be taken into account for every assessment. HEIs are encouraged to include this in their policies in order to remain relevant in considering the needs of teachers and students.

5.7 Conclusion

This detailed exploration using the TDE approach is divided into action model and change model. The action model includes the discussion in the previous chapter, which presented the themes that emerged from this study. These themes show the institutional tensions through the voices of teachers and students, such as the race against time students face for assessment tasks, the struggle of teachers to keep assessment tasks constructive in relation to learning outcomes, and the complexity of feedback both teachers and students had to deal with. In view of this discussion, this chapter revealed further the realities HEIs face, which brought about the discussion in terms of the gap between theory and practice, the gap in policy implementation and the need for a synthesis approach in policy implementation. This discussion brought about the insight that critical synergy between theory, policy and practice is absolutely necessary in order to activate the synthesis approach.

The analysis of this study resulted in three change strategies for HEIs to pursue and negotiate further: 1) allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment, 2) learning outcomes must stay constructive, and 3) develop a feedback model for the assessment task. These points for negotiation lead to the change model, as the change model shows the link between the actual intervention and the actual outcome. The following chapter concludes this thesis.

Chapter 6 Looking Back, Moving Forward

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will summarise the research findings of this study in relation to the research questions and share the contribution of knowledge derived from this study. This chapter will also provide the limitations identified throughout the research and highlight the scope for future research. This research began with the underlying theories of Gibbs & Simpson (2004), 11 conditions in which assessment supports learning. This is the spark of my theory-driven evaluation journey, where I adopted Chen's (2012), action and change model to present a comprehensive analysis.

As I reflect on the work I have completed so far and look ahead to recommend future research possibilities, I feel this chapter will serve to do just what its title promises. This study's research findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on bridging the assessment-learning gap.

6.2 Findings Overview & Research Question Responses

I will summarise and connect the study's research questions in this section. This study revealed three areas of tension faced by teachers and students. These tensions demonstrate why learning has faded in the background when assessment purpose is considered. Teachers and students face so many obstacles that they either do not have the chance to engage in the assessment process fully or are unable to do so.

> “students learning does not only take place through their attempting the assessment, but it also takes place when you go back and forth with them (Theo)”

The above quote by one of the participants of this study encapsulates the research findings identified in this research. Learning is in the process of attempting and completing the assessment task. The assessment task must support the process.

The following are this study's research questions:

1. How do the different stakeholders (teachers & students) within a business school in a Malaysian University perceive the ways in which their assessment practices support students' learning?
2. What elements within this business school context hinder / support assessment practices serving the function of supporting students' learning?
3. What are the implications, in light of theory-driven evaluation, for the research findings in the implementation of assessments that support students' learning at this and other Higher Education Institutions?

Research questions one and two are answered in chapter four, while research question three is clearly described in chapter five. Throughout the study, I was able to see how finding the answer to one question helped me find the answer to the next question.

This research captures the voices of the teachers and students, firstly, in understanding their perception of the ways in which their assessment practice support students' learning. By understanding these stakeholders' perceptions, I gathered the challenges they face in fully maximising assessment practice for the purpose of learning.

The perceptions of teachers and students differ in certain areas and are similar in other areas. One of the significant differences is when teachers feel students do not focus on formative assessment because students are lazy or lack planning. However, from the students' perspective, they have no choice. This reveals the first tension, the race against time in which students are always caught up. In other words, students in this study struggle to focus on formative assessment and end up paying attention to graded assessment as it matters more to them. Hence, this widens the gap between assessment and learning unless the assessment tasks are created with a deep learning approach. This brings us back to the point I mentioned earlier: the focus must be more on the process than the end product.

Second, it was crucial to understand teachers’ perceptions of assessment. Teachers highlight the need to review learning outcomes almost immediately when the purpose of assessment is discussed. As a matter of fact, the struggle faced by the teachers in this study is to maintain meaningful assessment tasks in fully optimising the need for constructive alignment. Teachers find themselves understanding alignment that flows from learning outcomes to teaching activities and assessment tasks perfectly. However, they are unable to include constructive alignment to this.

Finally, the area of tension identified in this study is in the area of feedback. This is found to be challenging for both teachers and students. Teachers in this study are overwhelmed with enormous workloads due to the imbalance SSR, and thus unable to provide appropriate feedback, a critical and fundamental feature of learning. Students in this study found it hard to utilise the feedback received due to a lack of feedback literacy knowledge.

These areas of tension answered research questions one and two of this study while opening the avenue to answer research question three. The dilemma or struggle highlighted through the voices of the participants of this study brought about more in-depth discussion in terms of the implications, in light of TDE, in the implementation of assessments that support students’ learning at the institutional level. The institutional tensions revealed a gap between theory and practice, a gap in policy implementation, and a need for a synthesis approach to policy implementation. Through a meticulous inquiry, these brought about three change strategies. The first aspect is to allocate enough time for students to engage in an assessment. In other words, students must be given time and duration to immerse in the assessment process, allowing students to experience the assessment moments. Secondly, learning outcomes must stay constructive. HEIs must understand teachers' struggles and enable teachers to create meaningful assessment tasks. The final aspect is to encourage the development of feedback models for assessment tasks by considering teachers' workload and the effectiveness of feedback to improve students' ability to respond to and make sense of feedback. Table 11 (chapter 5) provides a comprehensive and systematic summary of the findings of this study.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Writing this section helps me to analyse the process I went through to identify the findings of this research. I started with a wide view, then zoomed in, and now, when I zoomed out, I see everything in a different way. I can provide the analogy of taking a beach vacation. The view of the beach from my hotel room is amazing, but as I stroll along the shore, I notice that there are many more elements than just the gorgeous sky and ocean. Buried seashells, tiny stones, tiny crabs, sand art, and even plastic trash can be found. When I zoom out again, I see the entire seaside ecosystem in a new light. Similarly, beginning with the research with the underlying theories of Gibbs and Simpson (2004), the 11 conditions in which assessment supports learning provided me with a broader perspective. However, upon further evaluation, I have seen the difficulties teachers and students encounter in implementing assessment practices that effectively support student learning. These findings facilitated a broader perspective, enabling me to comprehend the gap between theory and practice and understand the reality of HEIs. This emphasises the need to examine policy implementation to close the theory-practice gap.

"If, as teachers and educational developers, we want to exert maximum leverage over change in higher education, we must confront the ways in which assessment tends to undermine learning" (Boud, 1995, p.35). As Boud (1995) urged, the findings of this study add to the existing body of knowledge by stressing the struggles teachers and students face in pursuing assessment activity that supports learning and bridging the gap between assessment and learning.

This study argues that theory and practice need to be integrated to reduce the gap. Through this detailed exploration, this study reveals the need for both a top-down and bottom-up approach – a synthesis approach – in the policy implementation process. Without this approach, theory and practice will continue to stay isolated as separate spheres when the literature proves there is a need for these spheres to integrate. The synthesis approach requires the integration of theory, policy, and practice. As a result, this will facilitate the alignment of policies with theory and practice, ensuring their continued relevance. The following section summarises the intervention approaches in relation to assessment practice that HEIs can consider in order to enhance student learning.

6.4 Interventions Approaches

This study highlights the importance of time and duration for students to engage in any assessment task so that learning can take place. Since students are seen to be highly strategic about their time allocation, teachers must balance assessment strategy by choosing summative assessment with formative characteristics. Providing various checkpoints also helps students to manage their time better. Finally, students appreciate the re-try assessment policy, which may be considered in the future by HEIs. Ultimately, the goal is for students to have the opportunity to make mistakes, get corrected, and apply what is learned.

Teachers must try to design meaningful, engaging and authentic tasks. It is time teachers re-evaluate the purpose of assessment tasks. In order for this to happen, HEIs must address the large student number issue because, unintentionally, teachers opt for more traditional examinations to avoid academic burnout, which only puts students on the losing end. HEIs must understand curriculum design planning is not only about mapping learning outcomes but also making sure this mapping leads to meaningful assessment tasks. HEI should also focus on aligning assessment to the learning outcomes constructively.

This study also calls for HEI to empower students with helpful feedback, which can be achieved when the feedback model is implemented for every assessment. Assessment design with no opportunity for feedback is merely carried out for testing purposes. Hence, proper feedback planning is crucial even for every kind of assessment where perhaps feedback before submission can be included.

Finally, students must make sense of the feedback they receive and attend to it. Students are always expected to take responsibility for their learning and attend to the feedback. However, we should not underestimate the importance of student feedback literacy to help students understand the feedback given, commit to the process, and regulate their emotions when feedback is given. When there is a regular feedback loop and feedback dialogues, students will better understand how to utilise feedback. This can only happen when the teachers create a regular opportunity for feedback loops and dialogues.

These intervention approaches are based on teachers and students' voices and also in view of theoretical considerations. These interventions are the urgent need of people who put assessment related policies into practice. Their voices must be heard so HEIs can remain theory-practice relevant to assist learning to take centre stage of assessment while not disregarding other purposes of assessment.

6.5 Limitations Directions for Future Research

Firstly, as an insider researcher, I have better accessibility towards the resources (SBS's teachers, students, documents) available. However, since I am from a different school, I would still be considered an outsider researcher by my fellow colleagues from SBS. I had ethical dilemmas in terms of identifying student participants, which I overcame by using gatekeepers to obtain contact information. I also remembered not to allow my subjectivity as an insider researcher to influence my view of the information shared by the participants of this study. Hence, for future research, I recommend researchers carry out the research where one might be considered as an outsider researcher. This will help to achieve reflexivity and objectivity quickly.

Secondly, this is a case study research that is limited to one particular school in the institution. However, recognizing the complexities of the assessment practice, a case study type of research must be carried out. Then, richer and more complete data can be obtained. In this study, I only focused on teachers and students, which can be extended to heads of departments and internal quality assurance bodies for better understanding.

Finally, this research took an approach of qualitative study. Hence, only a small number of participants were selected. In the future, a mixed-method approach can be used to balance the depth and breadth of participants.

6.6 Final Thoughts

This study aimed to bridge the assessment and learning gap where learning is seen to fade into the background among the purposes of assessments. The findings of this study have added to the existing body of knowledge to help HEIs evaluate the assessment practice that supports students' learning. Participants' voices are included while considering the theory and policies in place. This evaluation was carried out not to produce a single accurate verdict but to provide a platform for decision-makers to negotiate further. This is because each institution will make decisions based on its objective, allocated resources, and culture. We know assessment is a complex element in a complex environment, so carefully thought intervention without disregarding theory and practice while also including the views of those who put policies into action is critical. This careful consideration helps to create the synergy between policy, theory and practice to help with the synthesis approach of the policy implementation strategy.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Letter from Lancaster University & Sunway University

Educational Research | Lancaster University

6th January 2020

Dear Christine

Thank you for submitting your ethics application and additional information for **Evaluating assessment practices that support learning in higher education.** The information you provided has been reviewed and I can confirm that approval has been granted for this project.

As Principal Investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer (Dr Murat Oztok).
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to **Dr Jan McArthur** for approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact your supervisor if you require further information about this.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Doherty

Kathryn Doherty
Programme Co-ordinator
PhD in Higher Education: Research, Evaluation and Enhancement

13 February 2020

Ref No: SUREC 2020/002

Christine Shobana Arthur
English for Specific Academic Purposes Unit
Centre for English Language Studies (CELS)
Sunway University

Dear Christine Shobana Arthur,

Research Ethics Approval of "Evaluating assessment practices that support learning in higher education"

Sunway University Research Ethics Committee has reviewed the documents you have submitted for your project and has given approval for your proposed study.

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as per below:

1. Sun U Cover Sheet Form
2. Participation Information Sheet
3. Citi Report

Please remember that you are required to inform the Committee of (1) any changes in your research procedures and (2) the date when the project is completed.

The Committee wishes you the best success for your project.

Yours sincerely,

Assoc. Prof. Kenneth Alan Feinstein
Chair,
Sunway University Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2:Letter from the Gatekeeper

Reply Reply All Forward IM

Mon 25/1/2021 12:27 PM

Yuka Fujimoto

RE: Requesting for the approval to contact SUBS students

To Christine Shobana Arthur

Cc Prof. Stephen Hall; Prof. Steve Williams

You forwarded this message on 25/1/2021 2:43 PM.

Dear Christine,

Dean has forwarded me your email. Yes, it is fine for you to invite the students as the students' participation will be on a voluntary basis.

All the best!

Yuka

Yuka Fujimoto

Yuka Fujimoto, PhD (Monash, Australia) BBus Hons (UQ, Australia)
Professor of Management
Associate Dean – Postgraduate and Research
Associate Editor – Journal of Management & Organization (Cambridge Press)
Department of Management | Sunway Univeristy Business School | Sunway University | No. 5, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Sunway 46150 Petaling Jaya Selangor , Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | Phone: +60 3 7491 8622| Email: yukaf@sunway.edu.my

Appendix 3:Participant Information Sheet

Participants' Information Sheet

Title of Study: Evaluating assessment practices that support learning in higher education

Objective: This study aims to evaluate the current assessment system practiced at Sunway University Business School (SUBS) to understand the ways in which the assessment practices support learning.

Procedures:

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following:

1) An online Interview session that last approximately 40-60 minutes will be undertaken at mutually convenient times.
2) The conversation will be audio recorded. You have the right not to answer any of the questions at any point of time.
3) You may be asked to share sample assessment tasks and feedback given or obtained

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study without giving any reason. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 2 weeks after taking part in the study. No penalty will be imposed for withdrawal from the study and participants need not give up the remuneration received if you are withdrawing from the study.

Risks and Discomforts: It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. However, taking part will mean investing for example 40-60 minutes for an interview session.

Benefits: If you take part in this study, your insights will contribute to our understanding of assessment practice support learning. It will be a good platform to identify what supports and hinders this process.

Alternatives: -

Compensation You will be presented with a RM20 gift voucher from Grab Food to appreciate the time spent for the interview session. You have the option to withdraw from the study at any time before or during the interview and up to two 2 weeks following your interview without giving any reason. No penalty will be imposed for withdrawal from the study and you need not give up the remuneration received if you are withdrawing from the study.

Anonymous and Confidential Data Collection: After the interview, only I, the researcher conducting this study will have access to the ideas you share with me. The only other person who will have access to what you contributed is a professional transcriber who will listen to the recordings and produce a written record of what you have said. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the identity of the participants involved in this project.

Confidentiality of records: Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:
I will use it for research purposes only. This will include (e.g. my Ph.D. thesis and other publications, for example journal articles). I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences (I will attend practitioner conferences and inform policy-makers about my study).

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you) so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your identity in our publications.

Who to contact with questions:

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact:

1) Christine Shobana Arthur at **christines@sunway.edu.my**

Telephone: +6 **03-7491 8622 ext. 3366**

Address: No. 5, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Sunway, Selangor 47500

2) Dr Jan McArthur (SUPERVISOR) **j.mcarthur@lancaster.ac.uk**

Telephone: +44 (0)1524 592290

Address: Department of Educational Research, County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

1. Professor Paul Ashwin Head of Department

   Tel: +44 (0)1524 594443 Email: **P.Ashwin@Lancaster.ac.uk**

   Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK**.**

2. Sunway University Research Ethics Committee

   researchethics@sunway.edu.my

Appendix 4:Consent Form

Project Title: Evaluating assessment practices that support learning in higher education
Name of Researcher: Christine Shobana Arthur
Email: christines@sunway.edu.my
Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 2 weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 2 weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the identity of the participants involved in this project.	☐
4. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations without my consent.	☐
5. I understand that any online interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I acknowledge that I am participating in this study of my own free will. I understand that I may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time.

Name: ____

Signature: _________________________________ Date: ____________

Appendix 5:Interview Questions

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Teachers

1. What are the different subjects that you teach?
2. How long have you been teaching at Sunway University?
3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of assessment?
4. In your view, how does assessment relate to learning? Could you please describe an assessment that you have designed to promote learning?
5. Do you think students have enough time to carry out their assessment tasks?
    a) Why do you think they have / do not have enough time to carry out assessment tasks?
    b) Do you think students choose to focus on certain task and pay less attention on certain task?
6. Can you describe what happens from the time a briefing is done on an assessment task until the submission of the task?
7. Do you communicate your expectations of assessment tasks to the students? How do you do that?
Do you think this is an important element?
8. How do you distribute the assessment tasks across the module content?
    a) What is the determining factor?
9. How do you ensure the assessment task engages the students? Can you provide some examples?
10. How are you involved after assigning an engaging assessment task?
11. What you think feedback is?
12. How do you provide feedback? How do you ensure your feedback is sufficient and useful?
13. How do you ensure that feedback supports learning?
14. Do you have enough time to provide feedback?
15. When providing your feedback, do you try to connect to the initial expectations set for the assessment tasks?
16. How do you know your feedback makes sense to students?
17. Do you have a method to ensure that students attend to the feedback provided and improve in the consequent assessment task?

Students

1. What is the program of your study?
2. Which year of study are you in?
3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of assessment?
4. In your view, how does assessment relate to learning? Could you please describe an assessment that promoted learning? Really understand something that you didn't understand before?
5. Do you usually have enough time to carry out assessment tasks? Why? Why not?
6. Do you choose to focus on certain assessment task and pay less attention to some? Please provide examples of task. Formative & Summative?
7. What do you do when you first obtain an assessment task?
    a) Can you please describe the process?
    b) Do you have time to obtain feedback from your lecturer/peer before submitting the assessment task?

8. Do you think that the duration of time given for assessment tasks are appropriately distributed across the module content? Why do you say so?
9. Do you think assessment tasks are engaging? Can you describe one example of assessment task that was engaging? And one that was not engaging?
10. What type of learning helps you to gain more marks in assessment? What is the most important about assessment? Feedback or marks or combination *What motivates you to try hard in assessment?*
11. Which approach is most useful for learning– reflective task, understanding or memorization?
12. Do you think the expectations of an assessment task is communicated well to you? Do you think understanding the expectations of an assessment task is crucial?
13. Do you think there have been times when you felt "too high expectation"?
14. What you think feedback is?
15. Can you describe a useful feedback that you received and one that was not useful?
16. Do you think it is important to connect to the assessment expectations when your teacher is providing feedback? How often do you obtain such feedback?
17. Can you give a scenario when feedback made sense to you and a time it did not?
18. What do you usually do with the feedback?
19. Between marks/grades and feedback, what is more important to you?
20. If marks are not taken into consideration, what would you do with the feedback?
21. How do you know you are learning?

Appendix 6:Sample initial memo after the interview session before transcription

L3 - Real life assessment

- give the students time - assignment question released much earlier
- assessment - learning is more than assessment
- freedom in answering the question. - learning opportunity for teacher.
- Case Study

explore themselves

- when assessment is being ~~de~~ briefed / submission is important

look beyond

- Year 3 subject - more connection - Real world
- graduates for real world
- we should help them expand their view - (CT) 17min.
- Reading Draft? → is this supportive?

maintaining consistency?

- assignment briefing in front of everyone,
- FAQ - elearn.
- going beyond ~~elearn~~ Rubrics.
- formative assessment - peer assessment
- CAP

Appendix 7:Samples Transcription with Data Condensation

Sample 1

L5

methods matters. And then you think through every stage make it doable for them that it broken down into steps, right?
C: when you design this kind of you know engaging task that is very different from the usual you know assessment like MCQ or quiz or you know assessment report writing and so on. So how is this the external party that you mentioned earlier the stakeholders MQA, I'm not sure of AACSB, Lancaster University what extent it is challenging to you.
L5: Yeah, all of them. Very challenging, because sometimes I'm not sure if. It is always this little bit of anxiety when you submit it for their evaluation. Are they going to approve it? Is it too easy, easy to difficult, you know, and then sometimes they send you back one sentence statement. All approved. No details. I'm like so. Tell me more. Sometimes it's mixed. Sometimes I get detailed, feedback, other times I don't get anything much. Very roller coaster. Yeah, but now we have another stakeholder in a Business School, we have the Charter management Institute. Yeah, my and they seem to want to keep adding on you see all these professional bodies. So it is adds to the complexity. Because CMI wants to see stronger individual component. But that's an issue for the Business School when you have large classes. We tend to do group assignments right? So if you add individual components in the group assignment now you have an even bigger workload. Organisation like CMI would love to see you know like a strong mid-term which is what I've tried to do with some of my subjects I put like individual component and midterm essays. But of course it means more work for me and I have to mark individual work. So if the cohorts are small in a relatively between 50 to 80 students, it's manageable. Above 100, right I'm rushing for time.
C: Completely understand. What about an students perspective? Do you think they have time to complete their assessment task?
L5: I think if we don't give too many tasks. Like say, maybe one individual component, one group component.
If it's a long semester, that's workable. As long as the students maybe stick to maybe 4 subjects. I think if they do 5 subjects might be a bit too much and then one of those subjects or two of those subjects is going to suffer a bit. They won't be able to give their best. We have this broadsheet. We're supposed to fill out every semester, all the lecturers, and all the due dates. I honestly don't find that very helpful because every lecturer sort of imagines the best due date and we all come up with the same due date. So if we stagger it right? They are literally doing nonstop work every week, you know. And I have had some responses from students and I asked them so you know it's all all your assignments done. You know, can you focus on preparing for the for the final exam? No, I still have another group project due and it's a final week, so it's like one week after another boom boom boom boom, boom. So I also feel for them. And then we have all the formative, non graded sort of learning activities, users and so on. we encourage them to do. I don't think it's because they don't want to do, I think they just, they can't do.
C: Yeah correct, yeah I I completely agree. I know what you're saying. And and at one point I was even thinking of integrated assessment.
L5: We've actually talked. About this at Subs as well. Like we make them do one big overall investigation project, very hands-on mix our hands-on plus research. And then every lecturer access the different aspects. Are you do operation and and all that, but it hasn't materially materialized yet. Oh, and now we're moving to the new right so called block teaching. I don't know why that's gonna do to actual learning.

Christine Shobana Arthur
Adding professional bodies, only adds to complexity. Some professional bodies wants to see stronger individual component so there are larger classes like in SUBS, there are even bigger workload especially if there are more than q00

Christine Shobana Arthur
L5 think students are constantly busy, even though lecturers fill in a broadsheet to estimate and don't pack students with all the assignments at one point, students are constantly busy, like every week.

Christine Shobana Arthur
L5 says students then tend to focus on Summative assessment and ignore formative assessment. – this also connects to what some lecturers say about formative assessment. – can be linked to the need of itergrated assessment.

Sample 2

C1: Alright. That is interesting when you say understanding the assessment task, how do you think you understand. Do you think the lecturer has to communicate the expectation to you for you to understand the task?
S1: Yes, because when my lecturer tells me I want this to be done for a purpose for Marketing I want this to be done because you know how to segment the target market so I know what I should do so I'm not just following the instruction and write everything that's required but I know what is the purpose and how to put it in practice.
C: so when your lecturer sets the expectation, gives you briefing of assignment, is that sufficient or do you still have to look at assignment prompt or do you still have look at the marking criteria to understand the expectation?
S1: Normally, I don't think it is sufficient because I have read the every overview, the recording and then I have to search something and then I have to look at the marking scheme, I will list down every criteria, that is mentioned in each file.

Christine Shobana Arthur
S1 says the expectation of lecturer alone is not sufficient, students need to also play his/her role in understanding the assessment - Teacher designs the assessment, students play his/her role as well so assessment supports learning. S1 mentions the aspects she covers.

C: In order to understand the expectation?
S1: Yeah
C: Do you think there have been times where when the expectation is too high?
S1: Yes, sometimes the expectation is too high... I sometimes am not sure, I'm confused that, I don't know whether I'm on the right track, and when I ask the lecturer they confirmed that it is alright but for example Marketing we know that we want to do BCG matrix but the purpose is not taught to us because we don't know how... we do the BCG matrix but we don't need to explain in paragraphs so we are not sure why we need to do it without explaining it.

Christine Shobana Arthur
S1 still feels without understand the purpose of assessment, she feels she doesn't understand why the assessment is being carried out; Designing appropriate assignment is crucial in order to make it engaging for students

C: so when you are doing the assessment task itself you sometimes feel there is a gap sometimes and there is gap between what you are doing and the expectation, perhaps?
S1: Yes
C: So at that point of time, I guess you will ask your lecturer, right?
S1: So we will normally just ask, they are very helpful so they will confirm anytime.
C: So what about assessment and feedback cannot be separated. So what do you think feedback is?
S1: Feedback is very important because it is for my improvement because when I do something wrong I would expect you tell me what I should improve in the future so I can remember it because when we do something wrong it is easier to remember but sometimes many assignments comeback without any feedback so it is very hard for me to know why I get this mark and how should I improve it.

Christine Shobana Arthur
S1 says many assignment come with No feedback- hard to understand marks and to know where to improve - definitely no support for learning

C: So at that point of time do you go back to your lecturer to ask or you just leave it be?
S1: Normally we will leave it be. I thought it was a normal thing that we didn't get feedback until this semester some lecturers give us some feedback.
C: Oh really? Let me tell you should get feedback for the assessments except for final exam that happens at the end of the sem, Perhaps you don't get feedback.
S1: I'm starting to get feedback but for the first year, I did not get anything.

Christine Shobana Arthur
S1 thought it was normal not to receive feedback - One whole year of no feedback

C: ahh ok ok alright (I was very surprised at this point). Can you describe a useful feedback that you received and one not so useful?
S1: Useful feedback is the resume that told me to complete two pages and just dont leave it blank and for Marketing the lecturer put details like in one paragraph, why should you put in, is good or which part should you emphasis on.
C: oh ok that kind of detailed feedback is useful. Anything that is not useful?
S1: Yes, like adjectives. My organisation behaviour assessment came back with feedback like good analysis. I'm very motivated but I'm not sure where else I can improve so it is not full marks so I want to improve.

Christine Shobana Arthur
S1 mentioned that not so useful feedback comes with very short description and no explanation on improvement. This is the of feedback that doesn't really makes sense

C: So when it is not full marks and you get one word feedback, you are not sure what went wrong. Yes, that is not useful. Can I say it is similar to not getting feedback?
S1: Hmm... good is very motivating so it's ok

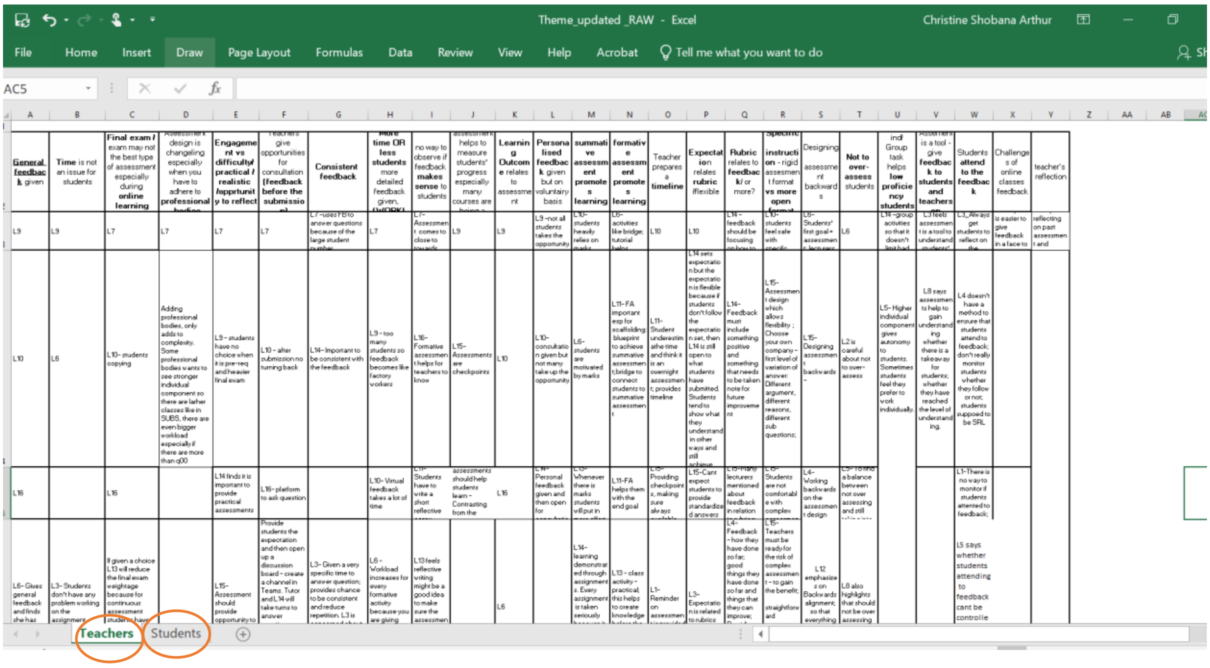
Appendix 8:Policy on Re-Sit

Policy on Re-sit	• A re-sit is an opportunity to make another attempt at the failed assessment component of the subject (such as sit for another written examination or re-submit coursework) following a marginal failure (30% - 39%) or a component failure.
	
	• A re-sit may be considered under the following circumstances:
	  ◦ Marginal failure in subjects where the assessment is fully based on coursework (applicable only to students from intakes before March 2017).
	  ◦ A student who marginally failed a subject, where it is not required to pass all assessment components, and who have attained an overall subject mark that is no more than 10% below the required subject passing mark, may re-sit the one or more failed assessment components required to attain the overall passing mark.
	  ◦ Students who fail a subject due to component failure in a subject where it is required for all components to be passed (see J1.3) will be offered the opportunity to re-sit the failed component(s), providing that the total mark for all assessment components combined is equivalent to a marginal subject failure, that is the first subject failure mark is no more than 10% below the required subject passing mark. The subject marks after a re-sit are calculated from the total of the marks achieved for the previously passed component(s) and the marks for any component(s)that are reassessed. Components may be passed at different times and do not need to be passed in the same assessment cycle.
	  ◦ Students with one or two marginal subject failures from the final semester of study and who have no other outstanding reassessment.

Exceptions during April-June 2020 (MCO)	• Students who fail a subject in **April-July 2020** semester will be given the opportunity to re-sit or resubmit a coursework component in the first instance unless student request to repeat the subject or PAB at its discretion require student to repeat due to poor attendance or engagement.
Exceptions during August 2020 (CMCO)	• Unless prohibited by professional body and except where an irretrievable fail has been awarded as a result of malpractice, students who fail a subject undertaken in the August 2020 semester may be given the opportunity to retry the assessment for any component or all of the subject that has been failed. The opportunity to retry the assessment in any subject which has been failed for the **August 2020** semester assessment cycle is regardless of the number of previous attempts made in the subject. The retry will not be counted as an additional re-sit or new attempt and will be deemed as another try at the same assessment attempt. This means that a successful retry will be recorded as the only assessment in the August 2020 semester assessment cycle.

Appendix 9: Example of Data Display

Sample 1



Sample 2