



## DEVELOPMENT AND DATAMETRIC PROPERTIES OF A SCALE MEASURING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT ENVIRONMENT

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*Each classroom has its own assessment environment perceived by the students and springs from the teacher's assessment practices. Although students' perceptions of the assessment environment may influence their achievement-related outcomes, little attention has been given to the measurement of perceived classroom assessment environment. This study reports on the development and datametric properties of a scale measuring students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment. A total of 450 students enrolled in the tenth grade English language classes at Muscat public schools in Oman completed the scale. Results yielded two subscales of the perceived classroom assessment environment: learning-, and performance-oriented environments. The correlations between them suggested that they represented unique aspects of the classroom assessment environment as perceived by the students. Additional validity evidence was obtained through gender differences and correlations of the subscales scores with the total scores received in the subject at end of the semester. Reliability analyses showed that the subscales' scores had relatively moderate levels of internal consistency. Implications and recommendations for classroom instruction and assessment as well as for future research are discussed.*

Key Words: classroom assessment, assessment environment, students' perceptions, scale development, validity, reliability

### INTRODUCTION

Students are exposed to a variety of assessment activities in the classroom. Educators have long recognized that the activities presented in the classroom communicate important messages to students about what is emphasized there, which in turn may lead to different patterns of achievement-related outcomes (Ames, 1992b; Ames & Archer, 1988; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001, 2002). Ames (1992a) noted that the following classroom assessment practices are

likely to elicit positive patterns of beliefs, affects, and behaviors in students: (a) designing assessment tasks that include challenge, variety, novelty, and active involvement; (b) giving students opportunities to make choices and decisions in the assessment process; (c) conducting assessment practices that are private, assess progress, improvement, and mastery, and avoid social comparisons; and (d) allowing for time on the assessment task to vary with the nature of the task and student needs. These practices are typically initiated by the classroom teacher. The overall sense or meaning that students make out of the various classroom assessment events constitutes the classroom assessment environment (Brookhart & DeVoge, 1999). Brookhart and her colleagues pointed out that each classroom has its own “assessment ‘character’ or environment” perceived by the students and springs from the teacher’s classroom assessment practices (Brookhart, 2004, p. 444; Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003).

The concept of classroom assessment environment was first introduced by Stiggins and Conklin (1992) as a result of their observations of the assessment practices of four teachers in three sixth grade classrooms. According to Stiggins and Conklin (1992), the classroom assessment environment included eight key elements. These were assessment purposes, assessment methods, criteria for selecting the assessment methods, quality of assessment, feedback on assessment results, teacher’s assessment background and preparation, teacher’s perception of students, and assessment policy (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). Given that of interest in the classroom environment research are “students’ perceptions of the meaning” of the classroom assessment practices (Ames, 1992b, p. 264), Stiggins and Conklin’s (1992) conceptualization of the classroom assessment environment, as might be noted, centered more on teachers’ practices than on students’ perceptions of these practices (Brookhart & Durkin, 2003). As such, based on a synthesis of classroom assessment and motivation literature, Brookhart (1997) developed a theoretical framework for the role of classroom assessment in student motivation and achievement. In this framework, classroom assessment environment was construed as a classroom context experienced by students as the teacher establishes assessment purposes, assigns assessment tasks, sets performance criteria and standards, gives feedback, and monitors outcomes (Brookhart, 1997). For example, what do students think about the assessment tasks, assessment feedback, and assessment standards and criteria as aspects of the classroom assessment environment established by the teacher in the class? Do students think that these aspects of the classroom assessment environment as motivating them to learn and master

the content materials of the subject or discouraging learning and mastery pursuits?

Building on Brookhart's (1997) theoretical model and other motivational literature, McMillan and Workman (1998) have illustrated how particular assessment and grading practices increase or decrease student motivation. Specifically, McMillan and Workman (1998) explained that the following assessment practices may enhance student motivation to learn (pp. 22 – 23): (a) being clear about how learning will be evaluated, (b) providing specific feedback following an assessment activity, (c) using mistakes to show students how learning can be improved, (d) using moderately difficult assessments, (e) using many assessments rather than a few major ones, (f) using authentic assessment tasks, (g) using preestablished scoring criteria for evaluating student work, (h) providing incremental assessment feedback, and (i) providing attainable grading criteria prior to administering the assessment task. Along similar lines, Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) described four conditions that together may foster positive motivational patterns for students. These conditions stated that classroom assessments should focus on clear purposes, provide accurate reflections of achievement, provide frequent descriptive feedback on work improvement rather than judgmental feedback, and involve students in the assessment process (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).

In light of these educational perspectives, students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment have been thought to influence their motivational beliefs and achievement (Ames, 1992b; Brookhart, 1997) and as such it seems reasonable to argue that student perceived classroom assessment environment should deserve recognition and investigation as a valuable construct. With the exception of Church, Elliot, and Gable (2001), Dorman and Knightley (2006), and Wang (2004) studies, the measurement of student perceived classroom assessment environment was not quite clear in studies examining students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment (e.g., Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003; Brookhart & DeVoge, 1999; Brookhart & Durking, 2003) thereby making it difficult to draw inferences about the classroom assessment environment as perceived by students. In an effort to validate these inferences, the present study reports on the development and datametric properties of a scale measuring students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment.

**Purposes of the Study**

The purposes of this study were to report on the development and datametric properties of a scale measuring students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment. The study would provide information regarding its construct validity by means of factor structure and gender differences, present evidence concerning the reliability, and provide preliminary data regarding its criterion-related validity in terms of the correlations of the subscales' scores with the total scores received in the subject at the end of the semester.

**METHOD****Participants and Procedures**

The participants in this study were 450 Omani tenth grade students (224 females and 226 males) enrolled in English language classes at Muscat public schools in Oman. After obtaining schools' permission, the data collection process took place, three weeks prior to the final exam week, during a regular scheduled class meeting. The students were informed that they were not obligated to participate in the study, and if they wished to participate, their responses would remain confidential. The students were also told that participation in the study would not influence their grades or relations with the teacher in any way. Students who wished to participate were asked to respond to the scale described below and to write their names to enable the author to match their response with the total scores received in the subject at the end of the semester.

**Scale Development**

The classroom assessment literature (Ames, 1992a, 1992b; Brookhart, 1994, 1997; Church et al., 2001; Crooks, 1988; Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, & Akey, 2004; Maslovaty & Kuzi, 2002; McMillan & Workman, 1998; Midgley et al., 2000; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005; Stipek, 2002; Wang, 2004) was consulted to develop 20 items reflecting three aspects of the classroom assessment assumed to be more directly related to students' experiences of the classroom assessment environment. These aspects were assessment tasks, assessment feedback, and assessment standards and criteria. The students were asked to indicate the extent to which each they agree or disagree with each item as it relates to their tenth grade English language class on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Given that the language of the participants is Arabic, the author translated the items into Arabic. To verify the accuracy of the translation, the Arabic and English versions of the items were given to two faculty members in the area of educational measurement and psychology who were fluent in both Arabic and English. A discussion was held with the professors to verify discrepancies between the original and the translated versions. Few editing modifications were made as a result of the translation.

To establish content validity, the Arabic versions of the items were then given to four faculty members in the area of educational measurement and psychology from Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. They were asked to judge the clarity of wording and appropriateness of each item for the use with the targeted participants and its relevance to the construct being measured. Their feedback was used for refinement of the items. The consulted judges agreed that the items were clearly worded, appropriate for the participants, and relevant to the constructs being measured. The final English version of the scale is included in the Appendix.

### **Data Analysis**

In light of the aforementioned purposes of the study, the following statistical procedures were followed:

1. The data were screened for accuracy of data entry, missing values, normality, linearity, outliers, multicollinearity and singularity, and factorability.
2. The factor structure of the scale items was examined by principal components analysis.
3. The reliability was assessed by computing Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability estimates.
4. An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine gender differences on the perceptions of the classroom assessment environment.
5. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated between the subscales' scores and the total scores received in the subject at the end of the semester.

## **RESULTS**

### **Data Screening**

The data screening process showed no missing values and no concern about normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and singularity. Inspection of the correlation matrix of the 20 items revealed that the correlations when taken overall were statistically significant as indicated by the Bartlett's test of sphericity,  $\chi^2(153) = 2294, p < .001$ . Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) fell within acceptable range (values of .60 and above) with a value of .808. Each item also exceeded the threshold value (.60) of MSA. Finally, most of the partial correlations were small as indicated by the anti-image correlation matrix. These measures all led to the conclusion that the set of 20 items of the perceived classroom assessment environment was appropriate for principal components.

### **Factorial Structure**

Students' responses to the 20 items of perceived classroom assessment environment were submitted to principal components analyses (PCA) to identify their underlying dimensions. No particular number of dimensions was hypothesized and the criterion was set to eigenvalues greater than one (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The initial unrotated PCA resulted in a factor model of three dimensions as suggested by the scree plot and eigenvalues exceeding unity. However, based on its pattern of factor loadings, this unrotated factor model was theoretically less meaningful and difficult to interpret. Therefore, the analysis proceeded to rotate the factor matrix orthogonally with Varimax rotation to achieve a simple and theoretically more meaningful solution. During this analysis, four items were deleted because they loaded highly on multiple factors.

The analyses yielded two factors as suggested by the eigenvalue rule and scree plot. Table 1 displays the factor loadings for the two-factor model of perceived classroom assessment environment. Together the two factors accounted for 41.90% of the total variance. All items loaded  $\geq .35$  on their primary factor. The first factor accounted for 29.19% of the variance (eigenvalue = 4.67) and consisted of nine items. According to the content of its items shown in Table 1 and in light of the classroom assessment literature (Ames, 1992a, 1992b; Brookhart, 1997; McMillan & Workman, 1998; Wang, 2004), this factor was

labeled a *perceived “learning-oriented” classroom assessment environment* because its items focused on classroom assessment practices that improve student learning and mastery of content materials. The second factor accounted for 12.71% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.03) and consisted of seven items. According to the content of its items presented in Table 1 and in light of the classroom assessment literature (Ames, 1992a, 1992b; Brookhart, 1997; Church et al., 2001; McMillan & Workman, 1998; Wang, 2004), this factor was named a *perceived “performance-oriented” classroom assessment environment* because its items focused on harshness of assessment and grading as well as public evaluation and recognition practices.

Table 1. Perceived Classroom Assessment Environment Items and their Factor Loadings

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factor loadings</i>	
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
1. In this class, students can find out their strengths in English.	.76	
2. In this class, the teacher helps us identify the places where we need more effort in future.	.75	
3. In this class, the assignments and tests encourage thinking.	.72	
4. In this class, students receive continuous feedback from the teacher about their performance in English.	.66	
5. In this class, students are given a chance to correct their mistakes.	.62	
6. In this class, the assignments and activities are related to students' every day lives.	.58	
7. In this class, the teacher holds us the responsibility to learn.	.52	
8. In this class, the instructor uses a variety of ways (e.g., tests, in-class tasks, homework assignments...etc) to assess our mastery of the learned subject materials.	.46	
9. In this class, the assignments and tests are returned in a way that keeps individual student scores private.	.43	
10. The tests and assignments in this class are difficult to students.		.84
11. In this class, the teacher compares students' performances to each other.		.82
12. In this class, the teacher gives more importance to the grades than to the learning.		.71
13. In this class, there is a mismatch between the learned subject materials and the assigned homework and tests.		.45
14. In this class, the in-class and homework assignments are not interesting.		.43
15. In this class, the teacher's grading system is not clear.		.43
16. In this class, the assessment results do not fairly reflect the effort put in studying the subject.		.36

*Note.* Factor 1 = perceived learning-oriented classroom assessment environment. Factor 2 = perceived performance-oriented classroom assessment environment.

### Reliability

Measures of perceived learning-oriented and performance-oriented classroom assessment environment were constructed by averaging the items on each factor. Internal consistency coefficients for perceived learning-oriented and performance-oriented classroom assessment environment subscales' scores were .82 and .75 as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, respectively. Perceived learning-oriented classroom assessment environment was negatively related to perceived performance-oriented classroom assessment environment,  $r(448) = -.41, p < .001$ ; suggesting that students who perceive their classroom assessment environment as being learning-oriented are less likely to perceive it as being performance-oriented.

### Gender Differences

Research on classroom environment has shown that females tend to report more positive perceptions of their classroom environment than males (e.g., Anderman & Midgley, 1997; Meece, Herman, & McCombs, 2003). Therefore, to provide evidence of the construct validity of the perceived classroom assessment environment subscales in this study, the mean scores of males' and females' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment were contrasted to see if they differ in ways that are consistent with previous research. Table 2 displays means and standard deviations of males and females' scores on each subscale of the perceived classroom assessment environment. Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between males' and females' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment as being learning-oriented,  $t(448) = 14.20, p < .001$ . Females tended to perceive their classroom assessment environment as being learning-oriented more than males. Also, there were statistically significant differences between males' and females' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment as being performance-oriented,  $t(448) = 4.38, p < .001$ . Males tended to perceive their classroom assessment environment as being performance-oriented more than females.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Males and Females' Scores on each Subscale of the Perceived Classroom Assessment Environment

	<i>Males (n = 226)</i>		<i>Females (n = 224)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Learning Environment	3.13	.63	3.98	.64
Performance Environment	2.99	.77	2.67	.78

### **Criterion-Related Validity**

Criterion-related validity was examined by correlating the scores of each subscale of the perceived classroom assessment environment with the total scores received in the subject at the end of the semester. Results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment as being learning-oriented and their total scores in the subject;  $r(448) = .31, p < .001$ . In contrast, there was a statistically significant negative relationship between students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment as being performance-oriented and their total scores in the subject;  $r(446) = -.20, p < .05$ . Differences between the subscales of the perceived classroom assessment environment in terms of the magnitude and direction of the relationship with the total scores in the subject suggest that these two subscales are measuring two different types of the classroom assessment environment.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study reports on the development and datametric properties of a scale measuring students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment. The findings showed that the participating tenth grade students' perceptions of the classroom assessment environment in Muscat English classrooms in Oman centered around two facets: learning-oriented, and performance-oriented. The learning-oriented assessment environment focused on classroom assessment practices that enhance student learning and mastery of content materials such as asking students a variety of meaningful assessment tasks with moderate difficulty, giving them opportunities to improve their performance, and providing them informative assessment feedback. The performance-oriented assessment environment focused on assessment practices that provide students difficult and less meaningful assessment tasks with unattainable assessment standards and criteria, emphasize the importance of grades rather than learning, and compare students' performances normatively. These findings not only parallel those of previous studies exploring college-level students' perceptions of their classroom environment (e.g., Wang, 2004), but also provide support to some of the educational perspectives (e.g., Ames, 1992a, 1992b; McMillan & Workman, 1998) which have tended to theoretically structure the classroom environment around two dimensions: learning-oriented and normative-oriented.

The findings of this study lend support to the literature on perceived assessment environment and student motivation. Specifically, it has been found that assessment environments that are organized toward challenge are likely to

activate the need for achievement, which in turn may lead to adoption of learning goals; whereas assessment environments that are organized toward threat are likely to activate fear of failure, which in turn may lead to adoption of performance goals (Elliot, 1999). Social cognitive theories of motivation are based on the notion that students' perceptions are central to the effect of assessment environment events on academic motivation (Stipek, 2002). As students process these events they develop perceptions about the importance, meaningfulness, and difficulty of the assessment, which in turn might shape their learning strategies, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and achievement goals (Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003; Crooks, 1988; Brookhart, Walsh, & Zientarski, 2006; Segers & Dochy, 2006). For example, when students perceive the assessment task as difficult and less meaningful, and that the assessment feedback is linked to social and normative comparison, they are less likely to have a high sense of efficacy for the task, to approach it with a high enthusiasm, and to employ deep learning strategies (McMillan & Workman, 1998). These observations fit with the performance-oriented assessment environment described in the present study, which in turn could be conducive to the adoption of performance goals (Ames, 1992b). Likewise, when students perceive the assessment task as enjoyable, meaningful, and within their ability, and that the assessment feedback is private encouraging the view of mistakes as part of learning not as lack of ability, they are more likely to have a high level of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation for the task, and to employ deep learning strategies (McMillan & Workman, 1998). These observations fit with the learning-oriented assessment environment described in the present study, which in turn could be conducive to the adoption of learning goals (Ames, 1992b). Obviously, there is a need for more research to determine how perceived classroom assessment environment contributes to student motivation and achievement.

The moderate levels of internal consistency reliabilities and interscale correlations suggest that the perceived classroom assessment environment subscales measure two distinct types of the classroom assessment environment. Furthermore, the significant correlations between the subscales' scores and the total scores received in the subject draw teachers' attention to the importance of identifying classroom instruction and assessment practices conducive for desirable student learning. These include challenging and attainable assessment tasks, use of tasks that are more intrinsically motivating, and providing clear feedback that emphasize mastery and progress rather than normative comparisons (Crooks, 1988). Also, the findings underpin the importance of examining gender differences in perceived classroom assessment environment

to identify which practices are facilitative for different groups of students. Classroom observations and interviews may shed some light on why males perceive their classroom assessment environment less oriented to mastery and learning than females. Overall, the data in this study point to a conclusion that student perceived classroom assessment environment is a measurable construct. The scale may prove to be a useful tool in helping teachers to identify classroom assessment practices targeted at enhancing student learning. Further validation studies might need to be conducted in other subject areas, with other grade levels, and in other countries.

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### **APPENDIX. Students' Perceptions of the Classroom Assessment Environment Scale**

Dear Student

This survey study is designed to identify your perceptions of the classroom assessment environment in your tenth grade English language class. I would like you to participate in the study by completing the survey. The time required to complete the survey will take no more than 20 minutes. You are not obligated to participate in the study. Participation in the study will not influence your grade and your relation with the teacher.

If you decide to participate, please read each statement carefully and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statement as it relates to your tenth grade English language class.

Your responses will remain confidential. No one at home or at school will ever see your responses. Information gathered from this survey are hoped to improve instruction, assessment, and learning in the tenth grade English language class.

Thanks

First: Please provide the appropriate information for each of the following questions.

1. What is your name? -----
2. What is your gender? ----- Male. ----- Female.

Second: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements as they relate to your tenth grade English language class.

<i>Statement</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<i>Learning-Oriented Assessment Environment</i>					
1. In this class, students can find out their strengths in English.					
2. In this class, the teacher helps us identify the places where we need more effort in future.					

<i>Statement</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
3. In this class, the assignments and tests encourage thinking.					
4. In this class, students receive continuous feedback from the teacher about their performance in English.					
5. In this class, students are given a chance to correct their mistakes.					
6. In this class, the assignments and activities are related to students' every day lives.					
7. In this class, the teacher holds us the responsibility to learn.					
8. In this class, the instructor uses a variety of ways (e.g., tests, in-class tasks, homework assignments...etc) to assess our mastery of the learned subject materials.					
9. In this class, the assignments and tests are returned in a way that keeps individual student scores private.					
<i>Performance-Oriented Assessment Environment</i>					
10. The tests and assignments in this class are difficult to students.					
11. In this class, the teacher compares students' performances to each other.					
12. In this class, the teacher gives more importance to the grades than to the learning.					
13. In this class, there is a mismatch between the learned subject materials and the assigned homework and tests.					
14. In this class, the in-class and homework assignments are not interesting.					
15. In this class, the teacher's grading system is not clear.					
16. In this class, the assessment results do not fairly reflect the effort put in studying the subject.					

Thank you for your participation