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Assessment in higher education as a policy implementation issue: A case study of how actors and multi-level contextual factors influence assessment implementation at an institution in the UAE

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Assessment in higher education as a policy implementation issue: A case study of how actors
and multi-level contextual factors influence assessment implementation at an institution in the
UAE

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

Although it has been established that assessment of learning is an important part of quality in higher education, there is a dearth of research on assessment policy implementation in developing countries and how this cascades down and plays out at the micro level. Using semi-structured interviews and documentation, this single exploratory case study examined the issue of assessment policy implementation in one department at an institution in the United Arab Emirates. Adapting Contextual Interaction Theory (CIT) and using multi-level analysis, it explored how actors and contextual factors influenced the implementation of assessment policy. The study found that at the macro level, globalization and the UAE's own vision initiated large scale education reform, which in higher education, was directed at improving quality and accountability to produce highly skilled graduates for a knowledge-based economy had specific influence over the meso level. At the institutional level, a multitude of factors influenced the micro level such as a highly centralized, top-down approach to implementation, the institutional strategic plan underpinned by quality and accountability, a multi-campus structure, and a continuous culture of institutional change. Additionally, the policy was an important determinant which influenced actors in unintended ways. Finally, at the micro level, the study revealed how the context impacted actors' motivation, cognition, and power, which in turn, affected their interaction during the implementation process. The results of this study offer policymakers, institutional leaders, and faculty insights into assessment policy and its implementation, potentially helping with the refinement of policy and understanding of implementation in order to improve the process in the UAE or other contexts.

Keywords: assessment, policy implementation, contextual interaction theory, contextual factors, actors, deductive approach

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Dedication

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List of Symbols, Abbreviations and Nomenclature

Abbreviations	Definition
HEA	Higher Education Academy
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation
AoL	Assessment of Learning
AfL	Assessment for Learning
CIT	Contextual Interaction Theory
HE	Higher Education
UAE	United Arab Emirates
CAA	Commission for Academic Accreditation
MOE	Ministry of Education in the UAE
ASD	Assessment Specification Document
FWA	Faculty Wide Assessment
SCTL	Senior Course Team Leader
PAC	Program Academic Committee
PC	Program Coordinator
DC	Division Chair
CAU	Central Assessment Unit
CAP	Central Assessment Plan

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the wake of globalization, massification, and internationalization, higher education (HE) in both developing and developed countries have been subject to various policy reforms to advance its quality, efficiency, and effectiveness. Moreover, over the last decade, to safeguard and hold institutions accountable for the quality of education, many countries have developed comprehensive systems to assess the quality of HE. For example, in many European countries there are established national systems for oversight (Brennan & Shah, 2000) while in countries like the United States (U.S.) (El-Khawas, 2005) and Canada it is supervised at the state or provincial level. In response to reforms and oversight, institutions have changed and initiated new and also refined existing institutional policies and practices. Perhaps one lesser known area where there has been attempts to improve quality in HE is in the area of assessment, through the development of robust institutional assessment policies to assess student learning at the course level. This has been done, not only in light of increasing emphasis in recent years on accountability, standards, measurement, and performativity (Broadfoot, 1999; Coates, 2015), but within the current context where there is an understanding that assessment contributes to and fosters student learning (Bryan & Clegg, 2019; Leathwood, 2005).

Over the past decade, paralleling the rest of the world, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government and HE sector have formulated and implemented a number of policy reforms to improve the quality of education. The different policy changes were instigated by the central government, recognizing that improvements were necessary in order to remain economically competitive in the global economy in the post-oil-boom. While there exists both public and private institutions in the UAE, the public HE system responded directly to national educational policy developments, aligning programs with national economic policy whilst improving various existing policies and processes. As part of this effort, public institutions made a concerted effort to improve institutional teaching and learning in the

UAE. Consequently, to improve the quality of teaching and learning, some institutions have formulated robust assessment policies to assess student learning outcomes in programs because it is widely recognized that assessment is one of the most important factors effecting student learning (Bryan & Clegg, 2019; Coates, 2015). Indeed, it offers institutions opportunities to showcase education activity and performance (Coates & Richardson, 2012). However, given its relatively short history as a country, little is known about assessment or policy implementation in HE in the UAE.

This qualitative inquiry employed a single embedded exploratory case study to explore the implementation of assessment policy in a HE context in the UAE. This study sought to explore how actors and surrounding contextual factors influence the implementation of assessment policy at Latifa University (Latifa is a pseudonym) in the UAE. It provided insights into implementation of assessment in this new era of assessment reform and accountability which theorizes that assessment of learning outcomes should be geared towards student learning to improve the quality of learning rather than it just being used as a tool to measure and evaluate academic performance. Moreover, this study addressed the general dearth of research of the implementation of institutional assessment policy in HE in general, and more specifically in developing countries like the UAE. The UAE offers a unique context because there is currently an intense focus on quality due to increased government accountability through public accreditation agencies, in addition to a more conscious effort being made by government institutions to have their programs accredited by foreign organizations to confirm the quality of their institutions.

Background

In recent years, thoughts on assessment of student learning outcomes have changed in HE, and undergoing what has been referred to as an “assessment movement” (Banta & Palombo, 2015; Ewell, 2009; Katz, 2010). This movement occurred as a result of a changing higher educational landscape, where quality and accountability are at the forefront of reform. In addition, this has transpired in

response to curriculum changes due to changing theories on learning, and larger forces such as globalization and massification, which are influencing the HE system.

The assessment movement concentrated on approaches to assessment and asserted that student learning should be a fundamental part of assessment in HE. It emphasized that assessment should be designed in ways that contributes to and promotes student learning within programs and courses, and not just measure students' learning (Carless, 2007). Researchers contend methods can be implemented at various points during the assessment process that can change assessment from measuring student learning to also contributing to it. Consequently, it plays a significant part in improving the quality of learning and the quality of education (Carless, 2007; Pereira et al., 2015; Shepard, 2000).

As a result of changing thoughts on teaching and learning, policy directing assessment of student learning outcomes has also evolved in HE. However, despite the evolution and the proliferation of assessment policy, recent studies suggest that practices have not changed in HE (Coates, 2015; Deepwell & Benfield, 2012; Hutching, 2010). Today, institutions still appear to focus on summative assessment and utilize traditional pen and paper examinations to determine student knowledge (Carless et al., 2010; Duncan & Buskirk-Cohen, 2011; Postareff et al., 2012) which fails to facilitate student learning. Therefore, if this is the case in developed countries, what is the state of implementation of assessment policy in developing countries? This study examines the implementation of assessment at an institution in the UAE where little is known about the quality of assessment and education in HE.

In order to understand how assessment was implemented at an institution in the UAE, it was paramount to investigate key policy actors' involvement in the implementation process at the micro level, as well as the meso and macro level context because policy is transmitted and interpreted across multiple levels. At the micro level play, faculty play a crucial role in translating, formulating, and implementing sub-processes and sub-policies, ultimately influencing the outcomes of the policy. In light

of this, the study examined the motivations, cognition, and beliefs of central policy actors at the micro level to understand how their perspectives have translated into specific actions and responses which influence assessment implementation at the ground level. For example, a faculty's motivation, cognition, and power during implementation of assessment can potentially influence what is assessed, how students are assessed, the types of assessment that are used, whether they engage with a variety of assessment types, and if assessment is geared towards learning. Moreover, faculty's beliefs, motivation, values, and understanding of assessment policy "could have a significant impact on whether or not intended educational outcomes are achieved" (Fletcher et al., 2013, p.121).

Although faculty are the main actors in the assessment of student learning outcomes and their motivation, cognition, and power/capacity may be crucial factors, faculty do not work in a bubble so it is important to look beyond the micro level. It would seem that assessment research has sometimes ignored the practical realities of the institution (meso level), and the broader macro context when theorizing about the implementation of assessment policy and how practice is carried out. Indeed, there are a variety of contextual factors at the institutional level such as the organizational structure, and policy design which influences the implementation of policies in education (Honig, 2006; Viennet & Pont, 2017). At the macro level, Wall et al. (2014) argued that assessment is influenced by larger socio-political forces, for example, in the U.S. the accountability movement in HE influenced institutional assessment in colleges and universities. Certainly, there are different entities such as the Ministry of Education (MOE) and accreditation bodies along with larger macro contextual factors often serving as important sources of influence over actors' responses or inaction at the ground level during implementation.

UAE Context

The UAE is a small, prosperous country in the Middle East near to Saudi Arabia on the Persian Gulf. According to the latest census figures, it is inhabited by approximately 9.4 million people (Trading Economics, 2019). Historically it had its economic roots in oil and more recently diversified into tourism, trade, air transport, alternative sources of energy, and manufacturing (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020a). The primary language is Arabic, but English is widely spoken and has become the official second language of its country. Although it is a more open and tolerant society, especially in terms of other people, religions, and acceptance of commerce and trade, the Emirati people are strict and devout Muslims, they abstain from smoking, drinking and eating pork, and pray and fast daily during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Their religion impacts the way they live as they see the teachings of the Quran as moral guidelines that they need to live by each day.

Government in the UAE

When the seven emirates, which included Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, and Umm Al Quwain, joined together on December 2, 1971 to form the United Arab Emirates, they incorporated a federalist government. Both the President (Sheikh Zayed) and Vice President (Sheikh Rashed) at the time of confederation believed in federalism, although each held different perspectives on how this would be conceptually implemented. As Al Sayegh noted (1999), “Zayed saw federalism as the only way to build a modern state in the region, and while Rashed was in favor of federalism, he also wanted to exercise extensive power” (p. 35). In order for the federalist government to operate, each Emirate was required to contribute a fixed percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) to the central funds and political power was distributed according to relative size, wealth and population (Al Sayegh, 1999). Since Abu Dhabi and Dubai are the two largest and wealthiest Emirates, they wield considerable political power, which was established at the inception of

the federation. The result is a centralized-decentralized system of government where the federal government maintains control over foreign affairs, security and defense, education, public health, and communications policy while each Emirate preserves powers, including the crucial authority over oil rights and revenues (Forum of Federations, 2020, paragraph 6).

This centralized-decentralized system is reflected in education in the UAE. Individual public institutions in different Emirates maintain control over education policy, but receive direction and funding from the central government. The central authority (MOE) oversees the planning of HE education and scientific research in the UAE, as well as, licensing and accrediting private institutes of HE through the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA). For primary and secondary education, some Emirates have their own “Ministry” of Education office which is under the umbrella of the MOE; for example, in Dubai, there is the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), in Abu Dhabi there is the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), and in Sharjah, the Sharjah Education Council. All of these entities run education at the direction of the centralized MOE, which is based in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

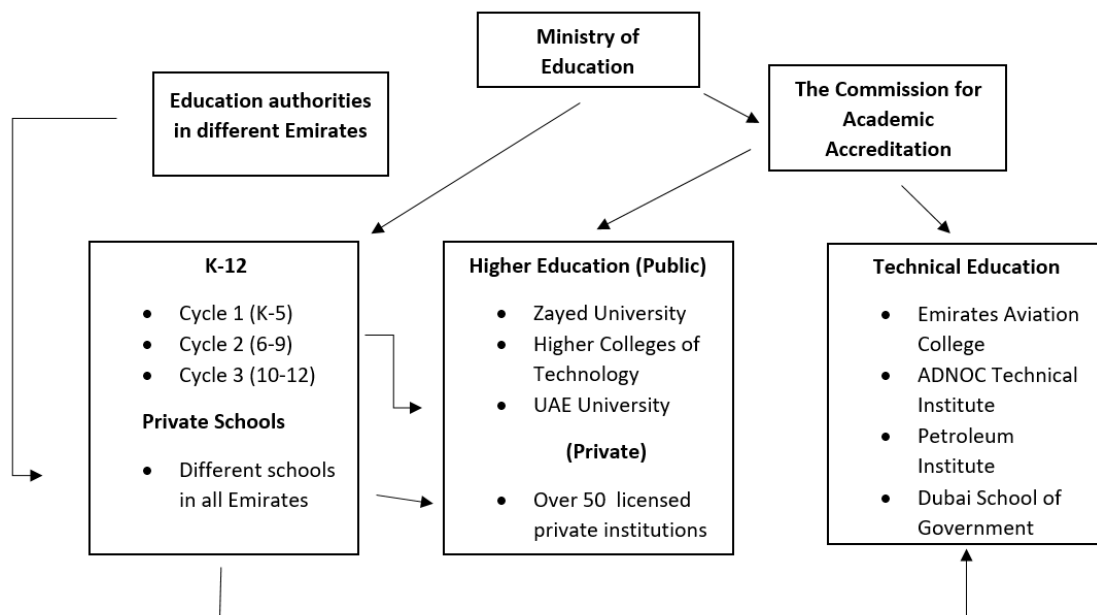
The Education System in the UAE

In the UAE, there are three main sectors in the public educational system (see Figure 1). This first part of the system is Kindergarten (KG) to 12 education or primary and secondary sector that is overseen by each Emirate with its own ministry. Emirati education begins with KG1 at age four, although this is not compulsory. After this, there are three cycles; Cycle 1 – primary education from Grade 1 to 5; Cycle 2, middle schooling which is grades 6 to 9; and Cycle 3, secondary schooling is Grade 10 to 12 which prepares the student for tertiary education and following a new law in 2012 it is now mandatory to attend high school (The Government of the UAE, 2018a). Alternatively, there are many different private schools serving the large expatriate population from other countries in the UAE.

After secondary education, a student can attend tertiary (HE) sector, either at a public or private institution. Public higher education is currently free for all citizens who wish to continue to study. At the post-secondary level, there are three public institutions available to students, as well as various private schools, some of which are affiliated with western colleges and universities. The publicly funded institutions include Zayed University, UAE University, and Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). In addition to these colleges and universities, the government education system has developed a specific sector with technical universities, colleges and training programs that feed the primary industries such as oil and gas, public service (government), and aviation which can be attended after high school

Figure 1

Education System in the UAE



At the top of this structure is the MOE (See Figure 1). The CAA, which is an education branch of the MOE, monitors and establishes laws and policies for institutions to follow to ensure that the colleges and universities of the UAE operate at international levels of quality (Commission for

Academic Accreditation, 2020). Similar to other developed countries, educational policy developed by the MOE in the UAE for HE is unspecified and broad in character, and according to DeBoer et al. (2005), this is done by governments “to do justice to local situations and allow for detailed decisions to be made during the implementation” (p. 98). In the UAE, each school and administration have considerable power over governance, operations, policies, and curriculum, as long as they align their mission and goals with the vision and standards set forth by the MOE and the CAA.

Governance Structure in the UAE

One impact of globalization in the UAE has been the adoption of a westernized approach to the governance of education. In 2016, the UAE government announced the unification of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. As Burton and Warner (2017) noted, “the consolidation of all education ministries aims to centralize the governance structure of the full education spectrum in the country, from early childhood to tertiary, and to increase quality, efficiency and innovation in the sector” (p. 24). Although some authority and power in education was centralized across different sectors, higher education is decentralized in that institutions retain authority over strategic plans and internal policy. Decentralization can be defined as “the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and task from higher to lower organization levels of between organizations” (Hanson, 1998, p. 12). In higher education, although the MOE and CAA maintain control and direction over overall policy and standards, institutions have authority to formulate policies and procedures in different operational areas, including student services, work placement, advising, and most importantly, teaching, learning, and assessment. The resulting structure is a centralized-decentralized system of governance in higher education in the UAE.

Investment in Education

It was recognized early on by leaders in the UAE, after federation in 1972, that education would be a central component to nation building. As President, His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the UAE, noted, “The greatest use that can be made of wealth is to invest it in creating generations of educated and trained people” (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020b, para 1). There is evidence that this investment in education succeeded; in 1975, the adult literacy rate was 54 percent among men and 31 percent among women, and today, the literacy rates for both men and women are close to 95 percent (Embassy in the United Arab Emirates, 2020b, para 2).

Education is (and has been) used by the country’s leadership as a mechanism for socio-economic growth and development the UAE. The leadership’s understanding of the importance of education for the future of UAE can be traced back to the 1970s; Davidson (2008) found that “it was always recognized that higher quality education would play the most vital role in the labor nationalization process” (p. 641). Similarly, current government leaders believe that education will guarantee a highly educated and skilled population which, in turn, will help make the UAE a competitive country in the global economy; in fact, in 2018, the UAE spent \$10.4 billion on education, representing 17.1 percent of its annual budget (The National, 2017). Compare that with the United States that spends about 6% of its discretionary federal funding (Federal Spending, 2017). This spending is allocated by the central government to all educational sectors in the UAE, although each Emirate also contributes a portion of their budget to public education.

Aside from current financial investment, in 2010, the UAE initiated different policy initiatives to further reform education in response to globalization.

The government, under the leadership of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, set forth a comprehensive vision comprised of six key pillars including: 1) a first-rate education system; 2) cohesive society and preserved identity; 3) safe public and fair judiciary; 4) competitive knowledge; 5) world-class health care; and 6) a sustainable environment and infrastructure. His primary aim was “to make the UAE among the best countries in the world by the Golden Jubilee of the Union” (The Government of the UAE, 2018b, para 2) in 2021. Within this vision, there were important reforms dedicated to improving the education system through higher standards and greater accountability. The extent of the success of the reforms was dependent upon whether colleges and universities could adequately provide a quality education that met both the needs of the students and the demands of the workforce. In addition to focusing on education, other critical elements of UAE’s vision related to the economy, including funding for research and innovation, attracting foreign investment, diversification of the economy, and improving the overall business environment.

A reform plan for education was also developed in conjunction with Vision 2021. The plan stated that “the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda emphasizes the development of a first-rate education system, which will require a complete transformation of the current education system and teaching methods” (The Government of the UAE, 2018a, para 2). The MOE’s strategic plan includes eight key performance indicators (KPI) which are:

- 1) Ensure inclusive quality education including pre-school education.
- 2) Achieve excellent leadership and educational efficiency.
- 3) Ensure quality, efficiency and good governance of educational and institutional performance, including the delivery of teaching.
- 4) Ensure safe, conducive and challenging learning environments.

- 5) Attract and prepare students to enroll in higher education internally and externally, in light of labor market needs.
- 6) Strengthen the capacity for scientific research and innovation in accordance with the quality, efficiency and transparency standards.
- 7) Provision of quality, efficient and transparent administrative services, in accordance with the quality, efficiency and transparency standards.
- 8) Establish a culture of innovation in an institutional working environment (Ministry of Education: United Arab Emirates, 2020)

These KPI's were developed by the MOE, the main education arm of the central government and are aligned to the National Policy (The Government of the UAE, 2018c), which identified education as a key pillar to the development of the UAE.

In addition to a specific national educational policy, to improve higher education, a national licensure and accreditation agency was founded in 1999. The CAA currently oversees university and college's individual licenses and program accreditation, although many programs also apply for international accreditation. The CAA provides licensures based on whether standards are met in different areas, according to its own detailed policy document (Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2019a). Although the policies directives are intentionally broad, there are clear standards and directions for student assessment which must be met by institutions in HE (Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2019b, p. 36). Indeed, this reform can also be linked to globalization.

Ultimately, the reforms have been geared towards improving standards and the performance of education throughout each sector in the UAE to surpass international benchmarks. This system of governance and policy transformation has resulted in significant changes in teaching, learning, and assessment. In HE, many institutions have embraced the policy initiatives and set their own strategic

goals to improve the efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of the education that is provided. For instance, many of the public higher educational institutions in the UAE have attempted to reform a number of institutional policies, some which relate to teaching methods and assessment practices.

Higher Education in the UAE

Since its beginnings, Higher Education in the UAE has grown dramatically and consists of both public and private institutions. All UAE citizens receive free tuition when attending a public university, and consequently, the public higher education sector has one of the highest application rates in the world (The Cultural Division of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2011, para 1). The UAE's universities offer undergraduate and some postgraduate degrees along with technical college education, which offers diploma, certificates, and post-graduate diplomas. UAE University was the first public institution established in 1977, which began with 502 students, and as of 2006 it had an enrollment of 14,470 students with 70 undergraduate degree courses (The Cultural Division of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2011, para 2). Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) was the second public institution established in 1988 and is the largest provider of tertiary education. It began as a technical college, offering alternative degrees and diploma programs different from UAE University. The last public provider of HE is Zayed University, established in 1998 and was initially a women's university; however, it has recently opened its doors to men. Zayed is organized into five colleges - Arts and Sciences, Business Sciences, Communication, and Media Sciences, Education, and Information Systems and the primary language of instruction are English (The Cultural Division of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2011, para 3).

Although there have been significant changes and growth in education in the post-oil-boom, as recently as 2016, the quality of HE in the UAE has been called into question. In a recent study, Ashoor and Fatima (2016) stated that,

Despite the many quality and regulatory bodies in the UAE and regardless of its performance indicators in the Global Competitiveness Reports, the state's quality of higher education is still debatable due to the quality of graduates and the level of programmes being offered in some private institutions. (p. 588)

A variety of studies have highlighted some of the problems in the Emirati system, such as poor teaching standards, poor management, low levels of professionalism, and the need to utilize appropriate assessment methods.

Assessment in HE in the UAE

According to Crosling (2013), "Assessment of students in higher education is crucial for the integrity, validation, and quality not only of programmes of study but also for individual institutions and the system overall" (p. i). Universities and colleges in the UAE play a significant role in economic, social, and cultural development. The central aim of educational policy is on producing graduates for a knowledge-based economy. In recent years, there has been wide scale educational reform and the government has paid considerable attention to the quality of teaching and learning in institutions. Consequently, there has been a sharp focus on the quality of assessment, resulting in the development of more robust assessment policies in HE. Assessment policies are important as they convey different information to stakeholders about individual institutions; for example, externally, the government and other stakeholders (public, students, ministry, and employers) utilize assessment data as a measure to hold individual institutions accountable for the quality of education and for funding. As well, it is also an important measure of student's learning in so far as it indicates what knowledge and skills the students have acquired. This data is used internally by faculty members and other staff to indicate how well students are learning program or course learning outcomes which can be used to improve programs,

or institutional policies or procedures. Most importantly, assessment can be used to improve teaching and contribute to student learning at the program level.

Since the UAE has a centralized-decentralized education system, assessment policy in HE is developed at the institution level. In early 2017, Latifa University introduced a new assessment policy document to be implemented by faculty in all departments. In this document, there were general principles outlining the college's conceptualization of effective assessment. It also provided information about different aspects of assessment like control and distribution of assessment, roles and responsibilities, and very specific policy statements on how assessment should be carried out. Additionally, it discussed the purpose of assessment, encouraging the use of a variety of assessments stating that "assessment is a central component for ensuring quality, providing evidence for achievement of student learning outcomes and discriminating between different levels of student academic performance arising from the programmes at Latifa University" (Latifa University, 2016b, p. 1). It defined assessment at the programme and course level and gave critical information about marking and grading at the college. Paralleling other institutions around the world, assessment of learning outcomes was driven by the policy formulated by the institution, although little is known about its implementation in HE in the UAE.

Problem Statement

In any educational system, assessment of learning outcomes is very important (Coates, 2015; Strakova, 2019). Coates (2015) contended that:

Assessment provides essential assurance to a wide variety of stakeholders that people have attained various knowledge and skills, and that they are ready for employment or further study. More broadly, assessment signposts, often in highly distilled way, the character of an institution and its educational programs. (p. 399)

While assessment contributes to student learning (Banta & Palombo, 2015; Bryan & Clegg, 2019; Carless, 2007; Strakova, 2019) and provides evidence towards the quality of learning (Coates, 2015), there continues to be issues with assessment in HE as it has been argued that traditional methods are still prevalent.

Some traditional studies of assessment have not examined assessment and policy implementation together. This seems problematic as the assessment of student learning outcomes in courses is driven by institutional assessment policy interpreted and implemented by key actors at the micro level. Moreover, despite intentions of policies, research has established that there are a number of different variables to implementation of policy in diverse contexts. Understanding the process of policy implementation, which is defined as actions taken by policy actors on behalf of a policy (O'Toole, 2000), is of paramount importance to understanding assessment. In this study, policy implementation is conceptualized as the process of translating policy, in this case, assessment policy, into actions by different groups of actors in a context, which produces both intended and unintended results. The implementation of policy could have a considerable impact on assessment practice, and ultimately, on the quality of learning because assessment policies are interpreted and translated by faculty and other actors in HE.

Teaching faculty are key “actors” in the implementation of assessment policy. They are in the optimal position to have an impact on student learning by implementing policy and utilizing appropriate strategies. Understanding faculty’s cognition of policy, and their subsequent motivation and power towards assessment policy are essential to individual programs, courses, and the institution itself. For example, if the faculty have poor beliefs or a misunderstanding about their role in assessment, this will inevitably affect the quality of courses, individual programs, faculty teaching, and the overall authenticity of assessments. Therefore, in order for any policy to be operationalized successfully at the ground level, understanding how the actors respond (either positively or negatively) to the policy, and to

know to their understanding and to what extent their beliefs are aligned or misaligned to the goals of the policy is essential.

That said, faculty are neither the only actors nor factor influencing the implementation of assessment. In reality, educational policy is transmitted across multiple levels by multiple actors, from the policymakers at the macro level, institutional leaders at the meso level, and educators at the micro level. This study seeks to address “what happens between the establishment of a policy and its impact in the world of action” (O’Toole, 2000, p. 273) by actors at different levels in their context or setting. A number of researchers have argued that claimed that context influences implementation (Honig, 2006; Mthethwa, 2012; Viennet & Pont, 2017). The exploration of the context is imperative and has been omitted from some evaluative studies of policy implementation.

In 2015, Fulmer et al. examined the assessment literature to determine factors that influenced assessment practice using a multi-level model of analysis. Their model was based on Kozma’s (2003) three levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro). In the model, the micro-level is the individual actors who are a part of the immediate context of classrooms while the meso level is the institutional or school level outside classroom. The macro level includes distal factors which have more indirect effects on the classroom including the governance structure and education policies at the national, state, and district level (Fulmer et al., 2015). After analyzing the literature, they found prevalent macro level factors influencing assessment such as changes in curriculums, national and international education policy, quality enhancement systems, and global economic forces. Moreover, there has been considerable study at the micro level and how actors’ beliefs, conceptions, and knowledge influence assessment practice. However, the authors determined that there was limited study of how institutional factors at the meso level influence assessment such as leadership and institutional culture. This was confirmed by the researcher’s own review of the literature of assessment in higher education. Given this gap and the fact

that most studies were done in Western and European contexts, there is a need to research assessment more comprehensively using multi-level analysis, exploring the different levels of influences on assessment policy implementation.

Understanding policy implementation and multi-level contextual factors are important to developing countries. Research can be used to feed into policy and advance developing countries economically, socially, and educationally. While this study is not representative of all developing countries, it is a step towards shedding light on assessment implementation in a developing country. This is very important in light of the movement towards assessment being a key element in learning and the importance of it in improving the quality of education provided in HE. Certainly, for the UAE, this is a critical issue and could provide much needed information for policymakers and educational leaders to improve assessment policy implementation and the overall quality of education. As Coates (2015) asserted, change in assessment implementation “would contribute significant value to higher education” (p. 410). Therefore, exploring assessment implementation in HE in the UAE would provide insight into the quality of institutional assessment, offering a means to overall improvement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to explore how actors and surrounding contextual factors influenced the implementation of assessment policy at an institution in the UAE. The overall aim was to further the development of assessment policy and assessment implementation research. In addition to this, there has been minimal exploration of more significant contextual factors that influence assessment implementation in HE in the UAE. Definitely, given the growth and proliferation of assessment policies in HE, there was a need to study the implementation process, which is a complex and evolving process involving many stakeholders. It is crucial to understand to evaluate the impact of implementation on assessment on student learning because of the marked difference between formulating policy and

turning it into daily practice within institutions, departments, and faculty through a process of implementation. This study offers practical recommendations for education leaders and policy actors who are implementing assessment and also highlighted theoretical and methodological considerations for those undertaking assessment policy research, especially in developing countries.

Research Questions

The following overarching research question guided the exploration of assessment policy implementation at the institution: “How do actors and multi-level contextual factors influence assessment policy implementation at an institution in the UAE?”

The following sub-questions were studied to investigate how multi-level actors and contextual factors influence the implementation of assessment policy:

- 1) What is the assessment policy at an institution in the UAE?
- 2) How do the contextual factors at the different levels (meso and macro) influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution?
- 3) How do actors’ (including administrators, departmental leaders and teachers at the micro level) motivation, cognition, and power/capacity influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution?
- 4) What are the challenges faced by actors in the implementation process in an institution?

Research Approach

The implementation of assessment policy in the UAE was explored through the use of a qualitative study using a single embedded case study methodology. This inquiry was a single instrument case study which concentrated on an issue in one bounded case (Creswell, 2007). A case study is a form of qualitative research that “involves a detailed description of a setting and its participants, accompanied by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns, issues” (Merriam, 1998) which can be used in

quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods design approaches. A case study was also selected because it is commensurable with an attempt to answer how or why questions in a specific context (Yin, 2009). Moreover, this was an appropriate approach to the study because according to Yin (2009) its goal is to document the procedures of a set of events and it “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events ...” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). This study investigated the process of assessment implementation from a variety of perspectives capturing the intricacies and detail within an institution.

Rationale and Significance

The study was significant and needed to be undertaken for a variety of reasons. First, assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, and this study underscored the implementation of assessment policy and the measuring of learning outcomes, highlighting how this plays out in an institution. Understanding the different contextual factors at play, which impacts the implementation of assessment policy and outcomes within an institution, can help institutional leadership and policymakers understand how to improve the implementation of assessment and/or refine policy. By improving the implementation of assessment, this could improve practice either by the further development of assessment policy or refinement of assessment processes.

Moreover, the study divided the exploration of policy implementation into different contextual levels so it can provide much-needed information to help institutions understand how this is being influenced at different levels and what key actors may or may not be influencing assessment policy and practice. The study also attempted to identify gaps between theory, understanding, assessment practice, and policy at the institution. Lastly, this study discovered the current status of assessment policy in an institution to provide insights to policymakers and leaders on how to enhance assessment

implementation to facilitate more effective student learning, and ultimately improve the quality of education in UAE.

The findings of this and the trends that emerged from this research provide a rich, deep, and meaningful examination of one institutions' assessment policy, its implementation, and factors that influenced policy implementation in a department. There may be some transferability of findings that could potentially be used by other institutions in examining how the implementation of assessment is influenced at the macro (outside the institution) and meso level (institutional level) while illuminating how faculty implement and respond to assessment policy at the micro level.

The Researcher

As opposed to quantitative research, the researcher is considered an instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), meaning the data are mediated through the researcher, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. Since the world is viewed through our filters and could have influenced decisions in this study, the researcher needed to describe relevant aspects of self, in addition to experiences to underline any bias that they may have had which might influence or qualify his or her ability to do research (Cohen et al., 2011).

To minimize the impact of the researcher, reflexivity and bracketing were a vital step to completing this study. This is even more true considering that I was a faculty member at the same institution where I examined and gave meaning to several key actors' perceptions and understanding of assessment policy implementation. In this study, I was positioned as an insider and shared some characteristics, experiences and had a similar role to those participants I studied (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I considered Dwyer and Buckle's (2009) work about an insider's perspective and understood that "disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential concerns associated with

insider membership” (p. 59). I began ‘bracketing’ by setting aside previous understandings about the topic and my own preconceived notions and experiences (Tufford & Newman, 2010) of assessment implementation and the policy. In addition, during the process of research, I exercised reflexivity through the use a research journal by evaluating myself and making myself aware my biases and preconceptions which could have influenced what I attempted to understand.

I instigated this process of reflexivity by outlining my own experience which could have impacted the completion of the study. As a researcher, I brought much practical and professional experience as a teacher and educational leader to this study. I have been teaching for 21 years, and have had formal training on assessment. Also, I have a thorough understanding of theory related to summative and formative assessment, having been immersed in assessment practice throughout my career. Unlike staff who come from other industries, or hold degrees outside of education - teaching, learning, and assessment are part of my expertise and knowledge base. Additionally, this was all influenced by my western education, ideas, and values which shape my attitudes towards education and have influenced my understandings of assessment.

One important ideal to reflect on is the value I place on individual goals and choices which contrasts to UAE’s ideal of collectivism. The basic premise of collectivism is that community and family come first before all else, which is underpinned by the Islamic value of giving; therefore, in educational institutions and business organizations group goals are more important than individual goals. The result is people conform to the group and rarely question when decisions are made as they assume it is for the benefit of the group. In comparison, growing up in a western culture, I was taught to focus on and pursue individual goals more so than group goals, and in the pursuit of these goals, it was permissible to question decisions. In addition, there are specific values related to hierarchy and authority that are different. In the UAE, individuals embrace and accept hierarchies of power, showing great

respect to superiors; consequently, they seldom question and often defer to authority. However, as part of my own upbringing in a western society, personal responsibility and autonomy is significant and it is a widely held belief that power should be shared and dispersed because everyone is equal. Although I hold these beliefs, reflexivity and bracketing permitted me to understand and acknowledge my own beliefs while also being respectful to some of the important beliefs in the UAE. Moreover, as an emic observer who lives and works in the UAE, it offered me insights that might not have been apparent to an outside observer.

I came to these questions in my role as a lecturer in the faculty of education at an institution in the UAE. As part of my own studies in education, I came to understand the importance of assessment practice that supports student learning. As a result, this led me to question several aspects of the assessment policy and implementation. More specifically, I wondered how, given their motivation, beliefs, and understandings of policy within an institution, key actors actually responded to and implemented assessment policy. After probing, I came to understand that the problem might go beyond just the actors, as actors respond to policy which is influenced by contextual factors in and outside of the institution.

Assumptions

Since this research is situated from a qualitative paradigm, there were certain ontological and epistemological assumptions. For this study, it was assumed there are in fact multiple realities which can be explored by examining differing perspectives of individuals. It was also assumed that knowledge and reality is subjective as seen by those studied. Another epistemological assumption I made was that subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views from research conducted in the field with the primary aim of this research being to understand the perspectives of the participants of the

phenomenon, and not the researcher's – which is embedded in people's experiences, but is mediated through the investigator's perceptions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Aside from ontological and epistemological assumptions, in this study other assumptions were also made. First, it assumed that the faculty and other key actors were able to answer questions about assessment openly and honestly. Additionally, it presumed that the inclusion criteria of the sample were appropriate and that the participants shared similar experiences or similar phenomenon of the study. It is also supposed that, like any phenomenon that is studied, some findings might be unforeseen (unexpected) and these findings may not be as it initially appears, so the data was interrogated thoroughly to identify the complexities, nuances and apparent contradictions.

Assumptions were also made about assessment and the implementation of assessment policy in HE. These included:

- 1) Assessment can measure and contribute to student learning simultaneously.
- 2) Assessment serves a variety of purposes and functions in HE.
- 3) Once assessment policy is established, faculty at the micro level are key actors in the implementation process.
- 4) Actors influence assessment through their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes and many might lack the knowledge of how to assess student learning.
- 5) Implementation is a complex process that includes multiple actors at different levels.
- 6) There are different contextual factors that influence policy implementation at the micro, meso, and macro levels, which differ according to each context and said policy.
- 7) Once policy is implemented, there are intended and non-intended outcomes.

Delimitations

This study was delimited in scope. This study was conducted in the UAE at one institution and focused solely on the implementation of assessment related to learning outcomes at the course level and not on other forms of institutional assessment or parts of the policy process. Additionally, although this college is made up of several campuses across different Emirates, it focused on one department a campus due to the size of the population and the practical issues with collecting data across a country. This study also delimited to just faculty's and leadership perceptions, beliefs, and conceptions at one specific point in time (over one semester) at the campus during the implementation phase of assessment policy. Consequently, attitudes might differ depending on the position within the college, the point of time at which this point of view is studied, and the stage of policy implementation.

Definition of Terms

Several key terms have been used for the inquiry and are outlined below. These include;

1. **Assessment** - Assessment refers to a variety of tasks by which teachers collect information regarding the performance and achievement of their students (Gronlund, 2006).
2. **Policy** – “is the explicit articulation of current actions or preferred actions undertaken in pursuit of a stated objective” (Trowler, 2003, p. 2).
3. **Micro-level** – the faculty as key actors and their cognition, motivation, and power/capacity (Bressers, 2004).
4. **Meso level** – refers to the institutional setting outside of the classroom, which may have a direct influence on faculty at the micro level and ultimately, what happens in the classroom (Fulmer et al., 2015).
5. **Macro-level** – The level outside of the institution. At this level, there are political and socio-cultural factors or ‘large-scale’ factors within a society and culture that may affect the

institutions or the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, of those individual members that make up that society and those in the institution (Fulmer et al., 2015).

6. **Policy implementation** – actions taken by policy actors on behalf of a policy (O'Toole, 2000).

Summary

This chapter began by providing an overview of the study which included a discussion of the background and context. After this, the problem statement, purpose and research questions were articulated. The next part explained the researcher's assumptions and background, the rationale, and delimitations to the study. Chapter two includes a literature review and an outline of the conceptual framework which guides the study. Chapter three is comprised of a summary of the methodology that will be utilized. It discusses a single embedded case study approach from a qualitative paradigm. It also addresses the research participants, data collection tools, data analysis, ethical considerations, and issues of trustworthiness. Chapter four presents the findings of the study and is organized by research questions. Chapter five offers a discussion of the findings considering both the conceptual framework and the prevalent literature in the area of assessment and policy implementation. The study ends with Chapter six and the conclusion which includes a final summation, implications, recommendations, areas for further research, and a discussion of the successes and challenges.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although there is a plethora of policy implementation research in North America, very little research on institutional educational policy has been undertaken in the context of a developing country in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Moreover, there is scant research exploring the implementation of assessment policy at the micro level at an institution in the UAE. To address these two gaps, this inquiry explored how actors and contextual factors influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution in the UAE.

This chapter is organized thematically and framed by the contextual framework focusing on assessment and policy implementation. It critically reviewed the widely available research on assessment in HE, however, this study was delineated to focus on assessment literature related to assessment of learning outcomes in order to understand the current state of assessment policy and its underlying theoretical principles to understand the framing of assessment policy. In addition, it explored policy implementation theory to gain an understanding of how to analyze policy implementation in order to develop a contextual framework for this study. No time period was selected because assessment and policy implementation have a historical context in some areas it was important to trace this history through the literature.

Assessment of Student Learning in Higher Education

There are a variety of definitions and meanings of assessment in the milieu of HE. For some, as Banta and Palomba (2015) noted, “assessment in higher education has also come to encompass the entire process of evaluating institutional effectiveness” (p. 2) of which course or program assessment is just a part. In some comprehensive studies and books on assessment, the term assessment is used interchangeably with the term evaluation. In Secolsky and Denison’s (2012) book, it is used to mean several kinds of assessment including assessment of teachers and classroom level assessment.

Some researchers define assessment based on students and learning outcomes. For example, Boud and Associates (2010) stated that assessment is “the making of judgments about how student work meets appropriate standards” (p. 1). Similarly, Capraro et al. (2011) defined assessment “as a process for documenting, in measurable terms, the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs of the learner” (p. 1). In this study, assessment is delineated to the assessment of learning outcomes within a program of study. It refers to a variety of tasks by which teachers collect information regarding the performance and achievement of their students (Gronlund, 2006). That said, even the assessment of student learning outcomes can and will mean different things to different people depending on its purpose and social-cultural context. In HE, when discussing assessment at the classroom level it generally has been divided into summative assessment, which has a selective or certification function in society, and more recently, formative assessment which has a social function aimed at improving learning and educational systems as whole (Gipps, 1999) in response to accountability and quality standards.

Assessment as Part of Education

Medland (2016) remarked that the term assessment is relatively new to the educational context, commencing in the 1970s. Prior to this, terms such as ‘evaluation’, ‘testing’ and ‘examining’ were used extensively. Historically, assessment for the most part, was considered something separate from teaching and learning; consequently, the predominant discourse of ‘assessment’ was testing and measuring learning which was something typically performed at the end of a unit or course (Dochy et al., 2007; Hounsell, 2007). In the traditional assessment paradigm, individual students’ role and ownership were limited (Brew, 1999; Stiggins, 2007) and the underlying learning approach was based on rote learning and memorization of content (Scouller, 1998), and the overall purpose of this assessment was to evaluate if the students learned the content; determine if students acquired subject knowledge; assign a grade for them as part of a course; and finally, to rank and compare them against

standards or other learners. Conventional and traditional assessment methods used in HE was examinations and written tests (Dikli, 2003; Scouller, 1998), which included multi-choice tests, true/false tests, short answers, and essays (Dikli, 2003). This form of assessment is referred to in the literature as summative assessment or the assessment of learning (AoL) and generally implies the certification of the student by granting them a grade.

Theoretical shift from Summative to Formative

In response to a number of macro-level contextual factors such as massification, globalization, and a focus on quality and accountability, there was a theoretical shift in assessment. Today, there is a consensus that assessment is important because it is a powerful influencer of student learning. Brown et al. (1997) highlighted the influence of assessment and suggested that “if you want to change student learning then change the methods of assessment” (p. 9). Boud and Associates (2010) also supported this assertion stating it is “one of the most significant influences the students’ experience of higher education and all that they gain from it” (p. 1). For students in HE, it frames and influences their learning in profound ways because it provides the clearest indication of what the institution gives priority to, setting the agenda more so than a course outline or syllabus (Boud, 2007). Therefore, it is argued that best way to improve student learning is not only by changing teaching approaches, but also by improving the methods of assessment in courses because of the value placed on assessment by students.

Another central component of this theoretical shift was an agreement among researchers that formative assessment or assessment for learning (AfL) is essential to assessment policy and practice because it is a fundamental part of student learning. Formative assessment, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, in contrast to summative assessment, has a ‘feedback’ or learning purpose and is comprised of a series of planned activities in the classroom where an instructor and the students use feedback to understand progress such as learning and understanding of skills and content,

and areas of improvement. Medland (2016) noted in her study that formative assessment is integral to the support of learning and the development of the learner. However, the emergence of formative assessment as a new purpose changed the assessment landscape and created significant tension within assessment theory, policy design, and practice.

This conceptual shift originated in different developed countries like the U.S., United Kingdom (U.K.), Australia, and Europe who all experienced it at different times and to varying degrees. In the U.S, Ewell (2009) asserted that the “assessment movement” began around 1985 and had “been stimulated by a combination of curriculum reform reports that called for greater curricular coherence, the use of powerful pedagogies known to be associated with high learning gains, and knowledge about student outcomes and experiences” (Ewell, 2002 as cited in Ewell, 2009, p. 5). Similarly, in the U.K., beginning in the 1980’s a movement towards quality emerged. This was first seen in the Jarrat Report (1985) which recommended “that universities, and the system as a whole, should work to clear objectives, develop performance indicators and achieve value for money” (as cited in Harvey, 2005, p. 264). In the 1990’s, there was even more movement towards a system of quality assurance and accountability in response to the Dearing Report (1997) and public accountability. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was developed to oversee standards in HE, and more recently in 2003, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) was created, signaling an enhancement approach to quality rather than oversight (Harvey, 2005).

In Europe, the Bologna process (1999) had a large impact on assessment in HE. The process was a series of meetings, creating a number of agreements among European countries to ensure consistency amongst nations in terms of standards and quality in HE. Another notable change to the process was the creation of the European Higher Education Area which allowed students to earn a degree at any European Union state university (Pereira et al., 2016). It also produced the European Association for

Quality Assurance in Higher Education that developed explicit assessment requirements outlining “that assessment requires students to be evaluated through explicit criteria for marking, with procedures adequate for formative, summative or diagnostic assessment purposes, and the assessment strategy clear and communicated to students” (Pereira et al., 2016, p. 1009).

From this conceptual shift, a scholarship of assessment emerged devoted to understanding and improving assessment in all educational sectors. Organizations like the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) in the U.K., the Centre for Teaching and Learning and Boud and Associates in Australia, and scholarly journals (*Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* and *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*) emerged and placed the issue of assessment at the forefront of HE. Within this broad body of research two key themes transformed assessment practice; the recognition of the importance of assessment in the quality and the student experience in higher education (Boud & Associates; 2010; Brown & Glasner, 1999; HEA, 2012) and the idea that assessment is a key part of teaching and learning (Boud & Associates, 2010; Medland, 2016) which gave rise to the idea of AfL as part of formative assessment. Today, assessment is split into two main functions – summative assessment, which involves the certification of learning, and formative or assessment for student learning. The two purposes are reflected in current assessment policy in HE in many nations around the world.

Understanding Summative Assessment and Assessment of Learning

Summative assessment or assessment of learning is under-researched, even though it remains a prevalent practice in HE. It has been defined as “a judgment which encapsulates all the evidence up to a given point of time” (Taras, 2005, p. 468). The key purpose of summative assessment is to certify and measure student learning (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007; Sambell, 2011). Indeed, summative assessment or assessment of learning plays a predominant role in determining whether students finish a course

successfully, graduate with a certificate, and in some cases, it is used to determine teacher effectiveness (Seldin, 1999). It is also utilized for grading purposes to permit comparisons between students and to confirm standards are met (Shute & Kim, 2014). As Wiliam (2000) supported “for most of the history of educational assessment, the predominant way of interpreting the result of assessments has been to compare the performance of an individual with that of a more or less well-defined group of individuals” (p. 1). Today, there remains a substantial focus on the demonstration and measurement of student learning due to challenges from professional accreditation agencies (Martell, 2007) and public accountability, where more and more, institutions are required to provide evidence for the investment of resources in terms of “actual student learning and the achievement of specific learning outcomes” (Luce & Kirnan, 2016, p. 75). This is what Knight (2002) referred to as the ‘feed-out’ function of assessment which is associated with summative assessment or AoL and certifies achievement and is an indication of performance used by different stakeholders within the institution and externally.

In the past, the principal approach to summative assessment was norm-referenced. It required faculty to place the performance of the individuals into some kind of rank order. However, this was found to be problematic. According to Wiliam (2000), “it is very easy to place individuals in a rank order without having any clear idea of what they are in rank order *of*”, and moreover, “these assessments are frequently based on ill-defined domains” (p. 6). As part of this discussion, there is a pervasive view that there are inherent problems with the validity and reliability of summative assessment.

Another issue of the practice of norm-referenced assessments is it does not lend itself to the formative function of assessment focused on student learning. Instead, norm-referenced assessments assess content and are compatible to situations where there are right or wrong answers (Burton, 2006). Another criticism is they typically do not allow for specific feedback learning outcomes by teachers; in many cases, it is rarely given or if it is given, it often occurs at the end of a course or programme. This

was underscored by Broadbent et al. (2018) who stated that “focusing purely on the summative purposes is insufficient to enhance students’ learning” (p. 319). There are various issues with summative assessment; this was underlined by Knight (2002) who concluded that that summative assessment was in ‘disarray.’ Indeed, many researchers argued that assessment should also contribute to learning, laying the foundation for the development of formative assessment or AfL.

In the literature, summative assessment is often presented in a negative light or as a contrast to highlight the benefits and need for formative assessment (Lau, 2015). Elkington and Evans (2017), for the HEA, supported this assertion stating that when summative assessment is discussed in research it is “to provide a contrast with formative assessment in order that formative assessment can be explained and its benefits emphasized” (p. 31). The result is that there is a theoretical tension or an “unhelpful binary division between summative and formative assessment” (Boud & Soler, 2016, p. 402). On one hand, formative assessment is seen as the more positive approach while on the other hand summative assessment serves a different and more specific, yet adverse function.

Understanding Formative Assessment and Assessment for Learning

Suffice it to say that formative assessment is the area of assessment that has garnered the most attention in assessment research over the past 20 years. The origins of formative assessment can be traced back to Scrivens (1967) who distinguished the two separate roles of assessment during programme evaluation. He contended that throughout the process of evaluation the purpose of ‘formative evaluation’ was to discover how a program could be improved while it is working and summative referred to judgments made about the value of a program upon its completion. Later, this term was developed and incorporated into the practice of evaluating student learning by Bloom et al. (1971). During the process, they described formative evaluation as the process of helping learners to

achieve mastery of learning conducted during a program of study as opposed to summative which was done at the conclusion of a period of study.

A close look at the literature suggests that there is far from a consensus on key issues such as definitions, purposes, and practice. Black and Wiliam (1998) defined formative as an on-going process in class that adapts to teaching to meet the student needs as well as providing feedback to the students. In their definition, both the purpose and the role of formative can be seen. Similarly, Heritage et al. (2008) defined formative as “a systematic approach to continuously gather evidence about learning” (p. 1). This definition is limited in that it does not account for what is actually done with the evidence. Brookhart (2013) suggested that assessment is about ‘forming’ learning by providing information that moves students’ forward. The different definitions view formative as a process that is integral in supporting and improving student learning and today has a place in the teaching and learning process (Frost et al., 2012). However, the issue with the definitions are most do “not represent a well-defined set of artifacts or practices” which is needed in order have something "useful to implement and study" (Bennett, 2011, p. 19-20).

Despite the lack of clarity and some criticism of its definition, it is believed that formative assessment is essential to the assessment process because it has a key role in improving learning (Carless, 2007; Elkington & Evans, 2017; Wiliam & Black, 1998; Yorke, 2003). Wiliam and Black (1998) in their pioneering work on formative assessment, reviewed research on its effect on learning and found that standards can be raised and learning improved. Their review of different studies claimed explicitly that “innovations that include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant and often substantial learning gains” (Wiliam & Black, 1998, p. 3). Their study, which was geared towards teachers and policymakers, also teased out suggestions for policy and practice (Wiliam & Black, 1998). Their findings on the positive impact of formative assessment are now widely accepted,

and as a result, research today focuses on the implementation of formative approaches for school improvement and has even extended into HE (Yorke, 2003).

Some researchers are less convinced of the impact of formative assessment. Bennett (2011) undertook a critical analysis of the literature related to formative assessment. In this study, he scrutinized some earlier claims about the far-reaching benefits of formative assessment in which the central argument put forth was that formative assessment causes medium to large gains which were based on trustworthy research (Bennett, 2011). He carefully examined various studies, namely the often cited Black and Wiliam (1998), finding that the research was far from unequivocal and that the size of claims should be questioned carefully. He pointed out that there needs to be more work on theory towards ‘action’ – which outlines the mechanisms involved in the change because we do not know how to do formative assessment. Similarly, Norton et al. (2013) expressed concern for the lack of sophistication in formative assessment practice, especially in contexts where research is the primary focus.

Theories of Practice

The criticism directed at the lack of sophistication of formative assessment, research has turned its attention towards how formative assessment can be done in practice (in the classroom), concentrating on models, methods, and approaches of formative assessment. Bennett (2011) noted that research is needed because formative “is still a work-in-progress” (p. 21). He postulated that further exploration is required on what he termed ‘concrete instantiation’ which “illustrates what formative assessment built to theory looks like and how it might work in a real setting” (p. 8). Bennett (2011) highlighted one of these ‘theories of action’ which was the Keeping Learning on Track Program (ETS, 2010) as an example of what formative assessment built to theory looks like in the classroom. It is based on one big idea and five key strategies which include; sharing learning expectations, questioning, feedback, self-assessment,

and peer assessment. Similarly, Leahy et al. (2005) also proposed five key strategies of formative assessment which is comprised of three main processes – 1) where the learning is going; 2) where the learner is now; 3) and how to get there (see Table 1). It also encompasses three key actors (teachers, peers, and the learner) who all having different responsibilities and roles.

Table 1

Five Strategies for formative assessment

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is now	How to get there
Teacher	Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning and success	Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence and learning.	Providing feedback that moves learning forward.
Peer		Activating students as learning resources for one another	
Learner		Activating students as owners of their own learning	

Note: Five “key strategies” of formative assessment, adapted from (Leahy et al., 2005)

This ‘theory of action’ provides a conceptual basis from which to plan and position formative assessment within institutional policy in HE. However, more empirical study is needed into the use of formative assessment principles as a part of practice.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Formative assessment is often associated and used interchangeably with AfL. However, AfL as a concept actually came after formative assessment. It was a term first devised by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) which was based around their understandings of formative assessment. They introduced the term to distinguish formative assessment from summative assessment or what was also known as the AoL which serves a different purpose. The ARG felt that “the term ‘formative’ itself is open to a variety of interpretations and often means no more than that assessment is carried out frequently and is planned at the same time as teaching” (Broadfoot et al., 1999) so they argued it is no longer a helpful term.

Moreover, they concluded the term formative assessment did not go far enough as the comments teachers may make tell students about their strengths or weakness but not necessarily how to make progress toward improved learning (Broadfoot et al., 1999). Alternatively, the ARG developed AfL which they defined as “the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in the learning, where they need to go and how to best get there” (ARG, 2002, p. 2).

There are varied thoughts and confusion about the relationship between AfL and formative assessment. Some see AfL as something that is part of formative assessment. Black et al. (2004) offered a clear and succinct definition of AfL stating it is “any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning” (p. 9). Therefore, AfL is an all-encompassing term and is seen as an updated ‘approach’ to formative assessment, and therefore, it should be integrated into teaching and learning with feedback being a central part of its implementation. In AfL, feedback plays a central role and can be used in two ways; for teachers to better understand how students are doing so they can adjust their teaching accordingly, and for students to understand what they are aiming for and what they can do to achieve these aims.

Despite confusion and debate, there is a general consensus that formative assessment is now considered to be a fundamental aspect of AfL and overall assessment practice. The thought here is that this formative assessment improves instructor practices and raises student achievement (Black & Wiliam, 2009). In much of the literature on policy, the term formative is used or interchangeably with AfL. It is important to note for this study and assessment policy, that when formative assessment and AfL is discussed, there is an assumption that there is a close relationship between the two concepts and these may be presented in assessment policies of one of the same. However, for policy developers, it is

important to clearly define and articulate what terms are used as part of institutional assessment policy and practice as each have different purposes and approaches.

Tensions between Summative and Formative Assessment

Much of the assessment literature examines the tensions that has developed as a result of the conceptual shift from summative assessment to formative assessment. Ewell (2009) explained the tension as a conceptual incongruence between the accountability and improvement paradigms which is, on one hand summative, and on the other hand related to formative assessment. He noted that assessment in HE is often used for both and when institutions adopt either of these paradigms it influences and affects assessment policy by influencing “choices about what and how to assess, how to organize assessment tasks and strategies, and how to communicate assessment results” (p. 3). Unfortunately, the research suggests that summative assessment practice seems to still dominate in HE, despite the proliferation of research on formative assessment. Ewell (2009) maintained “when institutions are presented with an intervention that is claimed to embody both accountability and improvement, accountability wins” (p. 8). As a result, assessment in HE is frequently geared towards summative functions at the expense of the formative aspect of assessment.

Ewell (2009) was not alone in his acknowledgment of this tension, which was deeply rooted in the past and the two paradigms which emerged from the research. In their seminal 1998 study, Black and William viewed summative and formative as mutually exclusive and overlooked the influence that summative assessment has on learning. Recently, Elkington and Evans (2017) abridged the summative versus formative dichotomy and confirmed Ewell’s assertion, concluding that “despite our awareness of the impact of summative assessment on the shaping of student learning, the literature essentially treats formative assessment as heading for oppositional and mutually exclusive list of attributes and practices” (p. 31). They argued that a number of studies examined formative assessment in HE while summative

assessment is often overlooked because it is seen as something old and outdated (Elkington & Evans, 2017). Given this dichotomy which was found in the literature, the question remains does this dichotomy still exist and how about in rapidly developing countries like the UAE?

Researchers have maintained that this dichotomy does not need to exist (Boud & Associates, 2010; Biggs, 1998; Carless, 2007; Lau, 2014; Yorke, 2003). Boud and Associates (2010) suggested that assessment *of* and *for* learning can be both – it can play “a key role in both fostering learning and the certification of students” (p. 1). Elkington and Evans (2017) supported this notion and observed “that all assessment is formative in some sense, while only some assessment is both formative and summative” (p. 42).

As an alternative to engaging in a debate between summative and formative assessment, there was a growing body of research that asserts that summative assessments be used along with formative assessments (Barnett, 2007; Biggs, 1998; Capraro et al., 2011; Carless, 2015; Frost et al., 2010; Lau, 2016). Maki (2010) argued that this can “provide students with a final perspective on their work as it has emerged over time” (p.160). Instead of placing assessment into an either/or frame, it is better to think of the value of both which can enhance assessment by providing multiple measures of learning. As Capraro et al. (2011) concluded, “good assessment practices include both formative and summative assessment” (p. 2) because together they offer evidence that teaching and learning are progressing. For example, formative assessment provides evidence of the day-to-day progress of teaching and individual student learning while for summative assessment it provides evidence of attainment of learning objectives which is linked to teaching. Similarly, Lau (2016) asserted that if you look back in the literature and the initial conception of formative and summative assessment, these concepts and approaches were actually connected. He argued the research “unintentionally” created this dichotomy. This has led new development in how assessment is approached one such well documented example being learner-

oriented assessment (Carless, 2015) which is comprised of three integrated components of assessment; assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning. It also has three key features in that there should be learner involvement, feedback for feedforward, and finally, to think of all assessment tasks as learning tasks which are aligned to teaching and objectives. It is believed that learner-oriented assessment as an approach can support student learning and measure student learning at the same time (Carless, 2009; Zeng et al., 2018).

Biggs (1998) seminal work on assessment asserted that “sensible models of assessment make effective use of both FA and SA” (p. 105). Rather than viewing summative assessment in a negative light, he believed that because it is linked to students’ futures – and invokes strong emotions for learners – it can have a positive effect on students. Biggs (1998) posited the positive “backwash effect” of summative assessment, conjecturing that students focus their learning on what they think they will be tested on during a course of study, instead of focusing on the entire curriculum. He proposed a situation where educators use this positive effect and “create a situation where summative and formative assessment support each other as a powerful enhancement to learning” (Lau, 2016, p. 517). It is powerful because the mode of assessment can potentially influence student’s learning behavior (Gibbs, 1999; Hamdorf & Hall, 2011; Biggs, 2002) and their motivation (Gibbs, 1999; Rowntree, 1987). Gibbs (1999) believed that assessment was “the most powerful lever in the teacher’s toolkit because it captures students’ time and attention” (p. 41). Due to this, researchers have asserted that assessment should be linked to learning and teaching (Biggs, 1998; Coates, 2015; Gibbs 1999; Ramsden, 1992) and not be something that is completed at the end of a course. A number of studies have found that summative assessment can play a formative role and provide a positive backwash effect on student learning (Broadbent et al., 2018; Hunt et al., 2012; Raupach et al., 2013; Trotter, 2006).

Recently, assessment literature has moved away from the summative and formative debate and focused on how to institutionalize assessment processes and practices using different tools and frameworks. The research has focused their attention on bridging the gap between assessment and learning (Broadfoot, 2017; Black & Wiliam, 2018). Current literature demonstrates much innovation in approaches to assessment and how assessment of and for learning can be operationalized in higher education to improve quality at the institutional and program level along with improving student learning (Boud et al., 2018; Black & Wiliam, 2018). This is changing the assessment landscape (Clegg & Bran, 2019).

Current literature has emphasized specific formative and summative theories in practice such as the use of feedback (Ajjawi & Boud, 2018; Carless 2017; Carless & Boud, 2018; Winston et al., 2020), and peer and self-assessment (Carroll, 2020). Other current assessment trends include authentic (Sotiriadou et al., 2020; Koh & Chapman, 2018; Villarroel et al., 2019) and innovative (Jeantheau & Johnson, 2019; Jessop, 2019; Koh & Chapman, 2019; Tai & Adachi, 2019) approaches to assessment to improve learning and assess competencies, especially those which assess and help develop learning skills. Research has explored the use of these assessment strategies and approaches in different contexts and subject areas (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Koh & Chapman, 2018).

For this study, assessment has been delineated to assessment of learning outcomes. There are different conceptualizations of assessment of learning outcomes and these are important in understanding assessment policy. Any policy must be founded on sound theory with clear goals. Therefore, given the findings from the literature, assessment policy targeted at student learning outcomes in HE should include goals for summative and formative assessment which has the potential to improve the quality of student learning. This study embraced both of these concepts as it examined the policy and implementation of institutional assessment by actors.

Policy Implementation

Implementation is a critical stage within the policy-making process. Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) defined implementation as “the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a statute but with can also take to form of important executive orders or court decisions” (p. 20). O’Toole (2000) defined implementation as the processes “between the establishment of a policy and its effects in the world of action” (p. 273). However, there is some who believe that no matter what the definition is, the mere development of a policy does not mean that it will be implemented and success guaranteed.

Researchers assert that the implementation process actually dominates the outcomes of a policy decision and, in many cases, it determines the success of policies which have been developed (OECD, 2013). In a comprehensive study of policy implementation, Viennet and Pont (2017) for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggested that “there is indeed a difference between passing a bill or a strategy and turning it into daily practices for teachers, school administrators and local communities” (p. 8). It is often the case that policies, even though there are desired outcomes, do not get implemented as planned and the result is in both intended and non-intended outcomes. Thus governments, experts, and international organizations have come to realize that they need to focus on the implementation processes (OECD, 2013; Viennet & Pont, 2017) after the development of policies.

As Honig (2006) supported, “in scholarly reviews of education policy implementation research – and implementation research in other social policy arenas – there is a remarkable consensus that the field has passed through three stages” (p. 5). Indeed, there is considerable research on the implementation of policy which has evolved through three generations, (de Leon & de Leon, 2002; Honig, 2006; Paudel, 2009; O’Toole, 2000), beginning in the early 1970s. This research produced rich and diverse findings,

using varied methodological frameworks to study policy implementation, although mostly in a North American context and in more developed countries.

First Generation

DeLeon and deLeon (2002) argued that the first generation of implementation studies commenced in the 1970s and consisted of case studies which outlined the difficulties that lay between the formulation of a policy and its actual implementation. In many of these studies, research focused on how a single authoritative decision was carried out either at a single location or multiple sites in order to understand the various actors and their influence over implementation (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1981). This era was characterized by the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) who highlighted the complexities of policy implementation. Although they offered a minimum amount of prescription or generalizations, the research raised awareness to the issues and problems related to policy implementation to the wider scholarly community (Hill & Hupe, 2002; Paudel, 2009). However, each study had its “own specific lessons, yet in terms of implementation theory, they offered very little” (de Leon & de Leon, 2002, p. 469).

Second Generation

After the first generation of research, beginning in the early 1980s and leading into the 1990s, a second generation of research emerged that was much more theoretical and sophisticated (de Leon & de Leon, 2002; Paudel, 2009). First generation research was void of theory building so scholars in the second period pursued studies that focused on developing theories of public policy implementation. Many of these studies attempted to “understand the factors including implementation processes and structuring these processes to minimize implementation obstacles” (Kohoutek, 2013, p. 4). This second generation split into two general approaches in the implementation process, one school of thought which turned to a deductive approach which resulted in a top-down approach and a command and control

framework emphasizing local compliance, and on the other hand an inductively driven, bottom-up approach, that focused on local actors and their interpersonal relationships at the local level (Goggin et. al., 1990).

Top-down. Top-down theorists were led by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983). Top-down implementation views policymakers as the central actors and focus on the centralized decision. Implementation, in their view, was a highly prescribed administrative process that is carried out from the centralized government at the behest of top-level bureaucrats. Matland (1995) noted that top-downers prioritize clear policies, and when implementing these policies are concerned with “executing what the policy mandates, to reach the goals stated, and with the means outlined in the policy statutes” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 21). The emphasis on centralized policymakers and carrying out their decision can be seen in Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1998) definition of implementation; “the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a statute but which can also take the form of important executive orders or court decisions” (p. 20). The focus of these studies was on the statutes as decisions themselves, with little focus on those implementing the policy and the context in which it was carried out.

Top-down policymakers focus on developing policy advice on how to successfully implement policy. Maitland (1995) noted that top-downers believe that there are patterns that exist across different policy areas and these ‘recognizable patterns’ allow them to give advice that is highly prescriptive which concentrates “on variables that can be manipulated at the central level” (p. 147). For instance, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) developed a model that helped analyze the implementation of policy. In order to achieve success, they postulated there were six variables that needed consideration which included:

- 1) The standards or objectives of the policy

- 2) Resources (especially human resources)
- 3) Characteristics of implementing organizations
- 4) Attitude of implementers
- 5) Communication between organizations
- 6) The social, political, and economic environment

This model linked performance of a policies to certain variables. They argued that, within this process of implementation, it was important to understand and study the obstacles to change. Moreover, there was a need to control the process at different levels and compliance action is an important concept in the implementation procedures (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975).

After Van Meter and Van Horn, other models emerged. Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) identified six conditions needed for effective implementation which were clear objectives, causal theory, the legal structure of the process, committed officials, supportive interest groups, and no undermining changing socio-economic conditions. In a later study, which built on previous work, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989) developed a top-down model which broke policy implementation into its essential features. They identified three key features such as problem tractability, the ability of statute to structure implementation, and non-statutory variables which they argued determined the probability of successful implementation. These factors were further divided into a set of 16 independent variables which influenced compliance to goals within the policy. The complexity of this model speaks to the complexity of the implementation process itself and also, as Matland (1995) noted, the lack of parsimony in the research.

Although the top-down theory has its strengths, there were various criticisms discovered in the literature. One central denunciation is top-down theorists focus too much on statutory language as a starting point (OECD, 2013; Matland, 1995), thus failing to consider previous actions; for example,

anything during the policy formation process. It is important to study the formulation stage since it provides implementers cues to the process and it is also important to consider broader public objectives. Secondly, it has been argued that this approach considers implementation as a purely administrative process by focusing on clarity and precision of language and rule promulgation in the policy. Critics have argued that this fails to recognize how highly political the entire process can be which may result in policy failure. Lastly, top-down approaches to policy implementation focus on policymakers or framers as key actors, instead of those on the ground. This is problematic because it does not detect that local implementers are in a far better position to propose policy because they are closer to the problem and ultimately these "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980) cannot be controlled and they ultimately determine policy on the ground (Matland, 1995).

Bottom-up. In juxtaposition to top-down theorists in the second-generation research, the bottom-up approach adheres to the idea that that policy implementation should be looked at from the perspective of actors at the local level (Berman, 1980; Hjern & Porter, 1981). They criticized top-downers for only considering the central decision makers at the expense of neglecting other actors in the process. As Sabatier (1986) stated, "rather than start with a policy decision, these "bottom-uppers" started with an analysis of the multitude of actors who interact at the operational (local) level on a particular problem or issue" (p. 22). Hanf et al. (1978), in their study of Swedish manpower training programs, identified a number of interconnected actors who are involved in the implementation of policy, using a networking technique to identify local, regional and national actors involved in different areas of the programs. In the bottom-up approach, there is a focus on the contracts and strategies used by actors to achieve their objectives and many studies have revealed that local actors play a central role and can influence policy towards their own ends (Lipsky, 1980; Barrett & Fudge, 1981; Hjern & Porter, 1981). Most importantly, the "bottom-up model suggests that successful implementation occurs only when those affected are

involved earlier in the policy process” (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009, p. 49). From their perspective, those who were most affected need to be actively involved in the stages of planning, including the steps of definition and policy formation. In a study on policy implementation, Hjern (1982) concluded that “central initiatives are poorly adapted to local initiatives” (Matland, 1995, p. 149) and asserted that the success of a program was due to the skills of individuals at the local implementation level who adapted policy to local conditions. He concluded implementation depended very little on the activities at the central or macro level (Hjern, 1982).

Studies from a bottom-up perspective, focus greatly on the context in the policy implementation, often describing factors that have caused difficulty in reaching the goals of a policy. These inductive studies contend that there are many factors that affect the implementation of a policy which often varies from one context to another (Matland, 1995). For this reason, there have been few specific policy recommendations made and led bottom-uppers to maintain that when implementing policy, a flexible strategy is needed to allow for the adaptation of policy to local challenges and contextual factors (Maynard-Moody et al., 1990).

There are different criticisms of bottom-up theories on policy implementation. One criticism is the emphasis placed on the local actors at the expense of the actors “whose power derives from their accountability to sovereign voters through their elected representative, but author of local service delivers does not derive from this” (OECD, 2013, p.19). This is what Matland (1995) described as the normative criticism in which they wrongfully equate description with prescription in the development of a model. Also, some argue that decentralization should only occur within a context of central control. One cannot use street levels bureaucrats’ discretion and flexibility as the basis of designing policy, because it goes in the face of a theoretical approach to implementation (Linder & Peters, 1987; Matland, 1995).

A second criticism relates to methodology (Maitland, 1995; O'Toole, 2000; Paudel, 2009; Viennet & Pont, 2017). Maitland (1995) asserted that the bottom-up approach overemphasized the level of local autonomy during policy implementation. Bottom-up theorists like Lipsky (1980) and Hull and Hjern (1987) placed prodigious importance on street level bureaucrats. When street-level bureaucrats implement policy, it is likely that they will abdicate the goals of their clients and ascend their own in place because of the discrepancy they have (Linders & Peter, 1987; Matland, 1995). Moreover, there are other local level factors at play as well, such as the institutional structure, available resources, and access to the implementation arena which is determined centrally (Matland, 1995).

Third generation

Third generation policy research began in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s. These researchers took their predecessors to task on the approaches they used in policy implementation research. It was based on the premise that further theoretical development and more rigorous research designs were needed. Indeed, prior research was criticized heavily for its overreliance on case study research (Goggin, 1986). Consequently, much third generational research discussed the need for more methodological developments in the field of implementation research. Researchers argued that it was essential for multiple methods and measures, comparisons across different units of analysis, and more longitudinal research studies (Mugumbwa et al., 2018; O'Toole, 2000). They believed that second generational researchers failed to provide a comprehensive approach to analyze the implementation of policy (Matland, 1995). For this reason, during this case study, a conceptual framework was developed to address this issue, allowing the researcher to examine different units of analysis.

Within third generation research, various implementation models have emerged (Barrett, 2004). A key part of the research synthesized top-down and bottom-up theories in an attempt to develop theory related to policy implementation. This was due to the fact that most researchers agreed that there was

sufficient evidence to validate both top-down and bottom-up arguments in the research (Matland, 1995; Sabatier, 1986). The macro world of policymakers and the micro world of actors were integrated to analyze both aspects of the implementation of a policy. Within this new paradigm there have been more synthetic and contingent perspectives on research, although some scholars have argued that third generation implementation has not been realized in practice (Matland, 1995; Mugumbwa et al., 2018; Paudel, 2009).

Elmore's (1985) research, which led to the development of the concept of forward and backward mapping, is an example of an effort to synthesize top-down and bottom-up perspectives. In his study, Elmore (1985) offered examples of how to forward and backward map when designing policy related to energy conservation. Forward mapping is a top-down approach that consists of "stating precise policy objectives, elaborating detailed means-ends schemes, and specifying explicit outcome criteria by which to judge policy at each stage" (Matland, 1995, p. 151). On the other hand, backward mapping is an attempt at incorporating bottom-up theory by focusing on micro-implementers and target groups' via "stating precisely the behavior to be changed at the lowest level, describing as a set of operations that can ensure the change, and repeating the procedure upwards by step until the central level is reached" (Matland, 1995, p. 151).

Another third-generation researcher, Matland (1995), considered the two models (top-down and bottom-up) and attempted to fuse the two implementation models to develop a model that explained when the two approaches are appropriate to utilize. He developed the ambiguity and conflict model that suggested that their "value depends upon the degree of ambiguity in goals and means of policy and the degree of conflict" (Matland, 1995, p. 43). This model is a contingency model in which there are four implementation perspectives based on a policy's level of ambiguity and conflict level, citing three

methods that can be used to gain compliance from different actors,' which included normative, coercive, and remunerative approaches (Mugambwa et al., 2018).

Although research on implementation has evolved, there is plenty of third generation research that discusses some of the continuing issues in policy implementation research. Aside from the aforementioned methodological issues, a review of the literature revealed a number of models that have been developed but from a North American perspective. Many of the studies were embedded in the policy process and were initiated by the central government in certain policy sectors. However, not all policies are initiated and developed by the central government. In some cases, a policy is initiated and developed locally in response to a central initiative. In HE, some policies are developed at the institutional level in response to government authority's initiatives. For example, in the case of assessment policy in the UAE, institutional assessment policy has been developed at the institutional in response to government policies which seek to improve the quality of HE. Policy implementation is done using a top-down approach in a centralized-decentralized system which makes for a definitive context, different than more centralized systems.

Another issue discovered in the literature of policy implementation is translating these models in developing countries. According to Paudel (2009), "the unique character of each developing country cannot be ignored in the policy implementation process" (p. 48). One such example is the level of political uncertainty in many developing countries. Hanekom and Sharkansky (1999) confirmed that the relationship between political uncertainty and policy implementation. They argued that past and recent events can be linked to the countries uncertainties in politics, policymaking, and policy implementation. Also, in developing countries, channels for participation in the policy process is less pronounced, especially in the implementation process where participation at the lower level is very rare, and choices

are often made by central level policymakers. This is all set against an ever-increasing globalized economy.

Globalization and the Internationalization of Higher Education Policy

In higher education, the impact of globalization has been frequently underscored as an important part of policy research. There is considerable literature discussing the impact of globalization and how it has changed higher education (DeWit, 2019; Matsumoto, 2019). One of the major impacts of globalization is it changed thoughts about the purpose of education because of the expansion of the global knowledge economy, shifting the role higher education plays in a knowledge-based society (DeWit, 2019; Tight, 2019). Much literature discusses how education around the world is now seen from a Human Capital Model perspective, viewing education as a mechanism and means to invest and produce human capital (Dewit, 2019; Zajda & Rust, 2021). Of course, this change perspective was due to globalization because it has created a need for a highly educated labor force where citizens have highly developed knowledge and skills (Zajda & Rust, 2021).

The literature debates the deep relationship between globalization and internationalization and its impact on higher education (David, 2017; DeWit, 2019; Knight, 2012; Zajda & Rust, 2021). Tight (2014) notes that these concepts are often used interchangeably. Therefore, to understand this relationship, it is imperative to distinguish between these terms. Knight (1999) offered perhaps the most succinct explanation suggesting that “globalization can be thought of as the catalyst while internalization is the response, albeit in a proactive way” (p. 14). In higher education, internalization has been defined as a process carried out a national, sectoral, and institutional levels which attempts to integrate an international, intercultural, or global function into the purpose function or delivery of post-secondary education (Knight, 2003). DeWit (2019) also noted that internationalization has changed conceptually

from one of cooperation where education and ideas are exchanged amongst institutions to one of competition.

There is much research documenting developed countries response to globalization through internationalization. Tight (2014) submits that internationalization embodies a change of international trends and development which can impact the national and local context in countries. One of the primary effects of globalization has been its influence over education policies, namely how education is governed, with many westernized countries having moved to more decentralized approaches. In addition, other impacts include the use of English as the language of instruction, internationalization of the curriculum, and more mobility of programmes, students, and staff (Knight, 2012). Another change due to globalization includes increased access to universities (DeWit, 2019), which has widened participation. However, this has impacted how education is managed in higher education. As Zajda and Rust (2021) argued, today as a result of globalization “educational organizations, having modelled its goals and strategies on the entrepreneurial business model, are compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of the efficiency, accountability and profit-driven managerialism” (p. 133). In addition, reputation and rankings influence the agendas and priorities of governments while institutional management strive for excellence in both research and teaching and learning (DeWit, 2019).

While these are some of the larger impacts in different developed countries, there is emerging literature focusing on internationalization in non-westernized, developing countries. Romanowski and Du (2020) found that that globalization has impacted Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. According to Romanowski and Du (2020), countries in the GCC are facing the reality that they cannot achieve economic goals individually within a globalized world. As a result, the response has been a tendency to rely on super national agencies such as the OECD for direction and also transfer or borrow education reforms, policies, and practices, which it is believed, will improve not only the education

systems, but also economic and social conditions (Mastsumoto, 2019; Romanowski & Du, 2020; Tan, 2010). Another response in governance has been the adoption in developing countries of a more decentralized approach to governance, copying the westernized reform model used to overhaul educational systems in the West (Matsumoto, 2019; Romanowski & Du, 2020).

Research suggests that internationalization in the UAE has taken different forms (Alsharari, 2018; David, 2017; Matsumoto, 2019). David (2017) discussed how the UAE education system has expanded significantly due to the number of non-nationals living and working in the UAE. Today, it is an “education hub” and home to a number of foreign campuses, more than any other in the Arab region. These branches service the large expatriate population, some local UAE citizens, and other Arab countries students, creating some competition among public and private institutions to attract local Emirati citizens. However, a lack of graduate programs at home and more opportunity in global markets has led to challenges for federal and private institutions to attract postgraduate students, particularly international students (David, 2017).

Another impact of globalization and internationalization has been that faculty teaching in both the private and public higher education sector are mainly international educators (Alsharari, 2018; David, 2017). Due to a lack of local qualified faculty, the UAE is dependent on international educators, especially in higher education. For example, within the UAE federal system, only approximately 10 percent of the 2,568 full-time faculty in 2013-2014 were UAE nationals. Similarly, less than 2 percent of the 3,949-faculty teaching in the private institutions within the free zones during 2013-2014 are UAE nationals (MHESR, 2015). However, despite the reliance of foreign workers, non-Emiratis are generally respectful of the collective culture, local traditions, and authorities, although it doesn't mean that they are integrated and practice these cultures and traditions. In many ways, foreign workers live in parallel with Emirati culture and traditions. Nevertheless, this does raise two important questions; one being

what impact does importing foreign nationals to work in higher education have on UAE's traditions, culture, and language; and secondly, how does this influence policy formulation and implementation?

The literature also revealed that internationalization of higher education due to globalization in the UAE has created a real conundrum for governance and policy development (Alsharari, 2018; Burton & Warner, 2017; Matsumoto, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2013). When formulating policy, there has been a tendency for the MOE and other government entities to rely on foreign expertise and select different policies. Alsharari (2018) referred to this as 'imported internationalism.' As Matsumoto (2019) explained, "the MOE in the UAE continues to defer to foreign expertise for the development of educational policies. Tenets of the global reform movement – including an emphasis on standardization, competition, and external accountability – shape policy in the UAE" (p. 8). Consequently, the UAE education system borrows and selects policy, giving little thought about the origin of the policy, the cultural context, its impact on culture and learning, and little thought of how to implement these policies (Matsumoto, 2019). O'Sullivan (2013) called this uncritical policy borrowing and revealed the presence of Western-influenced global education reform, including competition and external accountability. Due to its wealth, the UAE has had the luxury to sample education policies, which Croucher (2014) argues, helps it meet increasing economic demands related to graduation and unemployed UAE citizens brought on by the stresses of globalization and an over reliance of foreign workers. Moreover, as Matsumoto (2019) highlighted, "the UAE has developed so quickly, and with such a focus on international status, that considerations such as cultural context of policy origin and impact of English on Emirati culture and learning have been overlooked" (p. 5). Overall, there are many policy influences which have emerged as a result of globalization which impacts higher education in complex ways; however, as Alsharari (2018) explained "three main drivers are apparent; neo-liberalism (free market and little government involvement), quality assurance, and imported internationalization." (p. 6).

Although there is literature on the impact of globalization on education and reform, there is still a dearth of research on education policy implementation in developing countries like the UAE (Honig, 2006; Mugambwa et al, 2018). This study attempted to fill this gap and study some of the particular contextual features in a developing country impacted by globalization, where countries are incorporating a Western centralized-decentralized system of reform and policy implementation – and it is assumed that policy is cascaded from the macro level down to the local level. Moreover, this study is situated as part of the third-generation milieu of research that has “set its goals on the analytical understanding of how implementation generally works” (Najam, 1995, as cited in Mugambwa et al., 2018, p. 219) and understanding the relationship between determinants influencing policy. The next section summarizes some of the main determinants found in the literature that influence education policy implementation.

Determinant Frameworks

A number of frameworks have been developed which analyze determinants that either enable or hinder the implementation of policy (Elkington & Evans; 2017; Fullan, 2007; Najam, 1995). The primary aim of these frameworks “is to understand and/or explain influences on implementation outcomes, e.g. predicting outcomes or interpreting outcomes retrospectively” (Nilsen, 2015, p.3). Elkington and Evans (2017) developed a framework with a set of guiding principles and points of action after reviewing literature - analyzing it for key determinants that affect the implementation process and outcomes in education policy. After grouping determinants, four dimensions emerged “that suggests that for effective educational policy implementation, there needs to be: 1) smart policy design; 2) inclusive stakeholder engagement; 3) conducive institutional, policy, and societal context; and 4) a coherent strategy to reach schools” (p. 28). Due to a plethora of determinants which have been identified in implementation research, this study summarized the most frequently discussed and pertinent in the

following section in order to develop the conceptual framework to analyze the data and address the research questions for this inquiry.

Smart Policy Design

Policy design is an important consideration in studying policy implementation. It is almost unanimous among researchers that policy goals need to be clearly defined (Cleaves 1980; Honig, 2006; Pressman & Wildavasky, 1973; Williams-Jones & MacDonald, 2008). It is argued that if goals are unclear it can negatively impact implementation in various ways. Moreover, it is important that goals are clear as these will be utilized by implementing officials to implement policy and they are used to assist implementers in the evaluation of goals (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). In addition, Honig (2006) argued that if goals differ in scope, it can lead to more or less resistance by those implementing policy. Indeed, it was found that if goals lack clarity it may lead to different interpretations among actors, which in turn, could possibly lead to actors implementing the policy differently if they do not understand it or do not agree with it in spirit (McLaughlin, 1987 as cited in Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Choice of potential targets in policy design is an important determinant to think through in policy implementation. In Elmore's (1985) theory on forward and backward mapping, identifying targets was an essential part of the implementation process. For example, when considering curriculum reform aimed at changing pedagogical methods in education, teachers and learners are two targets that need consideration. It is required because unexpected attitudes from the targets of the policy or other stakeholders may arise which can create challenges to implementation (Honig, 2006). In this study, the attitudes, motivations, and beliefs of key actors or targets were explored as part of the conceptual framework within the implementation process.

The last element of policy design that needs consideration in implementation is the tools. Honig (2006) asserted that tools are influencing policy implementation. From a top-down perspective, these

tools assert command and control relationships in hierarchical education systems (sanctions, threats, etc.). On the other hand, from a bottom-up perspective, different tools exist such as capacity and team building, learning communities, and community. She noted that tools that are used are often based on conflicting theory within in one policy area. Similarly, Viennet and Pont (2017) also discussed the tools or instruments to implement policy as part of their framework because “choosing one policy instrument over another affects the dynamics of implementation” (p. 38); for example, the hiring of consultants, training, financial, or providing incentives all can potentially influence implementation. For this study, as part of the policy design, the tools that are being utilized to implement the policy were analyzed to determine the influence they had on actors and the implementation process.

Inclusive Stakeholders Engagement

O’Toole (2000) argued that “implementation research concerns the development of systematic knowledge regarding what emerges, or is induced, as actors deal with a policy problem” (p. 266). In this definition, we can see that there are multiple actors (stakeholders) in the implementation process so this study will be using a multi-actor approach to understand implementation. O’Toole (2000) claimed that “research that is performed in ignorance of the understanding that implementation actors themselves have about their circumstances is likely to miss important parts of the explanation of what happens” (p. 266). For some scholars, this includes both the assembly of policy actors and actions and the cause-effect relationship between their efforts and the outcomes of the policy (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989). Therefore, methodologically, when researching the implementation of policy and analyzing this it is imperative that research look at the various actors as part of their study.

O’Toole (2000) suggested that is very important when studying actors to make a conceptual distinction between the actors and their actual implementation actions on one hand, and the ultimate impact policy actors have on the policy problem on the other. Moreover, research into implementation

should begin within an understanding implementation is a multi-actor process when bringing policy into action (O'Toole, 1996). He argued that in some cases, when intra-organizational cases have been examined in terms of the tools and theories, even these instances exhibit multi-actor features. This conception is important when studying inter-organizational implementation because “analysts and practitioners must confront a world of multi-institutional actors – more than one government, agency, or sector – whose cooperation and perhaps coordination are needed for implementation success” (O'Toole, 1996). Therefore, to understand implementation as part of any research, it was imperative to focus on the systematic knowledge that emerged as actors deal with a policy issue.

The combined approach in third generation research considers the range of stakeholders or “actors” in the policy implementation process. It acknowledges that actors interact at different levels – between central policymakers at the macro level and local actors on the ground – both of who are important for successful implementation (Berman, 1978; OECD, 2013). Policy actors are considered by many researchers to be a critical variable in the successful implementation of a policy (Berman, 1978; Bressers, 2004). Therefore, policy actors should be examined as part of the policy implementation process. This was supported by Viennet and Pont (2017) who contended, that “many of the theorists and frameworks recognize the fact that the implementation process is highly contingent on exchanges among a range of actors at different levels” (p. 25).

The actors are those involved with the policy and can include individuals, groups, and organizations. As Viennet and Pont (2017) supported, “in the different determinant framework analyzed, ‘stakeholder’ or ‘actors’ may refer to individuals or collective entities, both formal (e.g. labor unions, implementing agencies) and informal (e.g. parents, political coalitions)” (p. 30). Similarly, Honig (2006) defined policy implementation “as the product of interaction among particular policies, people, and places” (p. 4). She offered more evidence of the importance of actors in the implementation process.

Within education policy literature, it is clear that the policy environment is complex because it involves multiple actors. Certainly, in public education, the number and type of actors have increased and the interactions between these actors are complex (OECD, 2013). Teachers (faculty) are critical actors within educational policy and it is widely acknowledged that actors can possess some agency which contributes to the process and the outcomes of policy implementation. Fullan (2016) argued that policy implementation at the classroom level essentially comes down to changing curriculum materials, pedagogical practices, and beliefs or understanding about the learning processes. This acknowledges that the end users of policy are very important because they can “shape the policy at their level, and they may do so in a way that aligns with policymakers’ goals – or not” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 26). For this study, it focused on formal actors at the micro in the institution which included those in administration, those in leadership roles, and faculty as well as actors at the macro and meso level that could be influencing implementation in the department.

In this study, actors and stakeholders was used interchangeably and referred to individuals or groups at the micro institutional level (i.e. faculty and administration) or at the macro level which included educational authorities like the Ministry of Education, accreditation bodies, and other relevant agencies involved in the implementation process. It used some network mapping to highlight the organization of these actors and the relationships between them. This synthesized an approach used by bottom uppers, Hanf et al. (1978), who employed network mapping to identify the local, regional and national actors involved in the execution of the policy. It is a widely held view that an implementer’s role is a crucial factor affecting the implementation process (Elmore, 1978; Honig, 2006; Viennet & Pont, 2017). Therefore, actors’ roles were also examined during the implementation process as part of the study.

In addition to exploring each actor's role and relationships in the implementation process, it examined their engagement by leaders at the institutional level. Researchers believe that engaging stakeholders is a key determinant in the implementation of the policy. As Honig (2006) supported, “researchers have come to reveal that people’s participation in various communities and relationships is essential to implementation” (p. 17). This can be done by engaging stakeholder early in the process, even during the formulation of policy to develop a shared understanding and also engaging them during the implementation process through regular engagement and even engaging detractors (Grantmakers for Education, 2011). Given this, this study examined how key actors were engaged in the process of implementation at different stages and how they influenced the implementation of the policy at the university.

Conducive Context

Context has been a key consideration in policy implementation research across disciplines. There is a plethora of studies which exist in a North American context in health care, economic, social, and educational policy research that considers the context when discussing policy implementation and policy performance. A number of studies have examined how different contextual factors influences implementation. It is widely accepted that policy implementation is influenced by its context (OECD, 2013; Honig, 2006; Viennet & Pont, 2017). In fact, there are over 300 potential contextual variables that have been proposed in the literature which can affect implementation (OECD, 2013; O’Toole 1986).

Honig (2006) discussed context as a key consideration in implementation and its impending success. Rather than being linked to specific policies, implementation success depends upon the interaction between policies, people and places. In her framework, ‘places’ refers to the context that shapes what people can and will do (Honig, 2006). She discussed that in contemporary research, many

studies focus on particular geographic locations and what conditions account for policy outcomes in those settings.

Similarly, Fullan (2007) studied policy implementation as a part of change and identified context as an important variable. In his study, he identified nine key factors that affected the implementation of education policy. After identifying the factors, he categorized these under three domains; characteristics of change, local characteristics, and external factors. The latter two refer to contextual factors such as local characteristics (district, community, principal, and teacher) and external factors (government and other agencies) that influence the implementation of educational policy (Fullan, 2007, p. 87).

Viennet and Pont (2017) also argued that context was one of many key determinants in education policy. Similar to other frameworks, they suggested that context must be considered because “they may facilitate or hinder the implementation process” (Viennet & Pont, 2017, p. 28). Their conceptualization of context included institutional setting, policy complementarities, and societal trends and shocks. Here we can see micro level and macro level factors at play in their framework.

A central purpose of this study was to examine various contextual factors influencing implementation using a multi-level analysis frame. It identified some of these factors in the framework, and then the framework was modified, identifying subsequent factors that were uncovered. This study moved beyond universal truths about policy implementation and is heuristic in nature. It attempts to understand the complexity of policy implementation, understanding the various interactions and dimensions of policy implementers with each other and with policy. Honig (2006) stated that her work “takes to heart McLaughlin’s (1991) admonition that “generalizations decay” – few if any findings hold true across all contexts and across time” (p. 20). This statement resonated with the research and provided a partial rationale for further research into the implementation of policy in the UAE.

Institutional Setting

There are many researchers who identified the implementing institutional or agency setting as an important variable in implementation (Bell & Stevenson, 2015; Berman, 1978; Honig, 2006; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Viennet & Pont, 2017). Honig (2006) in her book on educational policy implementation argued that ‘places’ is a key dimension of policy implementation studies. She discussed how in contemporary research that there are many place-based studies (in North America) that asks questions about outcomes and the policies that are enacted within these places. In her view, this place-based research includes the institutional setting in which a policy is enacted. Viennet and Pont (2017) supported this conclusion and determined that the institutional setting can influence policy implementation in a number of important ways.

While it has been largely accepted that policy implementation has become more multi-organizational (Hjern & Porter, 1981), implementation still functions and is performed by a single public organization (Peters, 2014). Similar to Viennet and Pont (2017), Gornitzka et al. (2005) believed that the characteristics of the implementing agency are an important variable in policy implementation which included the formal structural features of the organization and the informal attributes of the personnel. For example, the size of the agency’s staff and the degree of hierarchical control within the implementing agency (OECD, 2013) are two specific characteristics that might influence policy implementation. Similarly, Honig (2006) suggested that there might be deep-seated historical institutional patterns influencing implementation outcomes, although no specific examples were provided. Even top-down researchers Van Meter and Van Horn in 1975, identified the characteristics of the implementing organization as a key factor in implementation.

There are various institutional factors that actively influence policy implementation directly during the implementation phase. Aarons et al. (2011) study on implementation found that inter-

organizational and organizational networks exist within agencies or implementing institutions and are active factors affecting implementation. Also, at the institutional level, Bell and Stevenson (2015) argued that operational practices and procedures at the school level can impact implementation. Therefore, it was determined that any study of policy implementation in education needs to analyze the institution itself to determine the influence the meso level context is having on implementation and ultimately over the outcomes of the policy.

Leadership as a part of Implementation

The successful implementation of a policy depends upon various driving forces at the meso level. Leadership is a significant internal meso level contextual factor that has been identified in policy implementation research. Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1979) were the first to specifically identify the importance of leadership in a framework. They argued that "the leaders of the implementing agencies possess substantial managerial and political skill and are committed to statutory goals" (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1979, p. 485). When you unpack the ideas related to political skills, they highlight the importance of developing good working relationships with stakeholders and the need to convince opponents they are being treated fairly. In addition, they suggested that managerial skills, which included developing controls, maintaining morale, and managing internal strife so that those involved feel like they have a say in the process, are all important components of leadership. In a later study, Cerych and Sabatier (1986) discussed how the extent of control from the head of the Ministry of Education (MOE) was a factor which determined the successful implementation of education policy.

There are a number of studies that have identified leadership as an important part of policy reform. The OECD (2010) in their study on improving schools in Mexico, found that developing leadership at the school and system level was important for reforms to be operationalized in the schools. Another study by Bekker and Van Heyningen (2011), after reviewing Blanchard's situational leadership

model, highlighted how staff competence and commitment influences policy implementation, concluding that “their competency and commitment is largely contingent on the situation roles the leaders play” (p. 27). However, their research revealed that the leadership provided by organizations did not always work to enhance competence and staff commitment, which negatively impacted officials on the ground and the implementation of policies.

Although leadership is often cited and there is discussion about the importance of the role of leadership in policy implementation, there is often little theoretical discussion. Given policy implementations close association to change, it seems unusual that this has not been thoroughly examined as part of the policy implementation process. There is no shortage of leadership theory on which to draw for analysis. Generally, this literature is divided into theories on leadership and specific styles of leadership or paradigms. The main leadership theories and styles are summarized below which were considered for the discussion of the study.

In countless studies, leadership has been defined in many different ways. Yukl (2002) discussed how leadership had been “defined in terms of traits, behavior, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position” (p. 2). Katz and Kahn (1978) defined leadership as “the influence increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization” (p. 528). In comparison, Schermerhorn et al. (2000) said that “leadership is a special case of interpersonal influence that gets an individual or group to do what the leader or manager wants to be done” (p. 287). Kouzes and Posner (2007) developed a much broader definition and viewed it as a “dynamic process where leaders mobilize others to get extraordinary things done” (as cited in Aalateeg, 2017, p. 36). To do this, they theorized that leaders should engage in certain practices such as: “model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 14).

Although there is a wide variety of definitions, two common underlying themes are ‘influence’ and ‘mobilization’ (Antonakis et al., 2004; Bartol & Martin, 1998; Schermerhorn et al., 2000). Influence as a part of leadership is exercised in specific situations and consciously directed through communication and ultimately leads to the attainment of a goal. On the other hand, mobilization, which refers to movement from an organizational perspective, is a part of leadership that moves people or followers towards a goal. Despite the identification of influence and mobilization, neither are clearly understood. However, there have been different theories developed to help explain leadership in terms of how this affects organizational or institutional performance which are discussed below.

Trait theory. Early studies of leadership during the 1930 and 1940s considered attributes of leaders and argued that a leader must possess certain traits to be an effective leader (Bass, 1990). These traits emphasize attributes such as personality motives, values, and skills and argued that by identifying these traits or characteristics, one could distinguish a leader from a follower (Hughes, 2005 as cited in Aalateeg, 2017). Research from a trait theorist’s perspective “often identify particular personality or behavioral characteristics that are shared by leaders” (Amanchukwu et al., 2015, p. 8). The HEA (2012) discussed when implementing assessment policy changes strong leadership is important, suggesting that leaders need to be willing to challenge old and existing policies.

Behavior Theory. Criticism of trait theory led to other research in the 1940s and 1950s on behavior styles of leadership. Bryman (1986) noted that these were developed during World War Two because in many cases research was unsuccessful in explaining why leaders were effective. As opposed to great man theory which suggests that great leaders are born, behavior theorists asserted that great leaders can be made (Amanchukwu et al., 2015, p. 8). Moreover, as opposed to focusing on attributes or characteristics, behavioral theory emphasizes the “actions” or “behavior” of leaders in leadership situations in order to determine the optimal way to lead. One significant study was the Ohio University

leadership studies, which studied the attributes of leaders, and led them to conclude that there were two major dimensions to leadership behavior; ‘consideration’ and ‘initiating’ structure (Mullins, 2008). This area of research also gave rise to autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire descriptions of leadership behavior (Bryman, 1986).

Contingency Theory. After studying behavior theorists, in the 1960s researchers concluded that “leadership was more complex than isolating a few traits or preferable behaviors” (Robbins, 1997, p. 419). This led to the development on contingency theory which focused “on particular variables related to the environment that might determine which style of leadership is best suited for a particular work situation” (Amanchukwu1 et al., 2015, p. 8). Contingency approaches argue that there is no one way to lead, in fact, one leadership style may work in one situation, but will be ineffective in another (Aalateeg, 2017). Therefore, the leadership style changes with the situation or the situation must change to accommodate the leadership style.

Leadership Styles. In addition to leadership theories, there is a plethora of research on styles of leadership. It has been argued that different leadership styles may affect organizational effectiveness or performance (Nahavandi, 2012). Today, there is a glut of research on what style of leadership suits a certain situation. While it is beyond this study to look at leadership styles in depth, this study discussed elements of leadership during the implementation and how this influenced actors and the implementation process. To do this, the main leadership styles were summarized in the table below (see Table 2). However, it is important to remember that in practice, leadership often consists of a mixture of these theories either individually or by different leaders in the same organization.

Table 2***Leadership Styles***

Leadership Style	Characteristics	Criticisms	Research
Authoritarian leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very conscious of their position • little trust or faith in subordinates • pay is the reward and motivates through this • the leader gives orders and employee is expected to carry this out • is useful in emergency situations or where there is a homogeneous workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fails to develop loyalty or co-operation long term • does not develop pride of accomplishment among employees 	Khan et al., (2015); Du et al., (2020)
Distributed Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows for decision making to be shared • not the preserve of one individual, but rather shared amongst organizational members • organizational influence and decision making are governed by the interaction of individuals rather than individual direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slower decision-making progress as need to discuss with different stakeholders • Silos can develop if communication is poor 	Harris, (2008); Spillane (2006); Kezar & Holcombe, (2017)
Laissez-faire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "hands-off" style where the manager provides little or no direction and gives employees as much freedom as possible • effective to use when employees are highly skilled and competent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the group might not stick together • no initiative or responsibility from the leader • the group might overstep and there might be minorities left out my group 	Khan et al., (2015); Barnett, 2019
Servant Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethical leaders who serve others by investing in their interests by fulfilling a shared vision • connect with followers by establishing relations • employees will trust the organization and there will be a greater commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no theoretical framework and little agreement • takes time to implement and many lacks the willingness to adapt to this approach 	Bansal & Kumar, (2018); Brewer (2010); Greenleaf (2002);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are ten characteristics of a servant leader (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, stewardship, committed to the growth of people, building community) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a perceived lack of authority in this approach • the question of whether a leader is there to serve the goals of an employee or the organization 	
Situational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are different leadership styles which are appropriate for different tasks and individuals • leaders will adapt their style to the situation • match employee's development level to style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of empirical basis • ambiguous conceptualization of development levels of subordinates • does not consider different demographics which may impact the leader • does not address dealing with group and individual, might be individuals with lower development 	Hersey and Blanchard (1993); Graeff (1997); Quainoo et al., (2020)
Transactional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relationship between superiors and subordinates is well defined and is viewed as social exchange and are motivated through conditional rewards • involves either a positive or negative exchange depending upon the performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not focus on people, focuses on policies and procedures • impersonal and inflexible and focuses on following rules • does not encourage creativity 	Burns (1978), Bass and Avolio, 1993; Howell, (1993); Black, (2015); Bryman, (2008)
Transformational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when a leader and his followers interact to raise each other's motivation and morality • pursuing shared goals and values • these leaders care about their followers and understand the impact of their actions on the group • leaders want followers to become attached to mission or goals based on their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficult to be trained or taught • problematic if the leader is unscrupulous or immoral • its definition and components are unclear 	Bass & Avolio (1993); Black, (2015); Bryman, (2008); Burns (1978); Avolio & Howell (1992); Kovach, (2019)

-
- values and personal fulfillment
 - collectivism before individualism, but this leader does focus on each person's individual strengths
-

Note: These are summary of the main leadership styles but this is by no means an exhaustive list. It includes citations from the major theorists and some current studies.

The prevailing literature on policy implementation has led to the conclusion that leadership is an important element. Due to the lack of analysis in many studies of policy implementation, including this as part of the conceptual framework allowed the examination of leadership as a part of policy implementation to determine how leaders in HE influenced actors and the process of assessment policy implementation. In this study, leadership approaches, traits, and styles were considered during the exploration of the process of implementation in the institution. Indeed, because the institution is set within in a system of governance that adopts a more centralized-decentralized system and top-down approach to policy implementation, it offered a very particular context in which to examine leadership during assessment policy implementation.

Coherent Implementation Strategy

A number of policy researchers have addressed how policy is delivered is fundamentally important. Ransom (2009) found in her study of the implementation of the post-entry assessment policy at the University of Melbourne that the lack of coordination from a central authority led to a disjointed implementation through poor communication, lack of resources, and lack of support for staff. Therefore, task allocation, how the policy was communicated with stakeholders, resources, and the support provided to implementers were examined as units of analysis (implementation strategy) in this study.

Multi-level analysis in Policy Implementation

In the past, educational researchers have used multi-level analysis to explore a variety of topics and issues. Indeed, this is a valuable tool, helping researchers focus or direct their gaze during a study. In policy implementation research, multi-level analysis is applicable because as Gornitka et al. (2005) explained, “it is evident that both policy-making and implementation are composed of multiple layers, be it institutional, regional, state, federal or local, which points to the complexity of this research and practice” (p. 25). Therefore, for policy implementation researchers in higher education, it can support navigating research in a complex system by examining different levels, allowing for a more comprehensive and clear understanding.

Berman (1978) was one of the first researchers to discuss the different levels of policy implementation. His study of implementation was in response to the flawed focus of many studies which studied only one level of the policy sector, often neglecting the localized context of implementation and “therefore, deal with only part of the complete chain from policy input to outcomes, and not necessarily with the most important part of that chain” (Berman, 1978, p. 2). Berman asserted that policy implementation occurred at two levels and identified the macro implementation problem vs the micro-implementation problem which was completely different. He emphasized that policy implementation occurs at the macro level where centrally located actors devise a program and policies; and at the micro-implementation level, where local actors react to the macro level plans. Each structure has its operating rules and enduring patterns of behavior (Berman, 1978).

Today, there are different multi-level frameworks used when situating studies and analyzing education policies and practice in higher education. Some researchers have and continue to use the tripartite macro, meso, and micro levels to frame their discussion of a wide range of topics such as teaching practice, language policy planning, and assessment. In 2003, Kozma used this framework to

identify three levels of interacting contextual factors that influence teachers' practice. These three levels helped Kozma frame his research, concentrating on "educational technology and contextual factors influencing teachers' adoption of technology and related teaching strategies" (Fulmer et. al., 2015, p. 160). Similarly, Dysthe and Engelson (2011) used this systems approach to study the factors that contributed to the increased use of portfolios as assessments in HE. More recently, different researchers have used this frame to examine a wide range of educational topics and issues using a systems lens (Aizawa & Rose, 2019, Cheng & Wei, 2021; Dysthe & Engelson, 2011; Finardi & Guimaraes, 2021; Fulmer et al., 2015; Hairon et al., 2016). Aizawa and Rose (2019) studied English medium instruction at a Japanese university, examining meso level policy and micro level practice using the tripartite frame. In addition, this frame has been used in the study of language policy in education. Finardi and Guimaraes (2021), and Cheng and Wei (2021) examined and analyzed language policy using the macro-, meso-, and micro-level lens in Brazil and China respectively.

Another model that is currently used to analyze education is the 4-M model (Eaton, 2021; Simmons, 2016; Simmons, 2020). This model identifies four levels of analysis which includes the mega, macro, meso, and micro. It differs from the more traditional model in its macro and meso level perspectives, which instead of viewing the macro level as external to the institutional the label of mega is given the context outside the institution. Also, alternatively, the framework demarcates the institutional level into two parts; the macro level and the meso level, the meso level being the department at the institution. The only agreement between the two models is the identification of the micro level which refers individuals enacting policy or practice. The 4-M model has been used for the study of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; and has been used to explore other areas such academic integrity in higher education (Eaton, 2021) and assessment innovation (Lock et al., 2018), mainly in Canada.

Rather than engaging in a debate of what frame is more relevant, it was determined that it was more important to define these levels of analysis because there are different interpretations for multi-level analysis. Indeed, these constructs do not reveal themselves naturally. In the past, in policy implementation and systems levels approaches to educational research, sometimes the levels have been ill-defined and there has been an assumption made about the characteristics which define these levels. Consequently, these constructs and characteristics are clearly demarcated below.

Clearly, there are different interpretations and frameworks to situate multi-level analysis. It should be plainly stated that the tri-patriate macro, meso, and micro perspective was utilized in this study to examine the factors influencing assessment policy implementation. The frame was chosen because it is still applied by researchers to examine areas different areas in education (Finardi & Guimaraes, 2021), so the nomenclature and constructs still reveal themselves in current study of education systems. In addition, within assessment policy research the macro level and micro level frame has been used to discuss assessment policy and practice; therefore, this frame aligns with the literature on assessment which has identified the macro level as anything outside of the institution or school (Baird, 2009; Carless, 2005; DeLuca & Bellara, 2013; Fulmer et al., 2015). Lastly, the three levels of analysis aligned well with Bressers' (2004) Contextual Interaction Theory and the constructs that were developed as a part of his theoretical framework such as the wider and structural context which aligns with the macro level construct. Similarly, the case specific context parallels the meso (institutional) level which influences individual actors at the micro level.

Macro level

In Dysthe and Engelsen's (2011) study of the emergence of portfolios as assessments in HE, the macro level was defined as the "political policy level that gives top-down signals and directions" (p. 66). In contrast, Fulmer et al. (2015) defined the macro level as "distal factors that do not affect the

classroom directly, but that may affect the meso-level and, thus, have indirect effects on the classroom” (p. 477). These factors could include national, state and district level entities which devise or influence educational policy (Fulmer et al., 2015). They also asserted these factors could be sociocultural through social norms around assessment, economic or social pressure. In this study, the macro level is defined as distal factors outside the institution at the national or international level which influences the meso level (Fulmer et al. 2015).

Meso level

The meso level has been less clearly defined than the macro level. For Dysthe and Engelsen (2011), when discussing universities and colleges, they contended that the meso level is “the department or institute where decisions are made about study programmes, course designs, and assessment, and where top-down influences may be strong” (p. 66). In contrast, Liljenstrom and Svedin (2005) claimed more generally “the meso level was where the bottom-up meets top-down” (p. 5). In Fulmer et al.’s (2015) framework, they considered the meso level as factors outside the classroom itself, but those which had a direct influence on the classroom like school leadership, the school climate, tools, and support staff. Along with this, they added that these factors could include parents and the community which is outside the institution, creating some confusion about their frame. In the study of assessment practice, there is a considerable gap in research exploring how the meso level factors influences assessment and actors at the micro level. For this reason, this study will examine meso-level contextual factors that are influencing actors’ characteristics during implementation.

Micro-level

The micro level is often mentioned in policy implementation, but unlike other areas of analysis, it is not clearly defined. In social science research framework, this is usually the smallest unit of analysis and focuses on an individual in their social setting. In their study, Fulmer et al. (2015) identified the

micro level as the immediate context of the classroom. This included the teachers (their assessment literacy and beliefs) and students (number of students and students' performance in the prior topic area) as well as classroom factors such as tools and resources. In policy implementation, it has been identified and conceptualized from the institutional or organizational level where the policy is implemented or formulated and with the individual actors within the organizations/institutions who are implementing the policy. For example, for Berman (1978), the micro level of policy implementation was the institutional setting or the structure of the social policy setting, whereas in Morris and Scott (2003), they focus more on individuals or groups at the micro level in their study of large-scale curriculum change in Hong Kong, determining that teachers' attitudes and along with their background and interests impacted the implementation of the curriculum in schools.

For this research study, an analysis of the implementation of the assessment policy was done from a multi-level approach, looking at the macro, meso, and micro levels of implementation. This frame was used to explore the influence of contextual factors at different levels on policy implementation. It is clear that there have been different conceptualizations used in regards to multi-level analysis. This is perhaps why Lavrakas (2011) noted the choice of these levels is dictated by the researcher's questions and theory, which is why it is imperative to clearly define these constructs.

These levels are identified and defined in the conceptual framework which supports an examination of factors influences assessment policy implementation at an institution in the UAE. The UAE is a unique context because it is a relatively new developing country so there is limited understanding of policy implementation. Moreover, in HE policy implementation occurs in a centralized-decentralized structure of governance where the central power and authority over policy is held by the central government, although some decision-making powers and autonomy is held by individual institutions. Additionally, management within individual institutions generally reflect a top-

down approach where decisions over teaching, learning and assessment flow from the central authority to the departments and faculty.

Conceptual Framework

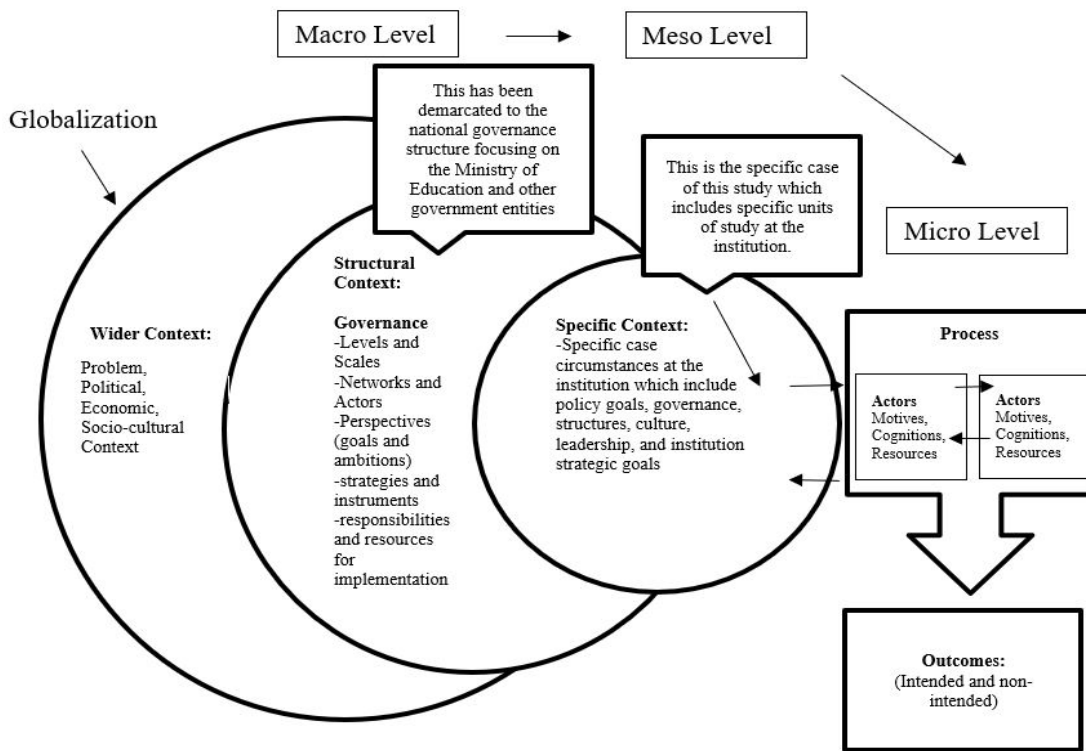
When developing the conceptual framework, this study reflected on top-down and bottom-up research from the literature review. It is widely accepted that when studying policy implementation, a synthesis of theories can be used to make sense of findings, especially in case study research. That said, Contextual Interaction Theory (CIT), which was created by the Dutch policy researcher Hans Bressers in the 1990s, was chosen as the framework underpinning the study. This deductive theory examines how actors and contextual factors at the different levels influence policy outcomes. In the literature, CIT has been used to investigate policy implementation as a multi-actor process, involving interaction among actors at the local level who influence implementation. In addition, it provides a lens to examine contextual factors across the different system levels, because in Bressers' (2004) model he established that different contextual levels influence each subsequent level as well as the actors' characteristics during the implementation of policy (Bressers, 2004).

According to Bressers (2004), there are three contexts in which assessment policy is situated, whereby an interactive and dynamic process takes place involving actors who play a crucial role in the success or failure of the implementation process (see Figure 2). The basic assumption of CIT is that the outcomes of the policy process is contingent on inputs (in this case the characteristics of the policy instruments), and also more critically, the characteristics of the actors involved (particularly their cognition, motivation, and power), and the interactions between these actors which is all influenced by different levels of context (Bressers, 2004). Therefore, an emphasis of this study was the micro level and the interaction of actors, examining how they influenced the implementation of the assessment policy. Bressers' framework assisted with the exploration of how actors influence assessment policy

implementation. Additionally, it provided a lens which to look at contextual factors beyond actors at the micro level. This was demarcated to the macro and meso level and included the institutional setting, governance structures outside the institution, and wider political, social, and cultural influences.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



Note. Conceptual framework adapted from Bressers (2004) work on Contextual Interaction Theory.

Social interaction process among actors at the Micro level

A central part of this framework is that implementation is viewed as a social interaction process that is driven by the actors involved at the micro level. Actors, which can be individuals or groups/organizations, take central stage in the analytical model, helping explore and explain the implementation process and the results. deBoer and Bressers (2011) argued this is important because “in

the history of implementation research hundreds of crucial success factors were proposed and used to analyze all kinds of different cases” (p. 5), however, in reality, actors are the ones on the ground level who deal with all factors that matter and these surround them simultaneously during the process.

Therefore, although context was examined, the emphasis of the study was on actors at the micro level.

This inquiry explored how actors at the micro level influenced policy implementation through interaction which determined the course and results of the process (Bressers, 2004). Bressers (2004) identified three types of interaction that can occur; cooperation, opposition, and joint learning. These have been described in the table below (see Table 3).

Table 3

Types of Interaction between Actors

Type of Interaction	Description
Cooperation	This occurs when both parties share a common goal. This can also be passive cooperation which occurs when one or more actors adopt a passive approach to implementation of a policy instrument. Forced cooperation is a form of passive cooperation imposed by a dominant actor.
Opposition	Opposition occurs when an actor tries to prevent implementation of the policy or program by another actor (USAID, 2009, p. 3).
Joint learning	This occurs when multiple stakeholders overcome a lack of information standing in the way of implementation (Bressers, 2004).

Note: described the types of interaction between actors (adapted from Spratt, 2009).

Understanding the interactions of different actors within an organization in the network will help understand where there might be barriers (challenges) to implementation occurring; and consequently, this could help to identify and develop well focused, small scale actions that might be developed among a few actors to address these issues (O’Toole, 2004; Senge, 1990). Moreover, understanding the level of interaction helped understand the level of collaboration among actors, which also influences policy implementation (Spratt, 2009).

In Bressers' (2004) CIT, there are three key variables at the process level (micro level) that influence policy implementation because it influences the social interaction process. This includes actor's motivation, cognition, and power/capacity. In this study, actor's motivation, cognition, and power/capacity were explored to determine how they influenced the process of assessment implementation at the micro level.

Motivation

The first variable, motivation, drives actors and is demonstrated through their readiness and willingness to participate. Their motivation depends on their own goals and values which can be influenced both by external pressures and by internal factors such as their opinion about the policy problem, beliefs and attitudes to implementation objectives, and actors' own self-effectiveness assessment, which is when an actor perceives the preferred behavior or action as beyond their own capacity (Bressers, 2004).

Cognition

The second variable is cognition as it relates to the cognition of policy goals, measures and of the methods of participation. Cognition affects one's perceptions, opinions and influences activities that one engages in regarding the situation (Bressers, 2004). This also includes communication between actors which is crucial for the formulation of the problem and its potential solutions. Bressers (2004) argues that it is therefore critical that policy agents have readily available and adequate information as well have the capacity to collect or get the information that is needed.

Power and Capacity

The third characteristic is power which is linked to capacity. It guarantees actors a greater influence on policy implementation, and depends on resources (human resources, time, and finances) owned by actors (Bressers, 2004; de Boer & Bressers, 2011; Owens & Bressers, 2013). Resources

provides actors a certain level of capacity or “ability” to act and implement policy. According to CIT, resources have the ability to weaken or strengthen an actors’ capacity, so this can affect the power of the actor if they have access to ample resources or the correct resources to support implementation. If an actor depends on the resources of other actors, the one who has the resources possesses the power because they have control during the process (Bressers, 2004). For this reason, Bressers (2004) argues it is important to examine not just resources, but also how actors comprehend their own power in the process.

Contextual factors

According to Bressers (2004), there are different levels of contextual factors that influence the implementation of policy. For this study, these context levels have been labelled as the micro level where actors interact to implement policy, the meso level which is the case specific context in Bressers’ (2004) model, and macro levels of influences which in Bressers’ (2004) framework is the structural context, and the wider context. The case context (meso) influences the micro level context and beyond this, changes in the wider context, the structural context (macro level) can change the institutional setting at the meso level. de Boer and Bressers (2011) argued that “each wider context not only influences the narrower one, but can also directly influence the actors’ characteristics” (p. 15).

Micro level. At the basic level, actors are influenced by their own interaction in the process from within or outside the system, “in as far as they change relevant characteristics of the actors involved” (de Boer & Bressers, 2011, p. 7). At the micro level the actor’s three characteristics (motivation, cognition, power/capacity, and beliefs) are influenced by various external factors from a multi-layered context. In addition, Bressers et al. (2016) asserted that the “characteristics of the actors shape the process, but are in turn also influenced by the course and experiences in the process and can therefore change during the

process.” (p. 47). It was though these characteristic that the implementation process was examined from the “bottom-up.”

Meso level (Case specific context). At the first level directly linked to actors, is the case specific context. At this contextual level, there are characteristics like geographical place where the project is realized which can include all kinds of circumstances, for example, previous decision making and framing (deBoer & Bressers, 2007). This context is significant because it sets the institutional arena and “influences which actors participate, to what extent, and with what legal resources and expectations” (de Boer & Bressers, 2007, p. 12). For this study, the case specific context (meso-level) refers to the institutional setting which included the policy, organization, governance structure, and leadership. It examined how the policy, organizational structure, and leadership influenced actors at the micro-level in their implementation of assessment.

Macro level (structural context). At the next level, CIT theory identifies the structural context. de Boer and Bressers (2011) described how the macro level include more than just institutional rule-based factors. In this framework, the structural context comprises a very broad interpretation, which they contend could include a variety of factors because the rules are just on the relevant inputs in the context. In the wider context this includes globalization, national policy goals, and marketization (industry demands). At the structural contextual level, CIT identified governance as a key component which can influence the case specific context and is formed by “five multiplicity aspects of governance” (Bressers & Kuks, 2003). For this study, governance was explored to understand how the national governance context (centralized vs decentralized system), which consists of the Ministry of Education and the CAA, and influenced assessment policy and implementation at the meso (case specific context).

Macro level (wider context). Around the structural and specific context at the meso level, is a more all-encompassing context. In CIT, this includes the problem context, political, economic, social-

cultural or technological context. There are a number of examples of how macro level factors influence policy implementation; for example, the cultural setting can make hierarchical approaches less feasible, or make social control obsolete. For this study, wider contextual factors were explored to determine how these were influencing the meso level and micro level context (actors) in the implementation of assessment policy.

Globalization influencing the Macro context. Outside of Bressers' (2004) macro, meso and micro levels, it is important to consider that globalization has an enormous influence on higher education policy. Globalization has been identified by various researchers as a key factor influencing education and policy around the world, and even in the UAE context (David, 2017, Matsumoto, 2019; Tight, 2019). Tight (2019) noted that globalization is a set of forces that are perhaps most keenly felt in developing nations, especially in higher education. Therefore, this study will situate the study's context and discuss the influences within the context of globalization, probing some of the influence this has had on the macro and meso level.

Challenges of Implementation

Although this is not included in CIT framework, a key part of implementation is the intended and non-intended outcomes. All policy implementation results in both intended and non-intended outcomes. From a top-down perspective, policy makers usually examine how closely outcomes or outputs align with policy objectives. This study examined the challenges as one of the outcomes of assessment implementation by examining actors' perceptions of the challenges that they have encountered or realized during the implementation of assessment in their roles during the process.

Summary

Today, the theory on assessment concurs that AfL or formative assessment paradigms should co-exist with summative assessment. This basic premise should be central to the development of

assessment policy and should be seen during the implementation of assessment. However, it has been found that summative assessment is still a central focus of assessment in HE. This leads to questions of assessment policy formulation and its implementation. The literature suggests that the implementation process and a multitude of factors at different levels influence assessment policy and implementation within programs at the course level. Using CIT, this study focused on faculty as key actors at the micro level and how they influence the implementation of assessment. However, assessment is not practiced in a vacuum and if you look beyond studies at this level, there are other factors at the specific contextual level (meso) at play such as leadership, assessment policy design, organizational structure, and the implementation strategy influencing faculty's assessment practice. Beyond specific context, there are macro-level factors which have been found directly or indirectly influencing policy implementation process. In short, each context is unique so it provides opportunities for researchers to understand policy implementation in developing countries like the UAE where there is a lack of research on institutional assessment policy and implementation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines my research design for the undertaking of this study. It includes my methodology and methods to conduct the research, as well as my ontological and epistemological assumptions of research. It discusses my choice of a single embedded exploratory case study that is bounded, and the process of data collection and analysis used in the context of this case study. Finally, this chapter addresses the important issues in the process of research such as ethical considerations and trustworthiness. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

Qualitative Inquiry

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate how actors at different levels and multi-level contextual factors influenced the implementation of assessment policy at a University in the UAE. I chose to employ qualitative research using a single embedded exploratory case study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined qualitative research “as a situated activity that located the observer in the world” and “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible” (p. 3). In this approach, researchers study different things in the world in their natural settings in order to make sense of or interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This methodology enabled an in-depth exploration of the context, and in this specific case, how multi-level contextual factors influenced the implementation of assessment policy at an HE institution in the UAE.

Research Paradigm

Arthur et al. (2012) argued that, “you cannot do or understand research unless you are clear about fundamental philosophical issues of ontology, epistemology and axiology” (p. 5). Indeed, there are fundamental differences in research paradigms, and when declared in your research, marks certain assumptions. Creswell (2012) asserted that research could be conducted through a qualitative or quantitative study, but this was ultimately dependent upon the research problem. Within a quantitative or

positivist research paradigm, one's ontological position would be one of realism that views that an object exists independent of the knowers which is not mediated by their senses as a researcher. In terms of epistemology, it is based on objectivism and assumes that a research will "go forth into the world impartially, discovering absolute knowledge about an objective reality" (Scotland, 2012, p. 10). However, positivism has its limitations and is seen as not always transferable to the social world. It has been argued the quantitative research not as absolute as it claims to be, as the focus of the study and that the data collected are themselves social products which are influenced by the researchers' positions (and agendas). This led to the development of qualitative paradigm which sought to understand the world in a different way. In contrast to the quantitative paradigm, it acknowledges the subjective nature of reality and the importance of the researcher in the construction of knowledge. Considering this, I chose to situate my research in a qualitative interpretive paradigm.

Ontology refers to what is the nature of reality (Creswell, 2007) or the study of being (Crotty, 1998). As this study was situated in a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the ontological assumption was relativism which believes there is no objective truth to be known. As Merriam (2009) stated, "there is no single, observable reality" (p. 8); instead, there are in fact multiple realities which are locally, socially, and historically specific, and none of these mental constructions can either be false or correct (Guba, 1990). It adopted the view that knowledge comes from the human experience and is constructed by those participating in it, so "understanding the reality experienced by the participants guides the interpretive researcher" (Hathaway, 1995, p. 544). Moreover, reality is socially constructed (Merriam, 2009) and differs from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From this perspective, using a qualitative approach, researchers attempt to gain an understanding by interpreting and constructing subjects' perceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of the nature of reality.

In addition to ontology and one's view of reality, this researcher established certain epistemological assumptions in this study. Epistemology is concerned with "the nature and forms of knowledge" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7) and "the relationship between what we know and what we see" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 102), so what it is to know something. Scotland (2012) offers perhaps the clearest clear distinction of epistemological assumptions by stating that this is "concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words *what it means to know*" (p. 9). The position a researcher declares and how they align themselves will influence how they uncover knowledge in the social world. For this study, I viewed knowledge as personal, subjective and unique, which meant knowledge is created by an interaction between the researcher and the subject being researched, and is unique to each social and historical context.

This study, done from an interpretivist view of knowledge creation, sought to "understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 17) and to describe social reality. Creswell (2009) suggested that, "Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual's perspective, investigating interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit" (p. 8). An important part of this research is the attempt to focus on the individuals and understand this from within i.e., beliefs and perspectives. Moreover, with regards to the nature of knowledge that is created, the findings are the creation resulting from the process of the interaction between the inquirer and inquired (Guba, 1996). Therefore, I refrained from asserting my own viewpoints and focused on understanding the individual's interpretations of the world around them. This study attempted to understand this phenomenon by examining the perspectives of different actors about the process of assessment implementation and factors that were influencing assessment implementation.

In addition to understanding the individual's perspective, the social and historical context is an important element of epistemology in interpretive research. According to Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009), the person and the context are important because actors and their situations cannot be separated because it is where "senses are created, perspectives are defined, and meanings are constructed" (paragraph 34). Vasilachis de Gialdino describes this as "*secondary characteristics*" of interpretive qualitative research, meaning what matters is not only the person but the person placed in a given context. For this study, the social and historical context was an important part of the study of assessment implementation in the institution in the UAE, and this was an essential part of what I sought to understand; how the social and historical context influenced individual actors during the implementation of assessment.

Within the interpretive paradigm that assumes a relativist ontology and a subjective epistemology, some of the methodologies that are employed include case study, phenomenology, action research, ethnography, and hermeneutics. Having considered this, the use of a qualitative single embedded case study, which is an in-depth study of events or processes over a period of time, aligned and were commensurable with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of an interpretivist paradigm.

To study policy, there are specific approaches that can be utilized as part of the methodology. Fischer et al. (2015) identified and differentiated between interpretive, critical, and post-structuralist perspectives to analyze policy. Interpretivist Policy Analysis (IPA) approaches are characterized by the reflexive and critical study of the informal and hidden aspects of policy processes and institutions as sites of meaning creation and context (Wagenaar, 2011). Wagenaar (2011) noted that it confronts policymaker's assumptions of the world and also the resistance the world exerts on the policy. Moreover, as Fisher et al. (2015) emphasized, IPA "clearly indicates an emancipatory interest in its critique of contemporary techno-empirical policy analysis, as in the case of evidence-based policymaking" (p. 9). Therefore,

interpretivist policy analysts often offer uncommon insights and question what is taken for granted. While it is important to acknowledge interpretivist research designs and methods are directed towards reconstructing actors' perceptions of particular processes through the creation, collection and analysis of qualitative data, for this study, IPA was not employed because it explored the policy and implementation using a more hermeneutic approach rather than a "critical approach" questioning policy makers' assumptions (Wagenaar, 2011). In addition, the focus was on understanding the policy in relation to the implementation process, so this study did not focus solely on the policy, its formulation, and the outcomes of the policy.

Methodology and Analysis: A Single Embedded Exploratory Case Study

A single embedded exploratory case study was appropriate for this study due to its commensurability with the research problem at hand. Creswell (2012) defined the case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. activity, event, process or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (p. 465). Merriam (2009), Stake (2006), and Yin (2009) all contend the essential requisite for case study research is the researcher's motivation to "illuminate understanding of a complex phenomenon" (Harrison et al., 2017, paragraph 12) within its context with a view to understand the issue from the perspective of participants. Yin (2009) also noted that "the case study methods is mostly likely to be appropriate for how and why questions" (p. 27), which are the basis of the research in this study, in that the central question in this study was to explore how actors and multi-level contextual factors influenced assessment implementation.

Yin (2009) also maintained that a case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Such is the situation with assessment policy and practice within an institution in the UAE which is very much a study of the "case" in its context. In this study, the context at different

levels was a vital component to understanding the implementation of assessment policy because contextual factors at the macro, meso, and micro level influence the implementation of assessment, and as a result, could ultimately influence assessment practice in courses at the program level. Obviously, in the end, this may have a significant influence on the overall quality of learning in the classroom.

A case study is often exploratory in nature (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009), which is to say it is used to gain an understanding of the issue in its real-life setting. This is perhaps the strongest argument for case study research. Using a case study approach, enabled exploration of how policy was implemented and how multi-level contextual factors influenced assessment policy implementation by positioning these factors in the real-life context of a HE institution in the UAE. After thoroughly reviewing the literature, it was concluded that there are few comprehensive studies focusing on institutional assessment implementation and practice in HE, and also few studies that employed a case study approach to research this phenomenon in depth in the UAE. Moreover, due to the UAE's short history and position as a developing country, research into education and the field of HE is just beginning to develop as a field of study, so this study created new knowledge and understanding within this context.

Merriam (2009) asserted that case study research has special features that assist with its delineation. She suggested that case study research is particularistic (focuses on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon; descriptive in that “the end product of a case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 28); and, it was heuristic, meaning that it illuminates “the reader’s understanding of the phenomena under study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). This study was particularistic in that it focused on implementation of assessment by actors in the UAE. The researcher provided a rich description of the implementation of assessment from the perspective of key actors. It also examined how contextual factors are influencing the assessment implementation which illuminated

the reader's understanding of how actors influenced the implementation of assessment policy, and also how contextual factors impacted its implementation.

Design

There is a consensus among researchers that a critical element of case study research is preparation, planning and the development of a systematic plan for implementation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). However, each researcher differs on the process. For Yin (2009), he advocates a very rigid and structured design while Stake (2006) advocates and prefers a much more flexible approach to the design of a study. For this study, Merriam's chapter on "Designing the study and selecting a sample" was consulted and used as pseudo model to inform the design of this study because it is a combination of both of Yin's structured and Stake's more flexible approach (Yazan, 2015).

Unit of Analysis

Baxter and Jack (2008) contend that determining the "case" or unit of analysis is an essential step in carrying out research that can be difficult for novice and seasoned researchers. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined the case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). Creswell (2012) suggested that these cases can be a single individual, several individuals separately or in a group, a program, events or activities. The unit of analysis in this study, the "case" refers to the implementation of institutional assessment policy by group of individuals (actors) in a department at an institution. Studying this case, I explored how the policy, actors, and contextual factors influenced assessment implementation.

Type of Case

This was a single case study with an embedded design. It was a single design because this approach allowed me to consider the unique context of the institution and the UAE which is very important when examining assessment policy implementation in HE. That said, this single case

consisted of embedded units at different levels of the framework. Baxter and Jack (2008) noted that it is important to embed sub-units into a design because these allow the researcher “to engage in rich analysis which will better illuminate the case” (p. 550). A sub-unit is a smaller unit of analysis in the larger case which allows for the data to be analyzed. In this study, it included: 1) The policy design; 2) contextual factors at the macro and meso level; 3) actors’ characteristics at the micro level, and; 4) challenges related to the implementation of assessment policy.

Bounded

Creswell (2012) defined bounded as a study that separates the research in terms of time, place or some other physical boundaries. Harrison et al. (2017) noted that “bounding the case is essential to focusing, framing, and managing data collection and analysis” (p. 12). This study was bounded to one public institution, at a single campus and to an individual faculty within a department (Health Sciences department). This study was further confined to one campus so the implementation of the assessment policy could be studied more in-depth instead of looking at a number of different campuses which would probably result in duplication of findings. At the campus it was bound to the department and the “faculty” which included both leadership and teaching faculty involved with assessment through policy implementation at the institutional level and aimed to “understand an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (Creswell, 2014, p. 73). I considered all those involved at the meso (institution) level in leadership within the department who were responsible for implementing assessment policy. In terms of faculty at the micro level, I selected some of those involved with course level assessment at the institutional and program level to explore assessment implementation of the policy at the institution and how their characteristics, i.e., cognition, motivations and power/capacity impact assessment implementation. Moreover, I wanted to explore their perceptions of macro and meso level institutional factors that were impacting assessment policy and practice. The “case” in this study referred to the

implementation of assessment policy and assessment practice at the institution. As far as time, it was completed over the course of one semester because the implementation of assessment policy and course level assessment practice occurred over a semester during the regular teaching cycle of a course at the program level. This time period allowed enough time for a thorough exploration of the case.

Research Setting and Context

This exploratory single case study took place at a post-secondary institution in the UAE. To study the implementation of assessment policy in its “real life” setting, the case was bound to a Health Sciences department at one campus, examining documentation (Appendix 5) and several key informants’ perspectives about the implementation of policy because this would garner enough manageable data to permit for an in-depth within the institution given the time frame of one semester from January to May, 2020. The university is a public government higher educational institution in the UAE that offers a variety of programs such as Engineering, Business, Health Sciences, Education, Information Technology, and other programs. The upper management and board of governors are made up of mostly Emirati managers while other department heads and mid-mangers come from different countries around the world including India, U.K., Australia, Canada, the U.S., and other African and Middle Eastern countries. The teaching faculty consists of educators from over 23 different countries.

There are several different gender segregated campuses and programs across the UAE. The Health Sciences department, which was part of the “case,” currently offers eight different programs and 15 different degrees in the areas of emergency care, health information management, medical imaging, medical laboratory sciences, nursing, pharmacy, social work and veterinary sciences. Throughout the various programs, student learning takes place in classrooms, laboratories, clinics, and hospital settings where experiential learning offers students to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors expected of a health science professional. While these programs are offered at different campuses, a

department at one campus was selected due to the proximity of the campus to the researcher and because it was the location of the senior leaders from the Health Sciences department.

In 2016, at the institution a new updated assessment policy was introduced to direct assessment of learning in courses. At the time of this study, the policy had been operational for four years. While changes were made, its main tools, goals, and procedures have remained, and therefore, it was an opportune time to explore the implementation of the policy in a department at one campus because of the impact this may or may not have on assessment and the quality of learning, and the effect this could have on policy implementation in the institution and the UAE.

Participant Selection

This research was completed following ethical approvals from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) and from Latifa University in the United Arab Emirates. After receiving approval from the review boards for my interviews, I contacted the research coordinator at the campus and the department Deans who were gatekeepers for the campus and departments. After the Dean of Health Sciences accepted my invitation, individual faculty and those in key leadership in the department were contacted via email. The Dean also provided suggestions as to participants to contact during the process. All members of the department at the campus were contacted and participants responded by email and then they were sent the consent form in a subsequent email. All total, 10 different members of the department consented (see table 4) with one withdrawing due to prior commitments. To gain access to assessment information and policy documentation at the institution, the research committee, the Head of the CAU, and the Dean of Academic Services provided access and permission to use different documents and to interview participants, so long as the institution was not identified in the study.

Table 4***Participant Profiles (Department of Health Sciences)***

Participant	Role	Years in Education	Educational Background	Number of Years at Institution
Participant 1 (P1)	Faculty (Associate Professor)	17 years	PhD	1 year
Participant 2 (P2)	Faculty (Associate Professor)	14 years	PhD	14 years
Participant 3 (P3)	Faculty (Associate Professor)	8 years	PhD	1 year 6 months
Participant 4 (P4)	Faculty (Lecturer)	10 years	Masters	5 years
Participant 5 (P5)	Program Coordinator/Associate Professor	8 years	PhD	2 years
Participant 6 (P6)	Divisional Chair/Associate Professor	12 years	PhD	7 years
Participant 7 (P7)	Program Coordinator/Associate Professor	10 years	PhD	4 years
Participant 8 (P8)	Senior Department Leader	5 years	Masters	2 months
Participant 9 (P9)	Senior Department Leader	13 years	PhD	8 months

Note: Some information was withheld in the table in order to protect the respondents' identity. Before the interview, all respondents were provided a copy of the interview questions.

Purposeful sampling is commensurable with qualitative case study research and was used for this study. As Patton (2002) supports, purposeful sampling is “a specifically qualitative approach to case selection” (p. 265) which sometimes limits the sample size of a study. However, the main objective of qualitative research is to understand the subjective reality of participants; therefore, this is not achieved by simply having a large sample size. Indeed, there is a benefit to purposeful sampling in that it allows a research to select “formation-rich cases” so there is an in-depth understanding of reality. Consequently, the focus was on the quality of information the participants had to offer rather than quantity.

To select the participants as part of this case study, key informants sampling was employed (Patton, 2002). Payne and Payne (2004) described key informants as:

those whose social positions in research setting give them specialist knowledge about other people, processes or happenings that is more extensive, detailed or privileged than ordinary people, and who are therefore particularly valuable source of information to a researcher, not least in the early stages of a project. (p. 134)

The informants included four faculty members responsible for teaching and assessment at the course level – most of whom was a senior course team leaders (SCTL), and those from different positions of leadership such as the program chair, program coordinators, and two more senior leaders in the department. The key informants were identified and selected as individuals that were especially knowledgeable about or had experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) in this case, the implementation of assessment policy. The key informants within the department were sought to share their unique experiences of assessment implementation, so that when all these experiences were put together, it would provide an understanding to the different research questions. Moreover, using criteria such as proximity and direct involvement in the process, and role in the assessment process allowed for a variety of perspectives from key positions of participants from varied experiences and backgrounds to emerge which increased the richness of the data.

Another contributing factor to the sample size was the methodological choices made as a part of this case study. As Yin (2009) suggested “the selection of participants or sources of data to be used in a study, is based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study’s research questions” (p. 311). The researcher bound the case to a department at one campus, so this limited the population of study. The study depended on 9 participants and document analysis due to methodological choices inherent to this study. The Health Sciences department agreed to participation so

this limited the population to a total of 18 members of the department which included those in key leadership position. Originally of the 18 members, 10 participants volunteered and one dropped out. This comprised more than half of the department population and the participants met key criterion of key informants such as being directly involved in the process, having close proximity to implementation process, and holding different roles in the implementation of assessment policy. Therefore, this facilitated an exploration of assessment policy implementation in a department because of their richness of their experiences during the process.

In addition to the methodological influences on sampling, there were pragmatic choices such as time to complete the study, contact with department participants due to their complex schedules, and the access to documentation and information at the institution. The Dean of Health Sciences department volunteered and allowed access to his department staff and documentation whereas other departments were unwilling to participate in the study. Moreover, the researcher was restricted access to participants for three months during the semester beginning on January 12, 2020 so the study would not interfere with the work and operations of the institution, department, and student learning.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using a qualitative approach. Multiple sources of data are a hallmark of case study because it ensures comprehensiveness in terms of depth and breadth for the inquiry (Harrison et al., 2017). The data collection methods applied for this study included documents (Appendix 5) and semi-structured interviews involving key informants (see Table 4). Bringing together a number of data collection methods facilitated the exploration of a number of perspectives and also enhances the credibility of the data through triangulation (Yin, 2009). Table 5 shows the different data collection tools and how these aligned with the research questions to ensure that data was triangulated, helping with the credibility and confirmability (trustworthiness) of the findings.

Table 5

Research Question and data method matrix

Research Questions	Documents	Semi-structured Interviews
1) What is the assessment policy at the institution in the UAE?	X	X
2) How do the contextual factors at the different levels influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution?	X	X
3) How do actors' (including administration, departmental leaders and teachers) motivation, cognition, and power influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution?	X	X
4) What are the challenges faced by actors in the implementation process in an institution?		X

Documents

Yin (2009), a widely noted positivist case study researcher, discussed the use of documentary evidence and noted that “is likely to be relevant to every case study topic” (p. 101). Documentary evidence is stable, unobtrusive and can be exact information which allows for a broad coverage of events in different setting (Yin, 2009). I utilized Merriam’s (2009) umbrella term of documents which is “to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 139). A variety of documents were collected during the first few weeks of the study which provided information about the context and offered some insights into assessment policy and practice. Additionally, these documents shed some light on how the policy was framed and what factors influenced the policy and its implementation. The documents that were collected and analyzed are

included in the table below (see Table 6). When using documentation, I considered the different issues of usage such as access to documents, ensuring that these were kept private and no harmful or sensitive data was shared in the study, and the documents were evaluated for their authenticity (Merriam, 2009).

Table 6

List of Documents collected for analysis

Documents related to assessment	Justification
<i>Course outlines and assessment plans for courses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To establish assessment practice from policy</i>
<i>Institutional Assessment policy document</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To determine assessment policy, actors' roles, and resources to support policy</i>
<i>Documents related to goals, vision and mission of institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To determine institutional goals and how this related to teaching, learning and assessment</i>
<i>Assessment documents for program (assessment criteria/instructions, rubrics)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To establish assessment policy and practice</i>
<i>Directives related to assessment sent to leadership or faculty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To understand communication and actors influence</i>
<i>Government policy documents related to Higher Education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To understand the influence of macro contextual factors influencing policy</i>
<i>Historical assessment documents (prior to new policy)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To examine assessment policy prior to existing policy document</i>
<i>Documentation related to final examinations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To explore summative assessment policy and practice</i>
<i>Documentation related to training on assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To determine how actors are supported and resources provided for the support of policy</i>
<i>Documentation related to accreditation and quality assurance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To examine how macro contextual factors influencing the implementation of assessment</i>

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a common method in case study research design. It allows for collection of rich very personalized information in terms of your research questions. For this study, the participants comprised two groups in the department; teaching faculty and those in leadership positions who have a role in assessment policy implementation. These participants were chosen because they “may have the best information with which to address the study’s research questions” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40). It was important to consider the perspective of both staff and leadership because they are key actors in the implementation process and potentially have the greatest knowledge and impact on the implementation of assessment policy and they also might have divergent perceptions. These participants were in a specific department at the institution, as studying all departments would be unfeasible and unneeded for the scope of this study.

The interviews were conducted by focusing on different elements of the contextual framework. The framework helped develop the questions for the individual interviews which focused on actors’ characteristics and interaction during the implementation process and also questions related to different contextual factors influencing assessment policy. Semi-structured interviews were utilized because it helped structure my questions towards the embedded units while also permitting “follow-up questions designed to probe more deeply issues of interest to interviewees” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40). I used an interview guide (Appendix 3) for faculty and leadership, but there was also some flexibility during the interviews to probe a little deeper in some areas.

Organizing Data

Yin (2009) and Stake (2006) argued that the organization of data is very important during a case study. For this study, a database was created to organize the data into folders by method with their dates (documents versus interviews) and another section for the analysis which included evidence of the

document and interviews being analyzed, lists of codes and themes, and a paper trail (matrixes, diagrams, and thematic codes) to support the analysis and generation of findings. This helped improve the analysis and reliability of the case study because the researcher tracked the data and established a chain of evidence that identified the specific evidence for each conclusion or finding which was developed during the study. Additionally, the database was organized so that the analysis could “be the subject of separate, secondary analysis, independent of any reports by the principal investigator” (Yin, 2009, p. 119) which increased the reliability of the entire case study.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative analysis involved a multi-staged iterative process, including steps of organizing, coding, thematic and content analysis. It was an ongoing process that occurred concurrently with the collection of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) and was about making sense out of the data. Additionally, the purpose of the process was to condense the data into a brief summary format in order to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings to ensure that these links are transparent and defensible (Thomas, 2003). Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009) both supported the premise that data analysis is a process that allows the researcher to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). As Merriam (2009) supported, “to me, data analysis is the process used to answer your research question(s)” (p. 176). The process of data analysis allowed for systematic analyzation and allowed the researcher to attend to the overall purpose of the study, which was to utilize the conceptual framework to explore how actors and contextual factors influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution in the UAE.

To organize the data, a database was created and organized into two categories, so I could easily retrieve the data when doing analysis (Yin, 2009). It was systematized into the actual data gathered, recorded and organized by entry, and also into the researcher’s ongoing analysis of the data which

included the analysis and observer comments through the researcher's journal (field notes). Once the data was organized, the data was segmented in response to the research questions and conceptual framework using data matrices. These segments were heuristic – “that is, the unit will reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information” (Guba, 1985 as cited by Merriam, 2009, p. 177).

Once data was organized it was analyzed deductively and inductively. Deductive coding was done by using a pre-defined list of codes or a coding frame that was created before the analysis began. The list was formulated using the conceptual framework and literature (Miles et al., 2013) and this approach helped focus the coding to the research questions, and particularly examine actors influence on the implementation process or analyzing the data from the bottom-up. While deductive analysis was used, I was also guided by Merriam's (2009) conceptualization of the data analysis process which she contends is inductive and comparative. These approaches are widely used and discussed in qualitative research (Thomas, 2003; Cohen et al., 2011; Kolb; 2012; Merriam, 2009). According to Thomas (2003), “the inductive approach is a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by specific objectives” (p. 2). These objectives are the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study, which was developed from the literature review. During the process of analysis, the research findings inductively emerged from the “frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data, without constraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2003, p. 9). By following a step by step process of deduction and induction, the researcher was able to establish clear links between the data and research objectives through the development of categories during analysis.

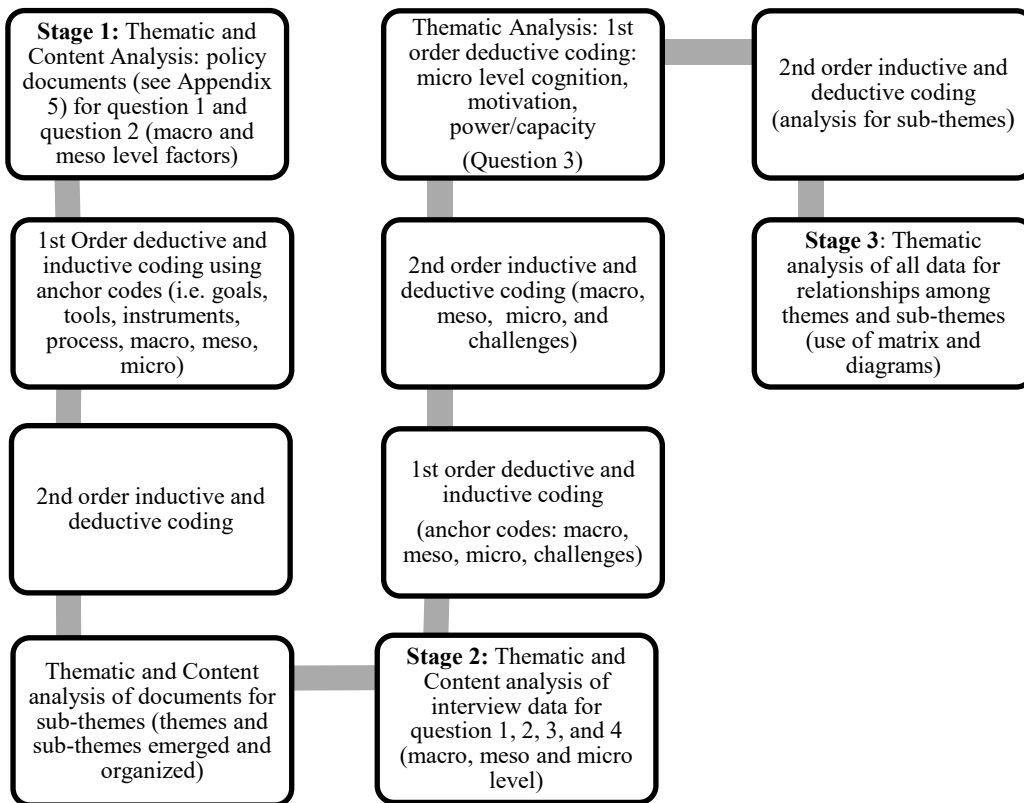
Although the findings emerged deductively and inductively, another important method used during analysis was the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009). Constant comparative analysis comprises a process of systematic data collection, inductive coding and analysis with sampling

(Kolb, 2012). Tesch (1990) noted that this “method of comparing and contrasting is used for practically all intellectual tasks during analysis: forming categories, establishing the boundaries of the categories, assigning the segments to categories, summarizing the content of each category, negative evidence, etc.” (p. 96). For this study, it was used to identify and reduce themes, serving to generate findings related to the research questions because at each stage I was continually compared the data to consolidate, reduce, and interpret the data by “moving back and forth between concepts, bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). From this detailed and systematic process, the findings of the study emerged (Appendix 10).

The analysis of data began with an examination of the assessment policy and the accompanying sub-policy documents to address the first two research questions (see Figure 3). The documentation included macro level policy documents (economic policies, education policies), policy documents from the CAA, and documentation from the Ministry of Education and meso/micro level policy documents at the institutional level which included strategic plans, reports, and assessment policy documentation to understand the assessment policy and process (see Appendix 5).

Figure 3

Data collection and analysis process



Coding deductively and inductively and using thematic and content analysis, the documentation was analyzed to examine the assessment policy (research question one) and how the macro and meso level factors influenced the actors at the micro level in the department (research question two).

After analyzing the policy documents, the next stage in the process was using the conceptual framework to examine the interview data. The analysis was comprised of four steps. The first step involved deductive and inductive coding using anchor codes from the conceptual framework to identify broader themes of macro, meso, and micro level in addition to challenges in the interview data (see Appendix 6). After macro, meso, and micro level themes and the challenges were identified in the data, it was then thematically analyzed a second time and coded deductively and inductively to determine themes and sub-themes related to challenges and factors at the macro, meso, and micro-level (see Appendix 7). After this, the interview data was analyzed using Bressers' (2004) CIT deductively,

examining actors' characteristics (cognition, motivation, and power/capacity). However, within these categories, sub-themes emerged after more thematic analysis and a 2nd round of deductive and inductive coding. These themes and sub-themes related to how actors influenced the implementation of the assessment policy (see Appendix 8), helping answer question three.

During the process of analysis, data was interpreted. As Merriam (2002) noted, "qualitative interpretivist research attempts to learn how individuals experience and interact with their social world, by the meaning they attach to them at a particular point in time and context" (p. 4). For this study, there were multiple layers of interpretations such as understanding of the macro, meso, and micro influences on policy. To understand this, multiple voices of key informants from the Health Sciences department were used, each of whom were different participants and had close proximity to the policy and were involved in its implementation. To interpret the individual experience, the researcher followed a strict process of analysis, allowing themes to emerge from the data related to macro, meso, and micro level influences, and about challenges to implementation.

After the themes emerged from interpretation, the last stage involved comparing all data and examining the relationship between the different levels of context, and actors' characteristics (see Appendix 9). In this stage, the relationships between the characteristics at the micro level and how different contextual levels influenced subsequent levels was examined. It was also during this final period that the researcher wrote a description and summary of these categories and developed a final thematic framework (Appendix 10) which was organized by research question and the corresponding themes and sub-themes. Each category was given a label and description. In addition, text associated with each theme was identified, organized in a matrix, and then stored in the database on the computer. Finally, the categories were incorporated into a casual network (Thomas, 2003) displaying how different contextual factors influenced each other at the different levels of analysis along with focusing on the

relationship between actors' characteristics at the micro level (see Appendix 9). This systematic approach to analysis ensured the trustworthiness of my research in that there was a clear trail of data to support my findings.

The data collected was also analyzed using content analysis software which is available to confirm the codes and themes. For the purpose of this study, NVivo 12 was used for the analysis of the content of the data collected. NVivo 12 is a text analytics tool that allows a researcher to store, sort, analyze, and display qualitative data. It assisted with the data analysis by identifying and verify codes, categories, and themes. As a text-mining software, NVivo 12 also offered the impartiality and objectivity in content and thematic analysis, helping to verify the codes and categories found during the content and thematic analysis done by the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations for this study. This includes the site admission, access to information, and privacy (confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent). Today, in the UAE, there is support and encouragement for institutional research, so I gained permission early by highlighting the benefits of the research study and submitting the proposal to the Campus Director, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the relevant department head via email and then in person to inform them of the study and build an open, transparent and trusting relationship about the study. I also shared my case study protocol so they understood when and what data I would be collecting on campus.

Another consideration for the study was the access to information within the university. A part of this study relied on document analysis, I developed a list of documents and asked for permission to use these documents (Appendix 5). I provided the ethics board and departmental participants a list of the documents and asked for permission to review these documents as part of the description of the study. Any private documents or communications remained confidential and were anonymized.

Each individual and the institution itself has a right to privacy. Their privacy was considered as part of the ethics as it is essential to research. The idea of privacy includes principles of anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. In such a small study, anonymity cannot be guaranteed, however participants were informed of this and every effort was made to anonymize the data. For this study, pseudonyms were used so that the participant's identities were not be revealed. Moreover, participant's anonymity was protected because no information from a participant was disclosed that revealed the individual's identity or allowed for the tracing of that individual. These same principles were also extended to the institution, as I did not disclose the identity of the institution and I was careful not to share information that might identify the institution by cleansing the data and report.

In carrying out this research, there is also a duty to keep the participants' information confidential. To do this, no information about the participants was shared by the researcher outside the study. I implemented safeguards during all stages of the research process which included anonymizing the data so participants were not identified, coding the data so not to reveal the identities of individuals, storing data separately from coding lists, and keeping data in a safe and secure location. For this study, information was kept in separate encrypted and password protected files. Other documentation was placed in a locked storage cabinet at the researcher's place of residence.

For this study, as part of the ethical considerations, informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. Informed consent was obtained through a letter that participants signed and kept on record in a secure location (see Appendix 2). The letter outlined and informed participants of the purpose of the research, their role and level of involvement of participants, who had access to the information, the potential risks, and what happened to the information disclosed by the individuals who participated in the research inquiry.

Trustworthiness

For this study, instead of the ideas of validity and reliability, which are measures used in quantitative research, the idea of trustworthiness was adopted because this is a key feature of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Merriam (2009) argued all research should be concerned with whether it has provided trustworthy research in that there was some rigor when carrying out the study, although the standards for rigor in qualitative data differ from quantitative research. I addressed trustworthiness and rigor, which was discussed by Merriam (2009), by systematically addressing the principles of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Researchers argue that these ideas are better suited to qualitative research because the ideas of validity and reliability are positivist ideas and do not address the rigor needed because this kind of research asserts different ontological and epistemological assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

Credibility

In qualitative research, there is the assumption that truth is a social construct which varies and is ever-changing. To ensure that this research was credible (truth of research findings) or as Merriam (2009) emphasized, how congruent are the findings with reality, the researcher adopted a number of strategies. First, I employed previous proven methods during line of questioning and data collection. This included carefully recording and organizing data and, as per case study protocol, there was prolonged engagement in the field studying the phenomenon over the semester. In addition, the researcher utilized a field journal to exercise reflexivity and to keep track of his own bias during the research. The researcher declared and highlighted his own assumptions in the report. Moreover, member checking or respondent validation (Merriam, 2009) of interview transcripts and findings was employed to ensure that the data was valid and there were no misinterpretations. While follow up interviews were

considered, these were not needed as the information was validated by participants after interview were completed. Lastly, although purposive sampling was employed during the study, the researcher used multiple voices, openly seeking similarity, dissimilarity, redundancy or variety in order to understand the case and the wider group which helped with the credibility of the research (Stake, 2008).

Another approach used to ensure credibility was the universal approach of triangulation in case study methodology. This can involve “the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 239). For this study, data was triangulated by using a wide range of data sources (interview different informants). As Shenton (2004) supported, data triangulation allows, “individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behavior of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people” (p. 66). In addition, methodological triangulation of data using different methods, including interviews and documentation. Documents can provide a background, verify opinions and details supplied by the participant and also help explain attitudes and beliefs. For this study, triangulation using different methods helped to cross examine the research findings in the study.

Transferability

This concept refers to the aspect of applicability. Guba (1981) articulated this idea as to how one determines “the degree to which the findings of a particular inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects” (p. 79). The research study considered transferability of judgement which allowed the reader to assess whether the findings are transferrable to their own setting. Using this approach, the reader, not the researcher, determined the transferability because the researcher does not know the readers own specific context. Transferability was handled by providing thick descriptions, by describing, in addition to behavior and experience, the context as well, which is a key part of case study

research, so “that the behavior and experience become meaningful to the outsider” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Included in this thick description was detailed information about the context. The in-depth understanding of institutional assessment policy, its implementation, and factors that influenced its implementation could have some transferability to other institutions or developing countries to understand the implementation process and how different factors may influence the implementation of assessment policy. Indeed, this research supports the assertion that “the accumulation of findings from studies staged in different settings might enable a more inclusive, overall picture to be gained” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with precision and accuracy, and consistency and replicability over time (Cohen et al., 2011). In addressing dependability, the process followed a detailed research design, beginning with the conceptual framework which underpinned the study and helped with the collection of data and the interpretation of the findings. In addition, from an operational standpoint (Shenton, 2004) of data gathering, a clear audit trail was created and documented, accounting for all research decisions and activities related to how the data was collected, recorded, and analyzed. I employed the code/recode strategy using NVivo, so all researcher’s coding was verified by NVivo after the codes and themes had been created. Lastly, I utilized reflection to ensure that I was documenting and appraising the steps I was taking in my research to ensure that the decisions that were made were underpinned by theory and best practice.

Confirmability

This refers to the “degree to which the findings of the research could be confirmed by other researchers” (Anney, 2014, p. 279) and the “findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but clearly derived from the data” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122). Anney (2014) suggested that

confirmability can be achieved through an audit trail, reflexive journal, and triangulation.

Methodological and data triangulation which was previously mentioned, also helped with the confirmability, reducing the researchers bias. In addition to this, a detailed methodological description was provided in addition to an audit trail which include the coded documents and interviews, data matrices, and thematic outlines, each offering visible evidence of the process and “that the researcher did not simply find what he or he set out to find” (Bowen, 2009, p. 307). This process also ensured the themes or categories related to the findings actually emerged from the data. Additionally, a reflexive journal was used to record all events in the field along with personal reflections in relation to the data and the process itself, being mindful of my own bias and assumptions to help “ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

Summary

This qualitative study used a single embedded exploratory case study methodology to explore how actors and contextual factors at the macro, meso, and actors at the micro level influenced the implementation of assessment policy at the program level in a Health Sciences department at an institution in the UAE. The implementation of assessment policy within a department at an institution was used as case for this study. It was bounded to a term and focused on implementation of assessment policy and practice in a department at an institution (higher education) in the UAE. It used purposive sampling of key informants to select the data, using documentation and semi-structured interviews of key informants, which allowed for triangulation of data. Data analysis followed a systematic process using deductive, inductive, and comparative approaches to analyze the data. Issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed.

Lastly, this section outlined a number of ethical considerations which were considered such as anonymity, privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study from an analysis of documentation and interviews of key informants. The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore the implementation of assessment policy and the factors influencing the implementation process at an institution in the UAE. The study aimed to understand institutional assessment by focusing on the process of implementation in a department at an institution in the UAE. By completing this study, it was thought an improved understanding about assessment and policy implementation in higher education in the UAE would emerge.

This chapter's information is organized by research questions and used the conceptual framework developed from the literature review. It took a top-down and bottom-up perspective driven by Bressers' model (2004) to understand what transpired during the implementation process by examining the actors and context. This chapter begins with a discussion of the background and current institutional assessment policy and then focuses on the macro level and the wider contextual factors influencing implementation. Along with this, the meso level factors influencing actors are identified and discussed. It also reviewed the findings at the ground level using Bressers' (2004) CIT, examining participant's cognition, motivation, and power/capacity during the process of assessment implementation. Finally, it discusses the challenges to the implementation in the Health Sciences department.

Research Question 1: What is the assessment policy at the institution?

The institution's assessment policy was central to the implementation process and directed all assessment of student learning in academic programs at the college. For this reason, one of the primary research questions was to determine how the assessment policy was framed at the time of the study because it communicated, directed, and facilitated how the assessment of student learning outcomes was

done at the institution. Moreover, actors at the ground level in the institution interpret the policy so it partially frames their understanding and directs the implementation process. After analysis of documentation and interviews the following themes emerged about the assessment policy (Table 7).

Table 7

Assessment Policy Themes and Sub-Themes

<i>Overarching Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
Theme 1: Goals of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the quality of learning • Improving the implementation process • Alignment of outcomes, learning, and assessment • Measurement of Learning Outcomes • Standardization of assessment across the institution • Holding actors accountable for implementation process
Theme 2: Assessment methods to ensure Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria referenced assessment • Course assessment tasks • Standardized summative assessment through examinations
Themes 3: Tools to ensure Quality and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course syllabus • Course Assessment Plan (CAP) • Assessment Specification Document (ASD) • Course Assessment File • Moderation

Background to Policy

The new assessment policy was approved by the Academic Council at Latifa University in January 2016 and then introduced on March 1, 2016. It was communicated through an email directive from the Vice-chancellor’s office and sent to all staff at the institution. It stated that the old assessment policy, which had been in existence since 2007, would be discontinued. The rationale for the change in policy was primarily due to a “changing institutional and external context,” which was acknowledged by

institutional leadership as a major factor and will be discussed later in the chapter. It also stated that there was a “need for system-wide assessment and grading procedures to ensure all system-wide staff engaged in the process of assessment” (Latifa University, 2016a, p. 1). The directive also specified that this was necessary to ensure consistency and transparency in assessment, so there was a common set of procedures related to grading as a reference for all personnel to follow. Attached to this directive was a set of *Assessment and Grading Procedures*, which were to guide faculty to “ensure effective alignment and integration of all components of the assessment process” (Latifa University, 2016a, p. 1). The procedures outlined in the document expanded on some existing policies (grading policy) and were to guide assessment in each department at the course level after its introduction. Overall, the directive outlined the new plan, which was a comprehensive set of guidelines and procedures, to direct the process of assessment of student learning across different programs at the institution.

In addition to the main policy document, after 2016, other procedural documents were announced to guide assessment implementation. These documents encompassed course assessment guidelines and exam administration guidelines. Specifically, the exam guidelines were introduced on April 24, 2017 before the course assessment guidelines and were developed to ensure consistency of the final exams’ implementation across all campuses. It was revealed, in the past, there were problems with the administration of final assessments at the institution, which compromised the validity and reliability of the assessments. As a result, this document delineated invigilation procedures and enforced detailed auditing of the assessment procedures, which was overseen by the assessment task force. This process was implemented each semester and held every campus to the same standard, attempting to guarantee that the final assessment in courses was carried out in the same manner.

Following the exam guidelines, on May 1, 2018, course assessment guidelines were introduced through another directive. The guidelines detailed procedures which directed the assessment of student

learning in all departments and included extensive instructions to develop system-wide final examinations. After analyzing this document, it was evident the policy intended to set goals to improve the quality of education through assessments, and more specifically, to refine the quality of teaching and learning at the institution as well as improve the processes that assure quality, like the use of alignment tools and documentation. A close look at the document revealed that many of the changes to the policy and procedures aligned with the goals of the new vision and strategy, which were introduced in the fall of 2017 at the University.

Goals of the Assessment Policy

After an analysis of six documents, which included the new policy documents, guidelines, and directives (see Table 8), it was found that the reason for the policy change related to a need to improve the quality of learning. The change of the assessment policy (course assessment guidelines, exam guidelines) was just one of many policy areas where change was initiated to improve the quality of education at the institution, which was connected to the strategic aim of the National Policy in the UAE. Hence, the new policy of assessment was emblematic of sweeping institutional change through policy and procedural changes, resulting from the new strategic plan.

Table 8

Assessment documents analysis (main themes and subthemes)

	Goals (Main Theme)	Assessment Tools (Main Theme)	Process of implementation (Main Theme)
Assessment Grading and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality assurance and accreditation • alignment • accountability • measurement of learning • consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tools for assessment implementation • Course assessments tasks • variety of assessments • course files and Course Assessment Report (CAR) • grading scheme (criteria) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • moderating • auditing • awarding grades • quality assurance processes (for accreditation) • documenting (record keeping)

Enacting Assessment at Latifa University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measuring student attainment • quality assurance • alignment of outcomes and assessment • standardization of assessment • consistency • improving student learning • transparency of assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment task (formative and summative) • Course assessment tasks • variety of assessment tasks • criteria referenced • feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mapping (alignment) • marking and grading • collaborating (among different team members and SCTL) • developing assessment tasks
Course Assessment Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement of learning • measuring student outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Wide Exams • Course Assessment Tasks • Rubric • Course Assessment Plan (CAP) • Assessment Specification Document (ASD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing assessments • moderating instruments and items (Level 1 and 2) • double marking • designing instruments • documenting process
Exam Administration Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measuring of student learning • quality assurance and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faculty wide exam (FWA) • online exams using Blackboard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invigilating • administering exams • auditing of process • implementing exams • improving processes
Directive (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure consistency • ensure transparency • standardization of procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment tasks • grading procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • covers process of implementation • compliance to process
Directive (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure consistency in implementation in administration of exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty wide exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exam administration of FWA

Note. Key Assessment policy documents analyzed. Summary of themes emerging from the documents (goals, tools, and implementation process).

Typically, when a policy document is written, goals are outlined. There were a variety of goals, some explicit and some more implicit, of the new assessment policy. The new goals were not easily discernible because after the old policy was voided, there has been no overarching policy document to replace the previous document. Instead, there were different individual/separate documents, such as the

first document - *Enacting Assessment at Latifa University* - which included principles, procedures, and guidelines outlining how each program should conduct assessment at the institution (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Excerpt from assessment guidelines (Latifa University, 2016a)

1. Course Assessment

Principles

- 1.1. Grades are determined by the evaluation of student performance against course requirements and relevant academic standards.
- 1.2. Assessment tasks will be aligned with course learning outcomes consistent with the relevant QFEmirates level descriptors.
- 1.3. Assessment tasks should have sufficient variety to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their learning.
- 1.4. Each course (in a particular programme) will have the same common assessment tasks and weightings in the same academic year.
- 1.5. Each course learning outcome will be assessed by at least one assessment task.
- 1.6. Generally, each course will have a minimum of three different types of assessment tasks.
- 1.7. Grading schema in all courses will be aligned to appropriate academic standards, depending upon the academic domain, year level of the course, and the appropriate standards of the QFEmirates.

Figure 4 illustrates that the new assessment document begins with key principles related to course assessment rather than beginning with overarching goals. The document stressed the importance of aligning assessment tasks to course outcomes and meeting the desired standards of QFEmirates. However, in the preamble, the directive and document suspended assessment policy LP 2220 “until a more comprehensive one is issued” (Latifa University, 2016b, p. 1). This made understanding, determining, and translating the goals of the new assessment difficult because no overarching was developed and there have been no accompanying goals. Indeed, when those in the department were questioned about the assessment policy they had difficulties identifying the overarching policy document because of the different documentation (see Table 8). Only after analyzing a number of the directives, preambles, and procedural documents, were the new assessment policies goals revealed.

Although there were several ‘hidden’ goals to the new assessment process, it was evident that the main focus was improving the quality of the assessment process and procedures (quality systems).

Improving the quality of learning

Analysis of the policy documents revealed that the policy’s primary goal was to improve the quality of learning in courses at the program level. As one assessment sub-policy document noted, “the challenges of meeting new expectations about academic standards in a rapidly evolving Latifa University demand that we rethink assessment policies and practices for better outcomes” (Latifa University, 2018a, p. 3). Another directive from the office of a senior leader corroborated this. It contended that “the reason for an explicit focus on improving assessment practice is the huge impact it has on the quality of learning” (Latifa University, 2016c, p. 1). This claim was reinforced in the *Course Assessment Guidelines*, stating that assessment has “one of the most significant influences on students’ experiences of higher education and all they gain from it” (Latifa University, 2018a, p. 3). Evidence suggested it was believed that there is a close relationship between assessment and the quality of learning, so any policy to improve learning must also underscore student assessment and not just direct policy at teaching and learning. Indeed, it was discovered that assessment at the university was a vital part of teaching and learning, which could help improve education quality. Improvement of the quality of teaching and learning was connected to the new strategic plan (Latifah 2.0); at the beginning of the new semester in August of 2017, set many institutional and strategic goals to enhance and improve the institution’s policies and processes to ensure quality. However, problematically, the goals were not explicitly set out in the new policy guidelines.

Quality implementation processes

Analysis revealed to achieve quality assessment of student learning outcomes, the institution developed a rigorous and robust, top-down process to implement assessment. The institution’s overall

strategic plan underscored the significance of having quality processes and systems in place. Consequently, an extremely detailed and prescribed assessment implementation process occurred each semester, and directed the course work assessments and final assessment in all programs at the institution. The process had many dates and deadlines, outlined different implementers' responsibilities, and had a built-in moderation and auditing process to ensure alignment, quality, and consistency in assessment. The process of developing assessment instruments is summarized in Figure 5 during a 16-week semester.

Figure 5

Process of writing and moderating/auditing final assessments for courses (Adapted from Course Assessment Guidelines, 2018a, p. 4).

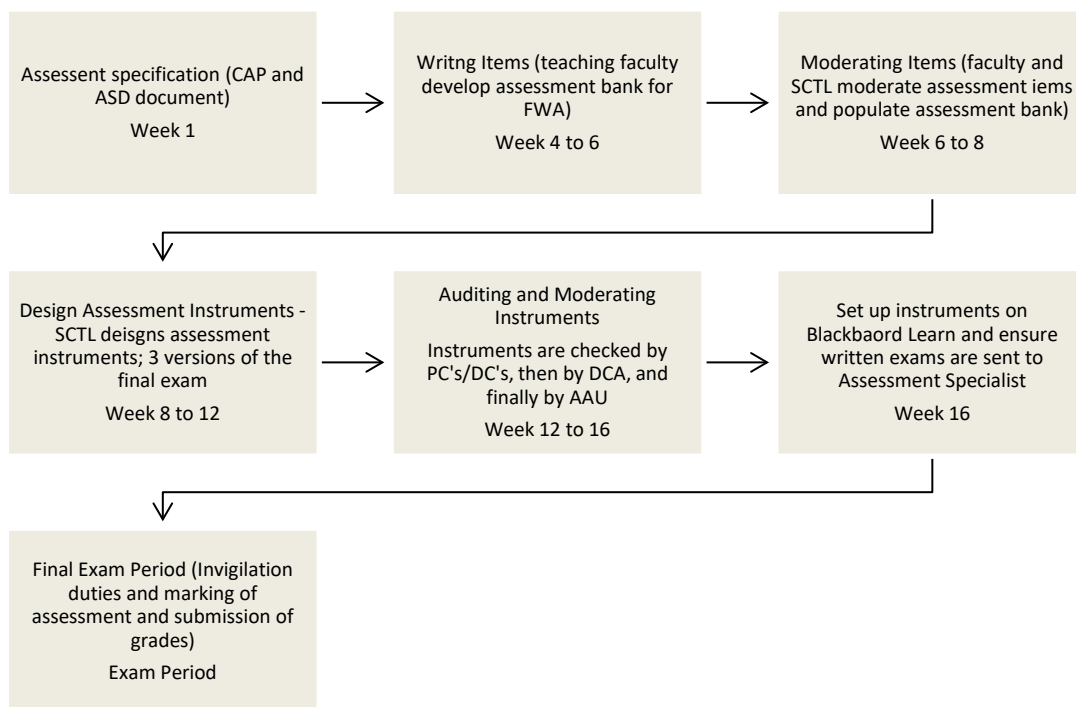


Figure 5 reveals that as a result of a focus on quality enhancement, a complex summative assessment process was developed to ensure that processes were standardized institutionally at the department level.

Interestingly, this process focused on summative assessment only, accounting for 30% of the final grade in the course - meaning much of the policy processes and time was positioned towards summative assessment. This fact was confirmed by faculty during interviews. Participants discussed how the policy focused primarily on the summative aspect of assessment and the implementation of final exams. This became very clear when one leader noted their role in assessment, affirming that:

My role at the moment is **specifically to do with exams**. And **there's not much involvement within the course work** aspect of the assessment at the moment, which I feel would be beneficial to do that moving forward, because again, we're not auditing or reviewing for quality of course work assessments at the moment. (P8)

Subsequently, the time and resources dedicated to the assessment process related mostly to the final assessment process. In contrast, there were far less control and resources (time, P.D., and tools) allocated to course work assessment which accounted for 70% of the students' final grade. Course assessment was still standardized as per the policy, but the process took less time, included less moderation, and was controlled by the department and faculty.

Alignment

While it was revealed that improving the quality of assessment was the primary goal of the new assessment policy, to achieve this, the institution sought to align the course learning outcomes and assessment. As the assessment procedures stated, "assessment tasks will be aligned with course learning outcomes consistent with the relevant QFEmriates framework level descriptor" (Latifa University, 2016b, p.1). Moreover, the documentation revealed that institutional leadership sought to address teaching quality in courses by ensuring that teaching and assessment aligned. As one of the sub-policy documents supported, "outcomes-based approach requires that curricula be developed in alignment with the intended learning outcomes (LOs), and selection of appropriate assessment task that provide

evidence (measure) of student learning” (Latifa University, 2016a, p. 1). The document went further and specified that “aligning assessment tasks to the taught curriculum requires a number of principles to be adhered to” (Latifa University, 2016a, p. 1). This evidence reveals the institution’s belief that alignment was a vital component to ensure quality assessment and learning in programs.

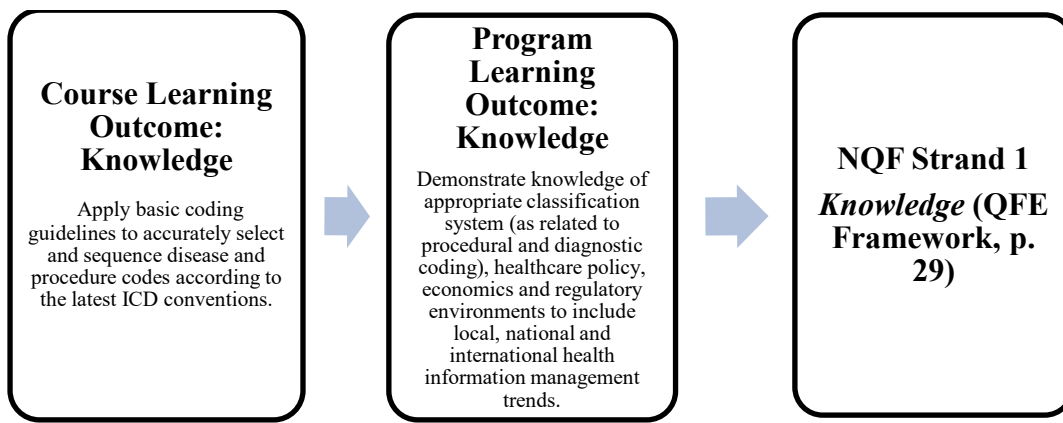
At the course level, the policy detailed how alignment between outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment was imperative in the process. The assessment procedures document cited Biggs (1999), a well-known assessment theorist, and his theory of constructive alignment to illustrate how this should align in the program and courses. The policy specified that student experience should take precedent over academic freedom in courses, and teachers were not free to teach or assess whatever they chose. In their view, to ‘guarantee’ quality, all teaching material should be aligned to learning objectives and the assessments in the courses. This was corroborated by many of the interviewees who suggested that alignment was a major part of the implementation process, but argued that some courses were better aligned than others. Participant 5 supported this assertion stating that the coursework is better aligned because the way “... we teach the course work, or the oral exams is different actually than the FWAs, the standard is very high, very high, and I don’t think the way we teach, and the resources or the assessments that we use in the coursework is aligned well, and it is not reflected well (aligned) in the FWA.” This was corroborated by Participant 1 who suggested, “**For some courses it is, well aligned...** but for a few courses, they need to modify or change a little bit. A little bit. **Tweaking is required for certain courses**, but for some courses, yes, they’re perfectly fine.”

In addition to an alignment between assessment and teaching content, the policy mandated that learning outcomes at the course level align with program-level learning outcomes and the National Qualifications Framework (QFEmirates framework) as seen below in Figure 6. For each course, the

department and faculty were responsible to comply with this alignment structure and ensure all courses were aligned by completing the CAP document at the beginning of the year. Figure 6 below illustrates one course learning outcomes which focuses on knowledge of a course outcome is subsequently aligned to program and the NQF framework.

Figure 6

Example of Alignment of Course Learning Outcomes to Program and QFE



In individual courses, this typically included four to five learning outcomes based on Bloom’s taxonomy. The QFE Emirates is intended to be the lone qualifications framework and reference point through which all qualifications in the country can be compared nationally and internationally. The framework is comprised of five strands or learning outcomes which programs need to align (KHDA, 2020). The five strands are knowledge, skill and competencies such as autonomy and responsibility, self-development, and role in context.

Another key feature of alignment was it provided assurance for the development of assessment tasks for each learning outcome (Table 9). Assessment tasks were to measure each learning outcome’s cognitive complexity based on Bloom’s Taxonomy of learning (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating). The course learning outcomes and content area outcomes were to be mapped and aligned with assessment tasks on a mapping document (CAP), including the weighting

of each assessment during the course to attain alignment. It also allocated a time of delivery related to each learning outcome (Column 3). The table below shows a revised version of a CAP and the mapping for one course learning outcome. In practice, this course had a total of six overall course learning outcomes and 40 different content areas outcomes to map and align to different assessment instruments.

Table 9

Mapping of Learning Outcomes and Assessment Tasks (adapted from Latifa University Assessment Document, n.d.)

Course Learning Outcome	Content Area	Duration of Delivery (hrs)	% Delivery Time	Cognitive Complexity	Assessment Instrument	Rationale	Assessment Type	Weight (% of Course Grade)
CLO 1: Apply basic coding guidelines to accurately select and sequence disease and procedure codes according to the latest ICD conventions.	CLO 1.1 Define related terminology: coding & statistical classification system	0.5	1%	Knowledge	Quiz 1	Students should be able to understand function of coding and statistical classification system	Formative (CW)	1
	CLO 1.2 Discuss the purpose and importance of coding.	0.5	1%	Knowledge	Quiz 1	Students should be able to understand purpose and importance of coding.	Formative (CW)	0

The importance of this was mentioned frequently by most participants in the study who stated they needed to certify there were at least two course work assessments along with a summative assessment properly aligned to the correct taxonomy for each of the learning outcomes.

The last area of alignment related to the final exam through the ASD (See Figure 7). This tool encouraged alignment between assessment items, learning objectives, and the final examination. Courses with a final exam had to verify that each question on the final exam aligned with the cognitive complexity of the outcome to guarantee that it measured the actual learning outcomes at the correct level

of complexity. As Participant 5 supported, “so if you have learning outcome, which is cognitive, and the cognitive level according to Bloom’s taxonomy basically says application. Then the question (for final examination) or assessment has to be application.” The document assured that learning objectives were evenly assessment according the planned weighting in the course. The mapping also assured that overall learning outcomes were mapped to the above CAP, safeguarding that program learning outcomes along with outcomes in the QFE framework were met. The example below was provided by the department to illustrate the ASD tool, which was used to align the learning outcomes, cognitive complexity, course work, and questions on the final exam.

Figure 7

ASD for Final Exam in a Health Science Course (Latifa University Assessment Document, n.d.)

Course Learning Outcome	Cognitive Complexity	Planned Weight (% of Course Grade)	Planned Weight (% of Instrument)	Item Type	# of Items	Actual Weight (% of Instrument)	Expected Time for Completion (min)	Which Items in Instrument?
CLO 1	Application	2	7%	MCQ	5	5		Q1, 2, 3, 4, 5
				Problem Solving	3	6		Q15, 16, 17
					8	11	17	
CLO 2	Application	7	23%	MCQ	2	2		Q6, 7
				Problem Solving	13	26		Q18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30
					15	28	42	
CLO 3	Application	6	20%	MCQ	2	2		Q8, 9
				Problem Solving	8	16		Q31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38
					10	18	27	
CLO 4	Application	6	20%	MCQ	2	2		Q10, 11
				Problem Solving	10	20		Q39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48
					12	22	33	
CLO 5	Application	4	13%	MCQ	1	1		Q12
				Problem Solving	4	8		Q49, 50, 51, 52
					5	9	14	
CLO 6	Application	5	17%	MCQ	2	2		Q13, 14
				Problem Solving	5	10		Q53, 54, 55, 56, 57
					7	12	18	
Instrument Total		30			57	100	150	

Measurement of Student Learning Outcomes

The most discussed goal of the assessment policy by the participants was the idea of measuring students learning or achievement. Interestingly, all (N=9) of the interview participants (leaders and faculty) who were interviewed, cited measurement of learning outcomes as the main purpose of

assessment. Although all had different interpretations and definitions, the general consensus was the purpose of the assessment policy was to determine students' level of achievement or to evaluate/measure the learning outcomes. According to Participant 3 "assessment will, in any particular course, assess student achievement of each course learning outcome." Participant 4 said "students must demonstrate that they have met the relevant standard required for the award of a grade." Similarly, Participant 8 suggested that the policy and assessment allowed for the department to know if "the knowledge of facts, theories, and concepts, the practical and thinking skills, and the competencies required by the course learning outcomes, if the student is ready to move on to the next level of study." Although there are slightly different interpretations, all of these statements are underlined by the goal of summatively assessing learning or achievement of outcomes.

Much of the policy documentation also mentioned that the purpose of the policy was to measure student learning and achievement of learning outcomes. The learning consisted of knowledge, skills, and certain dispositions and was done by embedding course assessments tasks in and a summative assessment task at the end of the course. In its opening paragraph, the document *Enacting Assessment at Latifah* suggested that assessment provides "evidence for the achievement of student learning outcomes and discriminating between different levels of student academic performance arising from the programmes at Latifa University" (Latifa University, 2016, p. 1). The document outlined how this was to be done at the institution. In addition, *the Course Assessment Guidelines* was dedicated to further describing, in greater detail than the initial documentation, how student learning outcomes were to be measured in courses. It discussed principles, tools, roles, processes, and approaches. Indeed, all the supplemental documentation (Appendix 5) supported the initial document which was released on March 1, 2016. To measure students learning, students at Latifa University received letter grades and a percent,

according to rubric of achievement, which described standardized levels of achievement for these grades (Appendix 11).

Standardization of assessment across the institution

Another goal of the assessment policy at the university was to standardize assessment across the different campuses to ensure consistency. In response to standards set forth by the CAA, specific measures, steps, and tools were developed to standardize the assessment practices such as building assessment specifications, developing procedures for designing, writing and reviewing assessment items and tools, and implementing methods for moderating and reviewing assessment instruments.

Standardization, according to one document, safeguarded that “learners are exposed to equivalent learning experiences” (Latifa University, 2018b, p. 1), especially with regards to summative assessment.

The goal of standardization was corroborated by all of the teaching faculty and program leaders who discussed the goal of standardization of summative assessment. As Participant 3 suggested, “when dealing with the SCTL (Senior Course Team Leader) role, they have a goal to standardize the assessments across different campuses, especially for FWA (Faculty Wide Examinations) preparations.”

Participant 5 also mentioned this in her role as SCTL stating that:

So basically, we have, let’s say **the course nursing is offered at two campuses in Sharjah and Fujairah**. Let's say this course is offered here. We have one system course leader (SCTL). Okay. Let’s say this system course leader is at the Sharjah women’s campus, so the Fujairah people and the SCTL would prepare the question bank according to the SCTL and people in Sharjah. And so, **the SCTL who actually gathers the bank, and then we’ll actually format three versions of the exam** because if it’s a two campuses exam.

This demonstrates that standardization was a very important goal, especially when courses were offered at two or more campuses and involved a final summative examination to assess the course learning outcomes.

Accountability

Accountability was another important goal of the assessment policy. As part of the new policy, there was a robust assessment process with quality checks. The new policy held actors in each department responsible for implementation of course assessment accountable to fulfilling certain roles and tasks. As part of this process, implementation focused comprehensively on developing faculty-wide assessments and were used to assess at least 30% of the final grade in any given course. The process included a rigorous quality assurance process involving moderation and auditing of the course assessments and final exam during the semester. It included different participants such as teaching faculty, program coordinators, the system course team leader, the Executive Dean in each department, and the Central Assessment Unit (CAU) who had very distinctive roles (see Table 9) for quality and accountability purposes.

Table 10

Departmental Roles in Moderation and Quality Assurance Process (Adapted from Latifa University (Assessment and Grading Procedures, 2016a)

When	Actor	Role
Before teaching the course in the semester	System Course Team Leader (SCTL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish assessment requirement for course for learning outcomes to be achieved by all instructors delivering the course • Ensure there is academic rigor for each assessment task so that is appropriate and aligned to the QFE Emirates framework
During the semester when teaching the course	Faculty (Instructor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain up-to-date course file adding a copy/detail of the assessment tasks, sample of student work, and grade distribution • Help with the moderation of assessment items for final exam

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate the writing of the final exam and grades
During the duration of the course	SCTL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and monitor course files and develop course files • Act which might include re-assessing students or regarding work • Submit course work grades to the program chair • Coordinate writing of final exam (see Figure 6) • Write three version of the final exam • Final Course Assessment Report (CAR)
After the final assessment period	Programme Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify final grades in consultation with SCTL. • Act if there are anomalies and outliers • Ensure faculty are adhering to final exam process and meeting deadlines • Hold meetings or communicate with faculty any changes or discuss concerns with assessment in courses or program.
Before the announcement of the final course grades	Executive Dean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify course grades and appoint an ad-hoc committee to manage grades and auditing of final assessments • Approve the release of grades • Ensure divisional chair, program chairs, and assessment specialist are complying with policy and process

Note: Many personnel in the department had dual or “tri” roles. For example, one participant had an instructor (teaching) role, was a program coordinator, and also took on the role of SCTL for an individual course which widened their assessment responsibilities

Table 10 also illustrates the steps and protocols which faculty needed to comply to and was tied to their performance appraisal each year. It was believed that compliance to these processes would preserve the quality of assessment in the programs at the institution. Indeed, the theme of “checking” was mentioned considerably by those interviewed, stating that there were many checks in the process of assessment, especially as it pertained to final summative assessment of the learning outcomes.

Participant 2, similar to others, when asked whether the process was to audit faculty work in the process,

was clearly annoyed with the audit process and felt it was overused stating that, “Oh my god yes, so much checking.”

Approaches to Assessment in Courses to ensure Quality

To further ensure quality, the methods of assessment were delineated explicitly in the policy document though a common set of assessment principles. It was apparent that each method was aimed to ensure quality by standardizing the implementation process across courses and programs at different campuses. The policy document *Enacting Assessment at Latifa* and the *Course Assessment Guidelines* stipulated that each course must include a minimum of three ‘Assessment Tasks’. In theory, these tasks could serve both a formative and summative purpose and may include several smaller assessments with timely feedback or more summative assessment tasks, which aimed to provide more extensive evidence of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired. It was expected that the assessment tasks chosen for each course provide substantive evidence of the courses’ learning outcomes in terms of partial achievement outcomes or summative achievement upon the completion of courses. During the semester, for any assessment task, feedback was expected to be given in a timely fashion. The policy also outlined different formative and summative methods used, summarized in the table below. The assessment list indicates dual goals of measuring learning and assessment for student learning.

Table 11

Suggested Types of Formative and Summative Assessment Tasks

Formative Assessment Task	Summative Assessment Tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussions • Blogs • Online discussion forums • Reflective journals • Presentations • Short writing tasks • Mid-term quizzes • Tests/quizzes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final academic paper • Final examination • Substantive project work • Capstone project or artifact • Performance task • Oral assessment • Presentation (Individual/Group)

Criteria referenced. Assessment at Latifa University is criterion-referenced to ensure consistency and transparency of assessment. Each course assessment designed was to be accompanied by a rubric with clear criteria, and descriptions of desirable learning were to be developed and reviewed to ensure that they aligned with learning outcomes and appropriate standards. It was suggested that criteria be shared with both the instructor before the course and the students during the course to promote transparency during assessment. Moreover, the institution required “that the student be fully informed about the expectations and criteria upon which their final grades will be determined” (Latifa University, 2018a, p. 1), which safeguarded that assessment was transparent and known to students. In addition, when designing examinations and quizzes, the questions had to be aligned with course learning outcomes and reflect the complexity of each learning outcome based on Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Course Assessment Tasks. To also ensure quality, the institution mandated a variety of assessment practices be used with students in courses. It included the formative and summative assessment tasks mentioned above. According to the guidelines, it was essential that assessment of student learning occurred continuously and could include a series of smaller assessment tasks over a defined period, provided that there was evidence toward the achievement of learning outcomes. However, this needed to be no less than 15% of the final grade. As the policy document *Enacting Assessment at Latifa University* stated, “it is expected that evidence of student learning outcomes with come from substantive (not less than 15% of the total grade) summative assessment task” (Latifa University, 2016b, p. 2). In addition to these tasks, there could be a mid-term or a final examination, giving students an opportunity to demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge; or alternatively, a comprehensive project, series of artifacts (e.g., a portfolio that is developed by students over some time and addressed a significant number of the learning outcomes, particularly ones that are of a higher

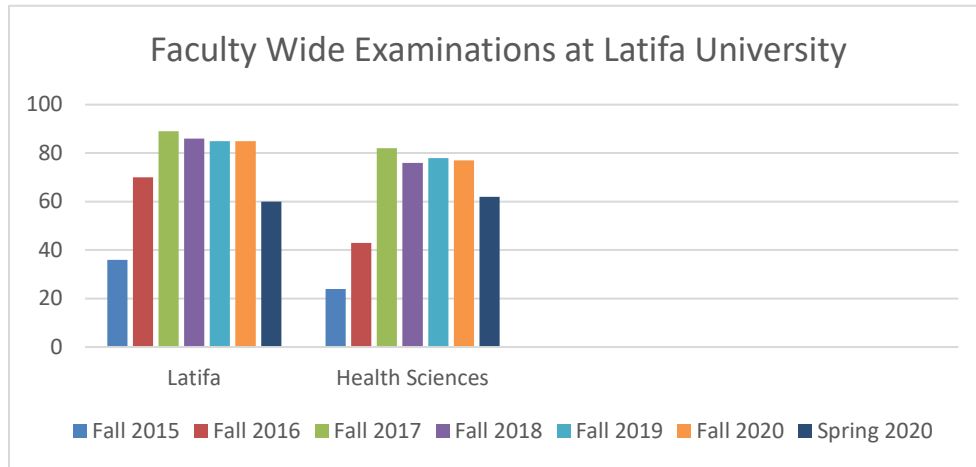
level). It was also required the instructor implement a final assessment task or final exam that measured all student learning outcomes for every course. When discussing course assessment, broad terms such as “Assessment Task” or “Assessment Instruments” were to be used instead of continuous or final assessments because it noted that this “may be confusing to students, instructors and the community alike” (Latifa University, 2016b, p. 2). Therefore, in the policy documents, syllabus, and assessment documents themselves, the term “Assessment Task” was commonly used, and a part of the institution's standard assessment nomenclature.

Standardized Summative Assessment. In the fall of 2016, the institution moved to implement faculty-wide assessments as the primary form of summative assessment. This decision, which standardized the measurement of student learning in core learning courses in all departments, was made based on internal review and external audits by the CAA. Historically, there were issues with the consistency of assessment between courses at different campuses, which brought questions about the institution’s quality of education. To improve the discrepancy in assessment across campuses, the institution moved to standardize the assessment at all campuses and programs, to ensure that all faculty who were teaching courses, were using the same assessment strategy and tools for the final evaluation of all learning outcomes. It was asserted by the policy document, faculty, and those in leadership that standardized exams would provide more consistency for the implementation of final assessments, the determination of grades, and the assessment of learning outcomes at each campus. However, many participants in the Health Sciences voiced displeasure and concerns with the use of final examinations to assess student learning. This will be discussed in later section of the study.

The figure below illustrates (see Figure 8) this move to standardization. The graph shows an increase in the distribution of courses using a written exam beginning in the fall of 2016, after the formulation and implementation of the new assessment guidelines.

Figure 8

Bar Graph showing increase in the use of FWA



Note. Graph of the use of Final examinations at Latifa University and Health Sciences. The graph shows the trend for all campuses and program and Latifa along with the Department of Health Sciences. It illustrated the increase in use of standardized campus wide examinations as assessment tools at Latifa University and the Health Science department. Overall, you can see a dramatic increase in the use of examination as the main form of assessment after the new policy.

Overall, it demonstrates a gradual increase in the number of exams in departments, reaching a peak in the fall of 2019. Looking specifically at the Health Sciences department, beginning in the fall of 2015 and prior to the new policy, faculty wide exams use was minimal, but after the new policy there was a significant escalation. In just two years, in 2017, the use of final examination had dramatically increased to over 80% of the courses being assessed by faculty-wide written examinations. However, in the Spring of 2020, during the time of this study, this policy had been rolled back and subsequently, there were substantial decreases in the use of faculty wide examinations in all departments. While this might be contributed to a change in the strategic plan at the institution from Latifa 2.0 to Latifa 4.0, it was expedited by the Covid-19 and the change in learning approach, which transitioned learning online.

Tools used to ensure Quality and Accountability

Analysis revealed that a number of tools were developed to help ensure quality assessment during the implementation process. The tools were introduced in 2017, but were only outlined in the *Course Assessment Guidelines* in May of 2018. The tools comprised the course outline or syllabus, CAP/ASD document, the Course Assessment File (E-CAF), and moderation. Along with helping with alignment, some tools like the CAP/ASD were also intended to help improve the validity and reliability of the assessment instruments used in each course (Latifa University, 2018a, p. 15). These tools were symbolic of a move towards quality processes to improve course assessment. Most of the tools were implemented to ensure that faculty members, who were the main policy actors, complied with the guidelines. Although faculty's performance appraisals were based on the completion of these procedural documents, each of these tools also ensured quality indicators such as transparency, consistency, alignment, and validity/reliability were met.

Course syllabus

The course syllabus was used as a tool for transparency and consistency, which were quality markers used by the institution. The course syllabus needed to be designed and discussed by faculty before the beginning of the course each semester. Once the course assessment strategy was decided upon and assessment tasks written into the course syllabus, it was mandatory for all instructors across all of the campuses to follow the course syllabus. Under no circumstances could the assessment strategy be changed or modified by any instructor at any campus for any reason. If changes were to be made, this had to go through the Faculty Academic Committee who needed approve the changes. This was done to ensure consistency across the different campuses and safeguard that students were clear (transparency) about how they will be assessed during the duration of the course.

Assessment Specification Documents (CAP/ASD document)

Another vital tool to maintain the quality of the assessment process was the CAP/ASD documents. The two documents were completed simultaneously and consisted of intricate spreadsheets created in Microsoft Excel. These two instruments were established in May 2018 with the *Course Assessment Guidelines*, and it was the responsibility of the SCTL to develop and share with the team. During week one and the first stage, the CAP/ASD was completed by the SCTL and other team members. These documents ensured alignment, consistency, validity/reliability, and standardization of the final assessment.

That said, it was important to note that these two tools were a source of frustration for faculty and leadership due to the constraints it placed on assessment and the confusion with the purpose of the tools. In addition, when these tools were introduced faculty expressed that they had misunderstandings of how to implement the tools as there was no training provided. In addition, participants discussed how this tool needed to be completed and updated each semester, as Participant 5 noted:

It's very challenging because we have advising that time. We have the scheduling, we have new joiners who needs, you know, who need orientation. So, if the course, let's say it's given to a **new joiner, then that's a problem** because it needs to be submitted with week one and week two.

Therefore, based on the interviews of the participants, although the tool had a specific purpose, it was found to be a challenging step in the process because of the complexity and technical skill needed to complete the task.

Course Assessment Plan (CAP)

The CAP document “outlines every assessment for a given course and provides information about the 100 marks that students are assessed on during the semester” (Latifa University, 2017a, p. 5).

The purpose of this was to certify that standard assessment instruments were used by teachers to assess student work. This tool also mapped the CLOs of the course with the PLOs and NQF strands, allocated instructional time to each CLO's, allotted the weightings of marks to each assessment task, aligned the cognitive complexity of the CLO and assessment task, and for the final examination, listed all the assessment items and weightings.

Assessment Specification Document (ASD)

The ASD was another tool that was used as part of the assessment implementation process. The ASD provides a road map of the final exam and outlined the types of questions (multiple choice, short answer, and essay) on the final examination and the planned weight of each item on the exam. Its purpose is to ensure that all CLO's have been assessed at the end of the course and that no CLO has been over or under assessed on the final examination, and question items match the cognitive complexity of the learning outcome. Again, during the interviews, faculty expressed their discontent and confusion with this tool, especially during its initial introduction. Even after having used this tool, it was revealed there was confusion about the purpose of the tool. As a result, faculty questioned the value of this tool in the implementation process and for the assessment of students.

Course Assessment File (E-CAF)

Another crucial tool to help implement assessment was the online Course Assessment File (E-CAF). Each semester, the E-CAF was created by the SCTL and each faculty who taught the course. At the end of the semester, individual faculty was responsible and held accountable for completing an E-CAF for any course taught, which was tied to their annual performance appraisal. Every semester this file was checked by the program coordinator or divisional chair to ensure compliance with the guidelines. These E-CAF files were mandated by the CAA and were used to provide evidence for accreditation purposes and internal auditors to check the quality of teaching and assessment by

individual faculty. The course files were frequently mentioned by faculty as an important tool that held faculty accountable, providing evidence for the quality of learning and assessment for the courses taught.

Moderation

The moderation of assessment instruments, grades, and the FWA was an essential part of the university's assessment policy, implementation process, and the quality paradigm. According to the institution, the primary aim of moderation was “to ensure that assessment is fair, valid, and reliable, enabling equivalence and comparability” (Latifa University, 2018a, p. 12). The first area of moderation involved the final assessments done each semester for courses and comprised 30% of the final mark. Interestingly, the course assessments were excluded from this moderation process - except for moderating grades that received an A or an F.

For the FWA, there were two levels of moderation. The first level of moderation began during the semester after each faculty member (SCTL) had written his/her exams. They would have their final exams checked and reviewed by the Program Coordinator or Divisional Chair for errors such as length of the exam, weighing of exam items, repetition of items, clarity of questions, redundancy, and that the exam version matches the ASD document which outlined the content of the exam. The moderation was to be completed by week 10 of the semester. After this, a second moderation was done by the divisional committee for assessment (DCA), which audited the three different exam versions (FWA). At this level of moderation, the test was reviewed to ensure the following:

- Complexity level is mapped to the ASD
- The length of time is in line with the ASD
- The layout follows a standard template
- Visual elements are clear

- The answer key is clear in terms of language

Included in the DCA was the Quality Assurance representative, the assessment specialist, and members of the division who were to be adept at linguistics and/or assessment. The DCA provided feedback and recommendations to the SCTL, which needed to be resolved, and the program coordinator or divisional chair also flagged issues at the first level of moderation.

Aside from the intensive moderation process of the final exam, moderation was theoretically done for all other assessment tasks before, during, and after the assessment task. For example, oral assessments such as interviews, presentations, or practical skills demonstrations should have at least two markers and “clear guidelines as to how to resolve difference between markers” (Latifa University, 2016b, p. 5). However, according to faculty and leadership in the department, at the time of this study there had been little focus on moderation of coursework assessment aside from what was done for the final examination.

Summary

It was important to establish an understanding of the assessment policy and supporting documentation to understand the different factors influencing policy implementation. The new policy had a number of different goals related to quality such as quality of learning, quality processes, alignment, standardization, and accountability. It was clear from the analysis of the policy documents that the assessment policy was rigorous and prescriptive, and supported by detailed documentation outlining many procedures which faculty needed to comply. Moreover, to ensure that there was quality assessment at the college, the institution implemented different assessment tools such as coursework assessment which was criterion referenced, encouraged a variety of assessments tools to be used for coursework, and moved towards the use of final examinations to conduct summative assessment of student learning across campuses at the end of each course to ensure the measurement of learning was

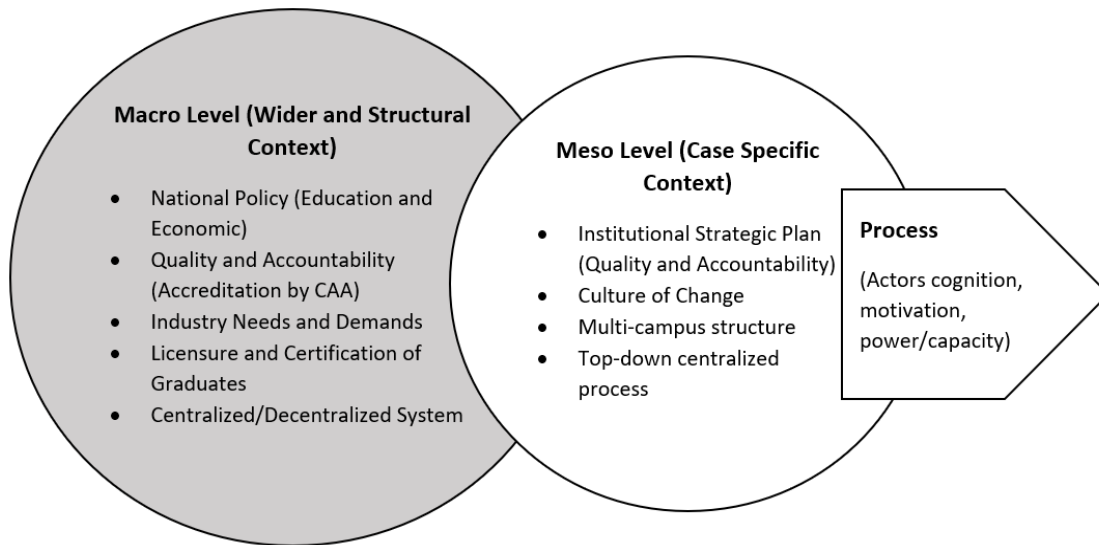
standardized. Lastly, the tools used during the implementation process revealed other quality markers such as transparency, consistency, alignment, reliability, and validity as sub-goals to quality. These quality markers were reflected in the assessment tools which were used to ensure that these goals were achieved.

Macro and Meso level Contextual Factors influence on Assessment Policy Implementation

After reviewing the policy documentation (see Appendix 5) and participant interviews, it was evident that several contextual factors at the macro level influenced the institutional context. The following figure (Figure 9) illustrated the sub-themes which emerged at the macro and meso level and were found to be influencing the implementation of assessment policy at the micro-level. These contextual factors influenced programming, teaching and learning, and, ultimately, the assessment policy, and implementation process. However, as Bressers (2004) noted, these macro-level factors do not influence actors directly, but each level influences the subsequent level, so the wider context is influencing the institutional context where actors are implementing policy. The macro level factors influenced the institutional setting at the meso level by influencing the formulation of the institutional strategic plan and subsequent policy, program and departmental approaches to assessment, and faculty assessment practices in the Health Sciences program and courses.

Figure 9

Macro and Meso-level sub-themes



Note. This figure clarifies the influences that emerged from the data as sub-themes at the macro and meso level which influence each subsequent level and actor's interaction during the process, according to Bressers' (2004) Contextual Interaction Theory. The micro-level or interaction process is addressed below after the discussion of macro and meso level themes are examined.

National Educational and Economic Policy

Policy documentation at the national and institutional level, along with department leadership and faculty in the Health Science (HS) department, indicated that policy at the institutional level was driven by national government policy. A review of policy documents revealed that the federal government policy cascaded down through the MOE and its branches (CAA) to the different public higher education institutions in the UAE. It was evident that the UAE's publicly funded universities were mechanisms for change. They promoted national social and economic policies, and their own strategic plans that were aligned with national interests, thereby contributing to the implementation of

socio-economic policy in the UAE. One of the managers in the Health department articulated this connection between the UAE's vision and the institutional goals in the following excerpt:

Today private sectors need to hire Emiratis because of **government economic policy**...

Therefore, our institution has changed their vision, um, to ensure that our students are employed by having these competency and skills through blending certification in the programs. So, our students, when they graduate, they have certification, and in some cases internationally certified.

(P7)

Evidently, Latifa University is a key public higher education institution in the UAE. It is under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and plays a crucial role in national socio-economic development in the UAE, therefore the government through the MOE exerts considerable pressure on the institution to align policy with national policy initiatives.

The current national policy (Vision 2021) aimed to make the UAE one of the world's best countries by the end of 2021. To reach this aim, in 2014, the policy set different national goals and articulated these through six key pillars or priorities, all representing different government sectors. The federal government designated education as a key pillar, stating that it was a "fundamental element for the development of a nation" (The Government of the UAE, 2018c). The vision also underscored the government's desire to have "a complete transformation of the education system and teaching methods' to meet national policy goals by 2021" (The Government of the UAE, 2018c).

Aside from the documentation, it also emerged from the interviews that department leaders and some faculty were cognizant that national policy was driving institutional policy. One senior department leader in the Health Sciences noted that the UAE's national policies were influencing the kinds of programs and courses that are offered in the institution: "I know that, ehm, you know, especially within the UAE, the degrees in the courses that are offered at Latifa, they're **influenced by the needs of the**

country” (P8). Another participant supported this link between national economic goals and higher education stating that: “Uh, you know, at times the government might say, the drive is towards the usage of more information technology in health care and all of these things, and so we have to adjust accordingly **because the major market is sovereign**” (P7).

The strategic plan and different policy documents at the institution revealed that institutional goals aligned with other national goals, namely the Emiratization of different private sectors. The National Agenda aimed to create a knowledge-based economy, specifying the need for “high levels of national participation in the private sector workforce” (The Government of the UAE, 2018a). To date, Emirati’s historically entered the public domain, namely government jobs, rather than joining the private sector. As one faculty supported, “the **percentage of nurses in the Emirates is only one percent** in the Ministry of Health and Education, so, they weren’t Emirati, I mean, nursing, is still way behind other professions, so the industry really needs Emirati nurses” (P5). This trend in nursing was evident in other health care fields in the UAE, and as a result, the institution developed programs to fill this deficit. A faculty member corroborated how Emiratization influenced institutional policy and programs. “You know **it’s all about Emiratization and increasing this**, because you know the government sectors are getting oversaturated with Emirati’s, so they need to look for other options, which is the private sector” (P5). As a result, Latifa University changed their goals and programs to meet the needs of the national economy.

In addition to influencing the institutional policy goals and programming, the National Agenda influenced the teaching and assessment of courses. An analysis of government policy documents revealed a significant focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The National Agenda outlined education as a key pillar to moving national interests forward and for the UAE to achieve its broad aim of being one of the best countries in the world. One participant described the influence of

government policies by asserting: “Uh, I think, uh the overall, uh you know, **the government policies also have like a huge impact** on, uh the way we, you know, go about the teaching process as well as the assessment process” (P7). Indeed, improving teaching and learning was an explicit goal of the national policy. Much of the documentation at the national and institutional level pointed to changes in teaching and assessment processes. In addition, according the Latifa’s Strategic Plan (2017c), the UAE was moving towards performance-based funding in higher education, therefore improvement was needed to “meet national aspirations and prepare for the future” (p. 6). Consequently, according to the Strategic Plan (2017c), the institution was “embarking on a historic transformational journey which will propel it to the future success up to 2021” (p. 6). Institutionally, goals were set to improve academic programs and faculty activities to meet high quality and industry standards. Indeed, the new assessment policy issued on March 1, 2016 and the procedural documents that followed were part of this transformation. The policy aimed at improving the quality of assessment by standardizing assessment processes which would facilitate consistency during assessment implementation. This would meet the institutions goal of fully embedding quality assurance processes (Latifa University, 2017c).

Industry needs in the UAE

It was also apparent that the institutional goals of assessment and assessment processes were directly associated with the institutions’ overall strategic plan, which linked to the national economic agenda. This aspect of the national policy made it a priority to use education to support the economy to meet industry demands in the country. The relationship between industry demands and economic policy outside the institution was connected to different strategic objectives and key performance indicators (KPI’s) at the institution, which highlighted a clear goal to meet market demands in the UAE. For example, one KPI in the institutions strategic plan from 2017 to 2021 set a goal towards graduates’ employability. It was discovered that one of the institution’s objectives was “to meet the current and

future demand with work-ready, skilled and competent Emirati graduates” (Latifa University, 2017c, p.7).

In the UAE, there is a shortage of Emirati’s in the Health Sciences. Institutional documents pointed to a massive shortage of Emirati’s in the medical health sciences (Latifa University, 2017c, p. 13). According to an Abu Dhabi Education Council Graduate Survey, only 5% of Emiratis were employed in the private sector (as cited in Latifa University, 2017c, p. 13). Although current numbers are not available, in 2013, it was reported that Emirati nurses only made up 3% of the total workforce (Gulf News, March 21, 2013). This trend is comparable to other health professions like paramedics, pharmacy, and lab technicians. As a result, the institution propitiates national demands of Emirati health care workers by aligning programs to external private industry demands. As one policy document supported, to improve industry deficits, Latifa University would “provide flexible industry-relevant programs and professional certification alignment at the institution” (Latifa University, 2017c, p. 13). In the past, Emirati’s had not chosen these fields as most gravitated to the government sector or private business because historically, jobs in the Health Care field like nursing were lower paid positions filled by offshore workers from countries such as India or the Philippines.

As a result of the connection between institutional and national economic policy goals, it was not surprising that there was a direct relationship between the program development and the country’s vision and policies, especially in the health care industry and the department of study. As one participant supported:

We need health care workers in this country. There’s a big drive with no Emirati left behind, you know and Latifa 4.0. **It all comes back to the Vision 2021 of the country,** and that’s why we do engineering, health sciences, I.T., you know, these are all the industries that the UAE wants to focus their attention on at the moment, and again, that means that this might change

moving forward **depending on what the needs of the country** are. So, I think that is a factor that affects the policy and how we assess the students. (P8)

Another faculty confirmed the influence of market demands and industry on assessment at the college. The participant discussed how external industry demands influenced institutional programs, courses, and assessments. As she explained:

Our assessment strategy depends a lot on the, **what the industry wants from us**. When the students will go in the practical field what they need. So, we make everything according, even the structure of the program, courses in the program, **we need to modify those programs** on a regular basis so that then **needs of the market**, we will address that as well. And whatever is needed in the market, we will equip our students with that knowledge. (P1)

Health Sciences faculty and participants in leadership noted that the universities alignment to industry impacted the assessment approaches in these courses. As one health sciences faculty suggested:

Our graduates, or our institution, have to change and reform to meet industry needs through quotation and private means. So, we get these relationships with them and **we are now encouraged to do the capstone projects with industry partnership with the private industry**, so it's a lot about private now, sectors, expose our students to the industry through activities, through capstones, though, um, a sponsorship as well. So, this is how the institution or Latifa is affected, to meet the KPI's. (P6)

It was also found there was a push for departments to focus more on practical skills or 'soft skills' to ensure employability. The interviews revealed an awareness among faculty and leadership in the department that they must prepare their students for employment by assuring that they have practical or soft skills in the health sciences field. Some of the participants spoke about this priority and its influence on institutional assessment; one faculty affirming that "it has to be part of assessment, and we

have to change it to reflect that our program is measuring competencies. **Hands on, is what the industry wants.**” (P6)

The symbiotic relationship between industry and the institution was further demonstrated by the establishment of the Industry Academic Committee (IAC) in the Health Sciences department. The committee meets each semester to ensure that industry stakeholders have input on the curriculum and outcomes of the different programs. The documentation and interviews revealed that the different industry partners, through their participation in this committee, influenced assessment in the department. Participants explained the Health Sciences department established a committee that met with stakeholders from the Health Sciences industry each semester to discuss various issues to meet the needs of industry. One participant explained industry partners influenced various parts of the program and assessment:

So basically, we invited out partners from the industry to come to college and we know we update them or appraise them in terms of the curriculum or in terms of assessment. **We get feedback from them in terms of quality, what they want, you know, the attributes they want our students to possess or what skills that they want them to possess.** And based on that feedback we get from the committee, we make improvement to the design of the exam and review the exam during the design process. (P7)

This committee included various industry participants from both private and public in the healthcare field, such as hospital managers and managers from the Ministry of Health.

The Commission for Academic Accreditation

After reviewing documentation and interviews, the CAA was an often-identified government entity that had a direct, yet albeit, positive impact on assessment within the institution. It is a branch of the Ministry of Education and its’ core activities are institutional licensure and program accreditation so

that the “UAE public can be confident that licensed institutions and accredited programs will provide the quality of higher education that they expect and deserve” (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2011). For an institution to be licensed in the UAE, it must exhibit adherence to eleven different performance standards covering a range of activities in the institution, which helps to ensure that newly established institutions and programs, as well as existing ones, meet high levels of quality (Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2020). In addition, institutions must exhibit principles of continuous improvement and offer evidence that students are achieving student-learning outcomes.

Institutions attain licensure and program accreditation by application and providing supporting documentation to the CAA, which is then monitored through site visits by an external review team with appropriate expertise. Within the licensure and accreditations documentation, there are standards for program and course assessment set by the CAA. It emphasizes the process of assessment, ensuring each institution has valid and reliable instruments to determine student achievement and also to confirm that there are processes in place that institutions are using the information to improve teaching and learning. One significant standard established by the CAA is consistency in the assessment process which was reflected and highlighted in the assessment policy. It focused on prescribing a process of implementation to ensure standardization and consistency across all departments and campuses.

Although the CAA had influence, it was suggested that their impact was guiding and conciliatory and was not perceived as a negative influence on assessment implementation. In fact, the CAA safeguarded quality by ensuring there exists a robust process of assessment and quality measures within the programs. Beyond this, much of the “how to” of assessment was left to the institution, as long as it met the standards set by CAA. One senior leader in the department described the constructive effect of the CAA on assessment:

The CAA, to be honest with you, they, they really don't hurt us, they have quality measures that need to be enforced and **they're really after quality** ... they're very consultative, collegial in a way that, you know, your program has room for improvements. If you don't have assessment tools, you need to have assessment tools. They are telling you facts. I don't see the CAA as a limiting factor, **their guiding, I mean they do affect how you do assessments, but not in a negative way.** (P9)

Nonetheless, this cooperation and guidance attempts to establish consistency across the institutions, influencing both the assessment policy in the institution and the implementation process at the program and course level.

It was apparent that assessment was just one of many aspects of HE where the CAA provides guidance and direction. After examining the CAA manual, standards for assessment are outlined under Standard 2 in the guidelines; it stated that institutions “operates equitable, valid, and reliable processes of assessment which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes specified for the relevant program or course/module” (The Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2019b, p. 19). Moreover, there is also a section with seven different stipulations to consider such as the appropriateness of assessment tools, validity, and alignment of tools with learning outcomes. Furthermore, the standards specify that courses have rubrics for assessment tools, there be moderation of assessment and methods for authentication of student work, information for all stakeholders in the process, and departments need to ensure that tools are appropriate for program level and course (The Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2019b, p. 38). Also, there was information about overall institutional quality and quality enhancement processes whereby institutions must utilize assessment data in this process. This agenda clearly aligned with national policy centering on improving the quality of education provided in the UAE.

In addition to the participants discussing the CAA, a policy document cited the CAA as an external influence. It explained that the CAA was an essential part of the assessment process because the country was dedicated to improving the quality of public higher education, so the institution needed to change assessment to meet standards of quality set forth. For example, one of the direct impacts on faculty was that they are required to maintain a course file in compliance with Stipulation 3 (Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2019b). According to the standards and stipulations, the file must:

... contain sufficient information on each of the last two presentations of the course so that faculty or other persons who evaluate program effectiveness **can determine whether the course is meeting its learning outcomes**, and whether changes to the course are appropriate. The file included an approved outline with assessment strategies and also copies of assessment tasks, marking schemes, and model answers for all assessment tasks. (Commission for Academic Accreditation, 2019b, p. 39)

Licensure and Certification of Graduates

Another macro-level factor influencing the institutional context and faculty at the micro-level was the licensure bodies and certification examinations of different health authorities in the UAE. The Health Sciences department discussed that today, when students enter different professions in the UAE, much like developed and westernized countries, they must pass internal licensure examinations. Several interviewees discussed how this was on their minds when they prepared students during their classes. Participant 5 stated that:

Now our graduates have to be entering the private sector, and for doing this, **they have to pass an exam**. And, uh we started to think about how to **prepare our students to pass this exam**,

because honestly, with the curriculum we are teaching, if they go out and sit for this exam, they will fail.

Participant 2, who had been at the college for some time, also believed that licensure influenced assessment and argued that she would like to see the institution move more towards preparing students for these examinations during courses:

Depending upon what major they are doing, they should be more toward, um, like if they were doing nursing or pharmacy, **they need to be licensed**, so maybe assessment should be more towards board exams, and again, industrial thinking, because there are **so many licensure exams here** and they have to do this at the end, so they should be ready for this at that point.

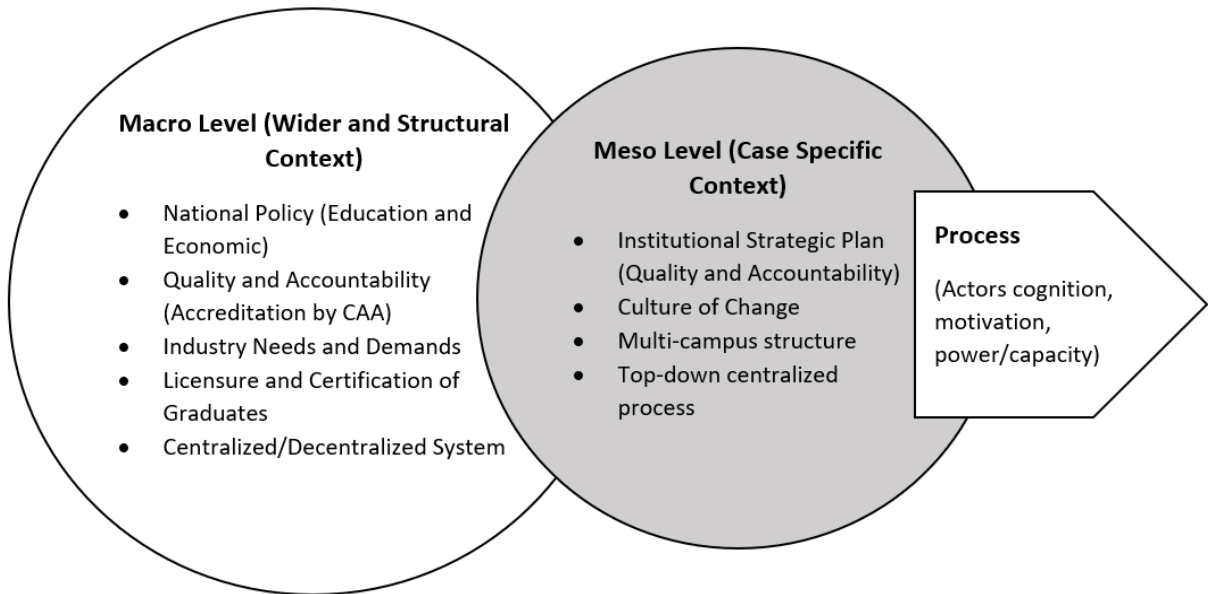
The evidence speaks to a conscious understanding of the individual participants that students who graduate in Health Science programs are required to pass licensure exams in the UAE, so teachers are often torn between teaching the content of the course while also knowing that they must cover elements from the licensure examination that is not taught in courses. Some of the participants felt that this should be a greater priority within the Health Sciences department because of the importance of licensure examinations for graduates.

Meso Level Factors

This study also aimed to determine meso level factors influencing assessment in the Health Science department. According to Bressers (2004), case specific contextual factors influence “actors” characteristics. The analysis of documents and interviews identified three main factors at the meso level that were affecting the micro-level and actor’s implementation of assessment policy. This included the institutional strategic plan centered on quality assurance and employability, the institution’s multi-campus organization, and the current institutional culture focused on change (See Figure 10).

Figure 10

Meso-level Contextual Factors Influencing Assessment



Institution Strategic Plan

Latifa University was founded as a technical college, and its current vision positioned itself as the leading applied higher educational institution in the UAE. The new institutional strategic plan launched in the fall of 2017 had a significant influence over both the assessment policy formation and implementation. This plan was a comprehensive institutional blueprint developed to meet key performance indicators set forth by the UAE government in its national vision. In this plan, five key goals were formulated with 15 specific outcomes that the institution would undertake over five years (Latifa University, 2017c, p. 1.). Many of these goals were designed to transform the institution and safeguard success by aiming to improve the quality of programs and learning within the institution aligned with broader national aspirations (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Latifa University Strategic Goals and Strategic Objectives (adapted from Latifa University, 2017c)

Goal 1: Empowering Students with 21st century skills in a vibrant campus environment engaged with their local communities.

- Maximize the number of Latifa graduates in full-time employment by becoming the employers first choice
- Broaden and enhance Latifa's program and campus life offerings
- Develop students' into well-rounded adults with strong academic and soft skills
- Improve retention and reduce the number of at-risk students
- Promote lifelong learning
- Enhance student and alumni services

Goal 2: Continious improvement of academic programs, faculty and scholarship activities to meet high quality standards and industry requirements.

- Latifa is recognized as a leading applied higher education institution
- Ensure breadth and depth of academic programs and curricula that continually meet industry requirements and international standards
- Blend traditional and innovative teaching methods to ensure student-centered learning
- Fully embed robust academic quality assurance processes
- Establish an effective applied research environment

Goal 3: Engagement of strategic partnerships to foster strong connections with industry, higher education institutions, alumni, and high schools.

- Latifa graduates maximize their contribution to the economy
- Enhance trust in the Latifa brand by the community
- Proactively broaden, operationalize and build on strategic partnerships

Goal 4: Provision of quality and efficient administrative services with effective governance.

- Attract, develop and retain high quality faculty and staff
- Leverage technology to enable institutional growth and development
- Ensure effective institutional governance
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency in the management and allocation of resources
- Enable effective processes, performance management and organizational excellence

Goal 5: Embedding an innovation culture in the institutional environment.

- Create opportunities for student innovation
- Encourage employee innovation
- Develop and enhance organizational learning

After analyzing the documentation at the meso level (see Appendix 5) and interviews, it was found that the strategic plan influenced the assessment policy and the process of implementation. The assessment policy document and the directive set forth by leadership, introduced in 2017 and preceded the introduction of the institution's strategic plan, was tied to the new strategic direction of the institution. For example, strategic goal two focused on "continuous improvement of academic

programs, faculty and scholarship opportunities to meet high quality standards and industry requirements” (Latifa University, 2017c, p. 8). Analysis of the strategic plan and the policy guidelines revealed that there was a goal to fully embed quality enhancement of assessment processes. The new policy also focused on standardization, ensuring that there was a standard set of procedures for everyone to follow across campuses to safeguard that assessment was consistent across the departments in the institutions across the Emirates. The strategic plan and the management framework described how standardization will be “cascaded” down from the central authority and that there will be “internal organizational alignment around the chosen strategy” which will “enable the aspired change” (Latifa University, 2017c, p. 11).

Quality and Accountability

Another emergent factor within the institution was a focus on quality and accountability, as a result of wider external factors. These factors include the aforementioned CAA and the federal government’s strategic plan to improve the quality of education which were linked to national aspirations and a change to performance-based funding. Evidence of quality and accountability was found throughout the strategic plan and assessment policy documents, and the strict and detailed procedures that outlined the process of assessing student learning. Besides this, it was also manifested in the tools used to implement assessments such as the CAP/ASD, which standardized and aligned course assessment. Also, the decision towards standardized examinations across campuses to ensure consistency of assessment reflected the institutions goals of quality and accountability.

Many of the faculty and departmental leaders discussed the CAP/ASD document. This was a tool utilized during the implementation of assessment in each course. Several participants asserted that this document ensured that assessment was standardized across campuses and confirmed that assessments aligned to learning objectives for each course. The ASD also directed quality and accountability because

the faculty's performance appraisal was based in part on their completion of this document and their implementation of assessment. These documents held faculty accountable for ensuring that assessment was valid and reliable by confirming the course assessments aligned with learning outcomes, and the final assessment measured the entirety of student learning over the semester and the required level of cognition according to Bloom's taxonomy. This also quantified the amount of time that was to be spent on each learning objective in the course week by week which frustrated faculty because it left little opportunity to adjust learning and explore and probe deeper into different areas. As Participant 2 supported (referring to the CAP/ASD tool), "it closes my hand, it is limiting, in my opinion, because if I'm assessing ... I have prepared the CAP/ASD from the beginning of the semester, so that keeps me limited again to go further and look around." It reveals that one of the impacts is that it limits faculty's academic freedom and teaching in the courses and perhaps the quality of learning.

Large Multi-Campus Institution

The most often mentioned meso level contextual factor in the interviews was the institutions' multi-campus structure. Latifa University is made up of 14 different campuses across five different Emirates, and this unique organizational feature influenced both the development and implementation of the assessment policy. For the Health Sciences department, this meant managing the implementation of assessment in eight different programs across several different campuses.

The existence of courses at different campuses impacted the implementation in different ways. A number of different participants discussed that due to the institution's large multi-campus organization, a focus on consistency to ensure quality was paramount. To ensure consistency, the institution standardized many implementation processes of assessment of learning in programs across campuses. Moreover, the change in assessment policy processes was due in part to the standards set forth by the CAA about how assessment should be carried out within programs at different campuses within any

institution where there are multiple campuses in the UAE. The CAA set comprehensive guidelines about the standardization of assessment across campuses, ensuring that there is both academic rigor and similar student experiences at all campuses.

Many of the faculty and leadership discussed the unique challenge of implementing assessment at an institution with multiple campuses. One participant noted the multi-campus structure of the institution had a definitive impact on assessment. It influenced the decision and implementation of the FWA, the tools that have been implemented to ensure consistency and alignment of assessment to learning outcomes like the CAP and ASD document, and the detailed procedures to follow. Participant Six noted: “it has a huge impact, actually. It has a very big impact on the way the exam process is structured, especially the final exams ... because of the hazards of having the faculty wide assessments.” It was also believed that the multi-campus structure determined the decision to use tools, namely the CAP/ASD document to ensure consistency and alignment. As one program leader noted:

You know, the instruments I have been mentioning, you know the CAP/ASD document is **to ensure that you have consistency across the campuses**. So, you know, it is different if you have only one campus. Of course, it’s going to be one standard exam, and were designed by the faculty who designed the course. But to **ensure consistency across the different campuses you know, we have to comply with, it is a more stringent, more rigorous, the process.** (P7)

This reveals how the institutions multi campus system influenced the policy and process. Because of this structure, the institution needed to safeguard the assessment process so that there was consistency, and assessment tasks were aligned to learning objectives across campuses. To do so, the institution formulated and implemented a rigorous and robust assessment process underpinned by faculty compliance.

An Institutional Culture of Change

A prominent theme from the documentation and interviews was the existence of an institutional culture focused on change. According to both faculty and leadership in the Health Sciences department, the culture affected the assessment policy and implementation. Many of the participants noted that the changes in the assessment policy and procedures occurred simultaneously with other policy and procedural changes at the institution in 2016. This included modifications in leadership structures, program and curriculum changes, curriculum responsibilities for faculty, professional development requirements, and the advising model which created administrative duties associated with advising of students. As a result, many participants suggested that the continuous updates and changes of the assessment policy, along with the modifications to other policies and procedures, made it difficult to understand the process. As one faculty confirmed:

Each semester we have new regulations and new policies. ... and um, we have here too many policies, guidelines, and as I told you, **every semester that keeps changing.** So, I'm not sure why they keep changing the regulations that much, always there is updates in each semester...
(P3)

Participant 9 also supported this finding, noting that the institution was always changing policy. The participant detailed the impact in the following excerpt affirming that:

The organization, it seems to be **there's always a new idea and change** before allowing the implementation and maturity of the other idea. So, we're **always moving and changing** and modifying what we start with. So, if there is an idea, it molded into a new idea, and **then it changed, and then a new initiative.** And then it doesn't seem that we give enough time for an idea to make sure to get informative data to evaluate whether it works or not. (P9)

Participant 3 also noted there were continuous changes to the assessment policy procedures, which made it difficult to understand the policy and implement it effectively. When asked about her knowledge of procedures and the policy, the participant stated, “Yeah, **but the problem is with updating and changing** Sometimes they change the format or formatting issues or the templates and you need to learn this again” (P3).

Overall, this culture of change impacted the faculty workload. In turn, it created stress for faculty in the department. As Participant 9 detailed, “were always on the move and that is frustrating because it really creates unnecessary workload on the faculty ... It’s really affecting the culture, the health, the work environment.” The same participant noted that this impacted the health and the overall work environment at the institution stating that he was suffering from higher blood pressure. This was confirmed by other informants who confirmed that the many institutional changes created a very stressful work environment.

Beyond the impact on the work environment and the actors themselves, changes to the strategic direction within the institution initiated a chain reaction within the Health Sciences department, ultimately influencing assessment. Faculty stated that they were anticipating more changes because in January of 2020, the institution introduced a new strategic plan. Department leaders and faculty predicted it would bring about additional changes within the institutional context. One faculty highlighted that now:

We have to change to meet the vision 4.0, etc., etc., I know that, but it's not that easy. It’s a whole program. We are learning every day. It’s **new things** here because of the amount of time, so that's it, it’s happening whether we agree with it or not. (P5)

This participant also described how one objective of the new vision related to developing soft skills in graduates. As a result, she believed the assessment policy moving forward would have to include assessment of skills. She explained:

We are **moving into soft skills assessment**, so this is a new thing that we are moving, through the vision of HCT which is employability, and you know, so basically, we need to prepare graduates to have soft skills and to be technical leaders and to graduate companies within two years. In order to have these graduate outputs, we need to change our program. **So, if we want to change the program, we have to change the learning outcomes.** Once the learning outcomes are changed, the assessments have to be changed now, we are at a point where our program is settled if you like which is 2.0, but **now we move to 4.0.** (P5)

This was corroborated by another leader who conveyed that the change in the strategic plan would create further alterations to assessment because of the new goals of developing technical leaders, innovation, and soft skills. This participant concluded that the new vision would impact the programs in the department, and hence influenced assessment:

So, you know, if you are doing all these things, you have to review the program, setting greater and higher targets. So, uh, by **changing the program layout you have to review the assessment as well**, because you know, if the goal of the program is change in, then the way you are assessing the students or the expectations in terms of assessment will change as well. (P7)

This showed the change in strategic direction influenced assessment in different ways in the Health Sciences department. It impacted the programs, and as the participants in the interviews noted, when the program changed, it affected the assessment strategies in courses and the way students were assessed. However, it also raised more questions about the utility of final examinations in different programs.

Top-Down Approach to Governance and Implementation

The discussion by actors of communication of the policy, and analysis of the policy documents highlighted that there was a top-down approach to implementation. Policy was formulated by institutional leaders and then cascaded down by the Vice-Chancellor who usually introduced new policies through a “directive.” After this, policies were introduced to the departments and discussed by department heads with divisional chairs and program heads at the Faculty Wide meetings. It was here that new policies were introduced and roles and responsibilities discussed. After this, it was the responsibility of program leaders to introduce new policy or processes to faculty within the programs. Many program chairs discussed how when the assessment policy was introduced, this process was introduced to them and then the information was “filtered” down to the faculty. Faculty discussed how the new policy was introduced, but there was little time to discuss or understand the policy as it was piloted in the summer session over one month and then introduced in the fall semester. It was revealed that this top-down approach influenced both the formulation of the policy and the actors’ cognition, motivation, and power and capacity in different ways throughout the implementation process. This will be discussed in the next section and also in Chapter 5 comparing it to prevalent literature.

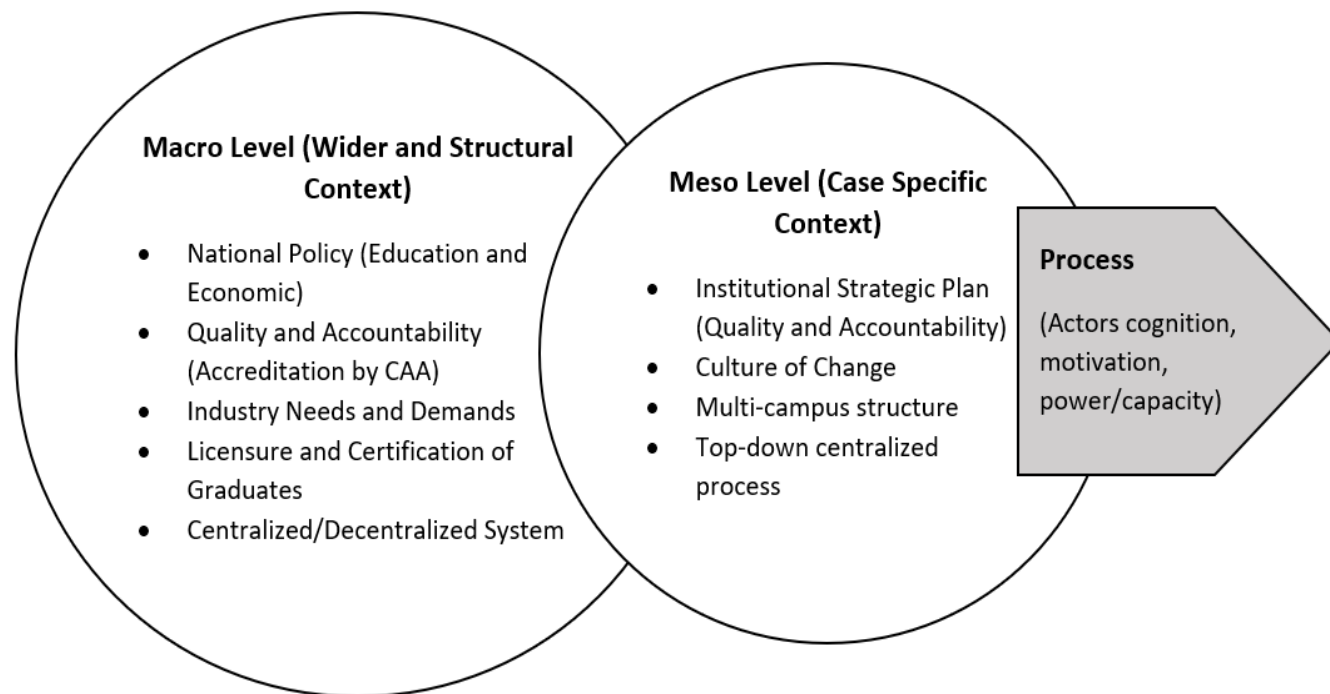
Research Question 3: How do actors’ (including administration, departmental leaders, and teachers) motivation, cognition, and power/capacity influence the implementation of assessment policy at an institution?

The micro-level refers to the actors implementing the department’s assessment policy at the program level. This study examined factors at the broader macro level and the meso (institutional) level or what Bressers (2004) referred to as the structural context. While context is important to consider and certainly influences policy and the implementation process, it was discovered in the literature that actors on the ground level profoundly influence the implementation of any policy (Figure 12). This part of the

study explored policy implementation from the bottom-up, “analyzing the process not in terms of compliance to these policies but understanding what happens and why ...” (de Boer and Bressers, 2004, p. 4).

Figure 12

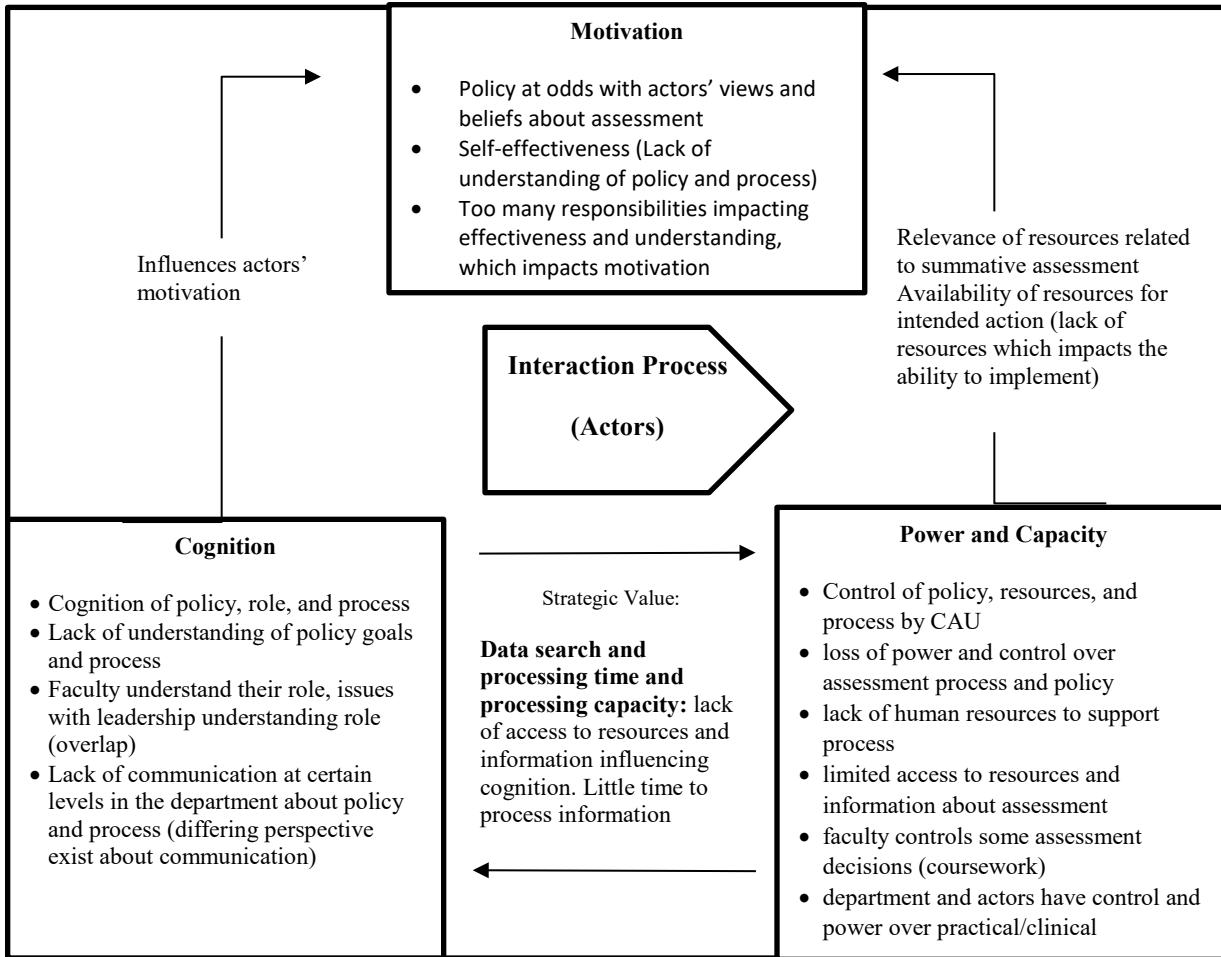
Micro-level Process Factors



The next section of the findings examines the interaction of actors in the Health Sciences department and how their cognition, motivation, and power/capacity at the ground level influenced assessment implementation. The following diagram was developed to identify sub-themes and the inter-relationships and their influence on policy implementation at the micro-level. It highlights the relationship between actors’ cognition, motivation, and power/capacity, which explains the influence of actors’ characteristics on the implementation of assessment (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Actors influence on implementation at the Micro-level



Cognition

Cognition relates to the beliefs or truth that is held by those who are responsible for the implementation of the assessment policy. According to Bressers (2004), this affects ones' perceptions and opinions, which then influences actors' engagement in activities. There were different findings related to participants' cognition (understanding) of the policy's goals, cognition of role in the policy process, and cognition of the process itself.

Cognition of policy goals. There were a variety of responses to the goals of assessment and the policy by participants. Participant 1 noted that for her, the goals of assessment at the institution “is to engage my students in the learning process” while for Participant 2 thought, “it was to measure the learning outcomes” and to “understand the level of student understanding, understand the level of the student, uh, assessment is understanding.” Similarly, Participant 3 stated that “assessment is to evaluate the outcomes, the learning outcomes of what you are teaching in different courses whether these outcomes are being met by the student, when you evaluate the performance of the students.” Therefore, most faculty’s cognition of the assessment goal involved evaluating learning goals and student understanding in the courses. Likewise, the divisional chair and program coordinators’ perception of the primary goal of assessment was to assess student learning outcomes in the program’s courses. Interestingly, the assessment policy’s larger goals were not clear to faculty or even to some managers. Only the senior department leader and the senior assessment specialist were familiar with some of the assessment policy’s broader goals such as program improvement and accountability within the institution. They also suggested that other goals were to ensure that there was a process in place, so assessment is fair and consistent at the institution in the programs in addition to and to improving teaching and learning.

No faculty members or mid-managers discussed these broader goals of assessment linked to learning. Participant 2 noted that she was not clear on the goals and stated in response to the purpose of assessment: “what is the purpose of the assessment guidelines? I don't know?” She claimed that “no the goals are not clear, I really don’t know what they want me to do?” Based on her tone and inflection, there seemed to be a sense of frustration around her lack of understanding. Another participant who was a program leader said that “for myself, I think, you know, I think it’s fairly clear, but I’ve spoken to some you know, some faculty members who have slight reservations you know, with the clarity in terms

of the goals for some of these assessments” (P7). However, this participant was unable to identify some of the wider goals of the assessment policy.

Many of the participants were not aware of the primary assessment policy document. They mentioned being more aware of the assessment guidelines and the guidelines for administering the Faculty Wide assessments. Participant 1, who was relatively new to the department (one year of service), mentioned that she was not aware and said that she had not seen or read any assessment policy:

Uh if you say **am I aware, in the sense that I have some document, which I have read or had some training. No, that is for that thing**, no, but of course with the, uh, this, by asking help from the colleagues and from, by discussing the things with the other, uh, teachers ...(P1)

Participant 3 also said she had not read the goals or any assessment policy document: “Yah, I’ve never read any assessment policies. The **things that we receive is usually be emails**. That we have new regulations, bullet points in the body of the email. I **didn’t read complete goals about the policy**.” The participant suggested that it would be good for it to be shared with them, “especially when they do new things or update regulations.”

The lack of awareness of the policy was not just among faculty. When a more senior leader was asked about the assessment policy, they questioned “which policy” I was referring. Indeed, in many instances, participants were unsure about the specific assessment policy I was talking about in the interview. There was confusion between the assessment documentation, including the central assessment policy, the course assessment guidelines, and the FWA administration guidelines. These were different documents linked to assessment and were in circulation and used to direct assessment. In addition, the old assessment policy document was still in circulation, referred to by some administrators, and was active on the central college’s site at the time of this study. One senior leader suggested that it was clear to faculty “because **they don’t know that it’s there**. So, they’ve not been made either aware of **not**

been made aware or they don't understand it fully because they're not ready" (P8). This leader went on to state that it was their responsibility to make these goals clearer to faculty and others in middle leadership.

Cognition of Role in the Assessment Process. The faculty understood their role in the assessment process. All faculty interviewed for this study discussed how they had a dual role as a teacher and as a SCTL however, this was often for more than one course, which was a source of frustration for faculty because it created administrative tasks. In the position of SCTL, faculty were responsible for implementing the assessment strategy and ensuring that tools were developed according to the implementation process, which had specific tasks to complete (Course Syllabus, CAP/ASD, moderation, and examination writing) at different times during the semester. Moreover, for each task, the participants stated that there were stringent deadlines attached, which were another source of frustration. Even those in leadership positions such as program chairs and divisional chairs, had teaching loads and SCTL's roles, which added extra administrative, curriculum, and assessment responsibilities to their current managerial role.

Manager's role in assessment. Leaders at the mid-management level within the department appeared to be less clear about their implementation process role. The program coordinators within the department and the Divisional Chair discussed some confusion about their responsibilities during the process. Participant 5 discussed how she was unsure what her role was compared to the Divisional Chair, stating that there was some confusion between the responsibilities of the Divisional Chair and Program Coordinators: "To be honest with you I didn't know what I was doing, no one, there was no handbook or guidelines regarding my role and responsibilities." However, she went on to footnote that a task force had been established to develop a handbook that would clarify the PC's role and responsibilities in the future and would include information on assessment responsibilities. Moreover,

during the assessment implementation, the mid-managers discussed how it took them time to understand their roles due to the complexity of the process and the lack of forthcoming information about some of their responsibilities and processes.

Participant interviews revealed that they were in a precarious position as Program Coordinators within the department. Participant 5 suggested that “basically, as, an administrative role we have to ensure the guidelines are clear to faculty.” It was noted by this participant and the other program coordinators that they were in charge of oversight and compliance of the timeline of the process. They also had to ensure that the assessment tools were valid and reliable by checking the CAP and ASD documents and moderate the writing of the final examination. Even when discussing the newly hired assessment specialist, participants felt that this role's responsibilities were not very clear, even though the role had been in place in other departments for several months. One department leader asserted that “after three months, it’s getting clearer, I think because there has not been someone in this role in health sciences division before We’re trying to find and forge a new role because nobody has done it before, so it’s not been clear, but that was due to the circumstances surrounding the division” (P8).

Cognition of process. It was apparent from the participants’ interviews that there was a lack of understanding of the semester’s assessment process. New faculty interviewed as part of this study (N2) of (N9) expressed the difficulties and challenges of learning these new assessment processes to assess students at the institution. They mentioned it was different and more complex than what they had experienced before in other universities. Faculty and program leaders expressed confusion about some aspects of the process and were unsure how to use some of the tools (CAP/ASD) during implementation.

Programs leaders confirmed the lack of understanding by teaching faculty. The following response was given when a program leader was asked about whether she felt faculty understood the policy and guidelines:

I don't think so because where they came from, **their background. They haven't applied this before. So, it was very challenging** and it is very difficult for me, because you know, we are basically explaining the Bloom's taxonomy, CAPS/ASDS, and then soft skills is another problem. They also didn't have, they're not very competent on excel sheets and you know, so now we are using, now you know, advanced for the CAP's and ASD's, excel sheets and all the functions and stuff. So, I think it is a big challenge. (P5)

Another manager in the department also stated that when "I'm going through the new audit documents and guidelines; faculty aren't really aware of the criteria that they are getting assessed against" (P8). However, this leader noted that they were "in the process of putting in some simple guides and get some simple training together to ensure everyone is on the same page" (P8). Overall, it was found that staff has knowledge of, and skill in, the assessment of student learning, but their lack of understanding was connected to the process and understanding certain steps and specific tools (CAP/ASD document) used in the implementation process rather than understanding how to assess student learning.

Communication of Policy and Process

There existed a top-down and linear process of communication in the department regarding assessment policy implementation. As one mid-manager confirmed, "the information trickles down from the higher management to the lower management and then to the faculty members" (P7). The new assessment policy was introduced through a directive by the Vice-Chancellor in March of 2016. After that, the Academic Assessment Unit communicated the policy and guidelines to the department to the Executive Dean, the quality assurance manager, and the Senior Assessment Specialist in the Health Sciences department. Next, this information was shared with Divisional Chairs and Program Coordinators through monthly meetings where the guidelines and procedures were discussed and then

communicated to faculty, usually through email. Moreover, each semester, if anything new was introduced or changes were made, it followed the same chain of communication.

The mid-managers and faculty described the problems associated with using email as the primary form of communication. Many participants argued this left little opportunity for a formal discussion of the policy and hardly any time to get information about the procedures, specifically when they were expected to implement these over the semester. Participant 2 confirmed this and asserted that when the policy was updated “it was just communicated by email” and there was no “ongoing training.” She also noted that the last training “was probably last year.” It was also evident that faculty were never formally introduced to the institution’s central assessment policy when presented in the department. Many of the leadership and teaching faculty participants discussed how this was self-learned over the semester. As Participant 1 noted “it is learned by doing” and by “asking help from the colleagues and by discussing the things with the other teacher.” This revealed that the department supported each other to implement the policy during the semester due to their lack of formal training and lack of communication about the policy.

The findings also showed that the faculty had many questions about the procedures and deadlines throughout the semester during implementation. However, most of these involved the procedures and tools related to the faculty-wide assessments. They commented that they would often ask questions, yet, it was challenging to find answers about why procedures and specific deadlines existed during the policy’s implementation each semester, especially when new changes or amendments were made to the existing policy. Faculty felt that it was essential to have a meeting or a workshop, “especially when we have, uh, updated policies or instructions. It useful rather than just being communicated with us by email. We prefer always to have good training” (P3). Nevertheless, the opportunity for communication around the assessment procedures was limited to a one-way, top-down approach.

Typically, after leaders sent emails, faculty had questions about these new procedures. However, it was difficult to answer why there were changes or why specific procedures existed. One faculty member indicated how faculty members believed emails were problematic because: “By just sending the email you have to keep asking people around you or you keep asking your PC, what does this mean? What do they want that?” (P3). Even the mid-managers admitted that they often did not have an answer to the questions about assessment. These leaders frequently could not provide answers because they were doing what they were told and merely enforcing the procedures and guidelines. Participant 5 noted that as a Program Coordinator, she had difficulties explaining the process, noting that “it’s just the policy and you have to follow it.” She also stated that she wanted to explain why certain procedures existed but “how can I explain why when I don’t even know.”

Differing perspectives on communication. There were conflicting perspectives on the effectiveness of the communication during the implementation of assessment. Interestingly, the closer to the ground level of implementation, the more people discussed the ineffectiveness of communication. Those at the top felt that communication was useful as they had regular meetings within the department in the form of divisional meetings and program assessment meetings. At the FAC meetings, which the Executive Dean, Associate Dean, Assessment Specialist, Divisional Chairs, and Program Chairs attended, there were opportunities for open communication about policy and procedures. However, there were minimal meetings and discussions around assessment at the program level, and all faculty discussed the need for better communication involving assessment policy and procedures because there was nothing after the initial introduction. Participant 2 suggested that “about a year ago or something, but no refreshing sessions because the policies are changing ... It is just communicated by email.” Participant 3 noted that they preferred communication of policy and procedures to be supported with proper training, “especially when we have updated policies or instructions.”

In contrast, leadership seems less concerned about communication. One of the program coordinators said it is ok, but “it could be improved, there is always room for improvement” (P5). Another leader in the department in response to the questions of whether communication of the assessment policy and process is effective said, “Yes, I believe so, and the messages are very clear, for everyone and we, we have a process in doing this” (P6). A third program coordinator also believed the communication was adequate because there were frequent meetings within the program. Participant 7 explained:

Yes, uh **we do have regular meetings**. We convene, we call it the program academic committee meeting. So, we have the PAC. So, we have like the **program committee meeting**. We have these two times every week, two times every month. So twice a month, so every fortnight. **We discuss not just assessment, but other things related to the design of anything related to the program, curriculum issues, issues related to students’ experience**. However, it is important to highlight that the PAC meetings comprise only the program coordinators and **not the teaching faculty** in the department.

Program coordinators felt the communication of the policy process was effective which is related to the frequency which they met as coordinators to discuss policy and procedures like assessment, however, there were few meetings as a whole department or as a program. It was revealed that the lower down in the department, the less effective the communication because there was less opportunity for communication about policy and procedures among leadership, program leaders, and teaching faculty.

Motivation

Another part of the framework at the micro level for this study looked at the motivation of actors, which according to Bressers (2004), can be influenced by actors own internal goals and values, the resources they possess to implement a policy, and assessment of their ability to implement a policy

effectively. After analyzing the data, it emerged that the policy was at odds with actors' values, there were issues with their readiness to implement it, which included a number of new responsibilities in the assessment implementation process and department.

Internal Goals and Values at Odds with Process

It was found that the assessment process was at odds with participants' values about how assessment should be carried out. It emerged that the process conflicted with a number of the interviewees' values and their beliefs, suggesting that the assessment process was much too complicated and could be simplified. The participants discussed the complexity of the process over the term, which involved many administrative tasks, strict deadlines, and many extra duties aside from just the writing and grading the assessments in the courses.

It is important to note that most of the problems reported by participants were associated with the faculty-wide assessments and the final examination procedures, which guided final examinations. Several participants' values and beliefs were not aligned with the assessment goals, especially the faculty-wide examination. Many of the department faculty believed that this was not the most effective way of assessing students. It can be seen in different conversations with faculty and leadership in the Health Sciences department. A divisional leader discussed how "from what I see, I feel that most of the assessment procedure focuses on the knowledge. So, I don't think that like all the people are in agreement or understanding clearly what is the purpose of having these assessments" (P6). This participant also discussed that as a technical college "we should be focused on assessing the skills of the students more than the knowledge" (P6).

This sentiment was expressed among many of the participants in the department, suggesting the faculty-wide examinations were not the most effective method of assessing student learning because as Participant 2 highlighted, "it is difficult to assess deep learning and application of student learning." One

participant described how “I want their brain to be clinically oriented. **I don’t want them to be memorizing things**” which she felt the final examinations had the propensity to do because of the preference for multiple-choice questions in courses, which they felt did not assess students properly. Instead, this participant felt the department should be gearing assessments towards what students will see in the practical field.

The data revealed that the participants were not necessarily against having final assessments. They understood the need to have summative assessments that measured and determined student learning in courses; however, their concerns had more to do with some of the procedures to be carried out to complete this task and the mandated faculty-wide examination. Moreover, they also expressed concerns about how the procedures involved in carrying out the faculty-wide examinations were enforced within the department. Most faculty expressed trepidation about the many deadlines and administrative tasks like the CAP/ASD documents and the writing of three versions of the final examination; they were viewed as tools and tasks that were at odds with their values and knowledge. The following was a typical response to the implementation process because almost all talked of the complexity of the final assessment process:

I think we all share the same, uh, perception. You know, related to the examination, the managing process, **I think it’s a bit overused, you know it is a little bit complex**. There is so many documents you have to fill out and there’s **so many processes** and protocols that you have to follow, I think, you know, the whole process could be a little streamlined and you it would be a lot more beneficial to everyone. (P7)

Assessment of Actors own Self-Effectiveness

Many actors, especially at the program level, felt unsure and confused about the assessment process's different aspects, which impacted their motivation. Some participants mentioned that they felt

they lacked the proper understanding of how to utilize Blackboard learn, which was used to implement assessments, specifically the grading of assessments, grade book, and faculty-wide examinations. They discussed being concerned about doing something wrong with the grade book or on the final examination settings, which might impact students' grades or get them into trouble given the institution's current environment, focusing on quality and accountability. This assertion was corroborated by leaders, who felt in some areas, the faculty did not understand the process and were unclear about steps in the process. As one senior leader noted,

I think that it's **not as clear to faculty because they don't know that it's there**. Right. So, they they've not been they've not been made either aware or not been made aware or they don't understand eh it fully because they're not ready. (P8)

Some participants discussed being confused by the assessment process, which was exacerbated by the lack of forthcoming information about processes and procedures. When participants discussed the assessment process, they asserted that much of the information and their understanding of assessment policy was self-learned, stating that they "learned by doing." For example, Participant 1 discussed how, when she came to the college, she had to learn the assessment process independently because the program coordinator was on her way out, and she did not give much support, although this changed once the new PC took over. Participant 3 also stated she had difficulty understanding the process because "it's quite complicated." She also stressed "the problem is with updating and keep changing" which impacts her readiness and ability to implement assessment. In contrast, Participant 4 mentioned that her implementation of assessment was based on her own experience and learning, and similar to other participants, she felt that she lacked knowledge about the institutional policy and process of assessment in the department, not the actual knowledge of how to effectively assess students at the course level in Health Sciences courses. As she noted, "I do not lack knowledge for assessment, but just the policy and

process” (P4). Again, her lack of understanding was due to the complexity of the implementation process and the various changes that were made to the policy.

Too many responsibilities impact effectiveness and understanding. It was found that participants had many different responsibilities during the implementation process. For faculty, this impacted their effectiveness, mostly if they were a course team leader to multiple courses. Many participants discussed the volume of work involved in creating new assessments and for faculty who were teaching courses for the first term each term that met the CAU requirements and standards. Many participants discussed the problematic nature of creating three versions of the same examination and completing the CAP and ASD documents as part of the process. This work, coupled with the various deadlines and other administrative tasks like academic advising, created a stressful work environment because of the many responsibilities and administrative tasks related to assessment.

It was found to be a similar problem for mid-managers who were teaching faculty and course team leaders. One program leader noted that it created much extra work when the new policy was introduced because of the all-encompassing auditing process, which was part of the implementation process.

Yah I think there's a lot, complicated, **it could be more simpler** ... because imagine my role, I have a full program like a lot, 23 courses, 3 versions. Let's say that I am moderating that, I wouldn't be looking at all 3 versions How could I do this? Like 3 versions multiply that 23 courses, go through the CAP/ASD and checking the 20%. (P5)

The program coordinator went on to explain that if the process was not coordinated, meaning faculty were not fulfilling their responsibilities and meeting deadlines, then it was her fault. However, she felt it was a very unrealistic process, given the amount of work and responsibility in the process. Another program coordinator also discussed the amount of work involved in the examination design process and

how this left faculty feeling “frustrated, because you know, when it comes to the time producing the final examinations, it is a very limited window, and in addition to designing the examinations they have to do their classes, and they have other responsibilities like advising” (P7). The participant suggested that there have been complaints related to the difficulties of meeting these deadlines and expected duties and responsibilities.

Power and Capacity

According to Bressers (2004), actors’ power and capacity to implement a policy is inherently linked to the resources, which give them the capacity to act during the implementation process. Therefore, it is important to examine the resources that are available and accessible to actors during the process. However, more importantly, Bressers (2004) argued that power is first attributed to actors by others. If there is a dependency because one actor holds power to these resources, then this can create a power imbalance during the process and impact motivation and cognition.

Availability of Resources

There were varied perspectives about the resources available to implement assessment in the department. Many different participants mentioned that there were some resources in place to support the implementation of the assessment. They discussed professional development on Blackboard learn, implementation tools, such as FWA development, and implementing the final assessment using Blackboard learn. A review of training documentation revealed courses related to developing tests using Blackboard learn, setting up the grade book, and invigilating online assessments in Blackboard and other general courses related to assessment. However, the training involved the implementation of a faculty-wide examination process. Beyond that, faculty and program leaders said that were not really trained on the policy or procedures and much of the policy processes were either introduced briefly through a “meeting” or at the “forum” at the beginning of the year, although this was one of a variety of topics or

operational and academic issues covered during these meetings. In addition, one participant noted that they had been “trying to manage the resources to help with our assessments” but because of the contract with McGraw-Hill at the university, which she felt is not well suited to the Health Sciences field, and also due to financial constraints “the faculty have to find the resources and search for it” (P5) and then connect and develop assessment related to this. Indeed, each assessment activity and the final questions for the final examination for all Health Sciences courses were developed from scratch by the SCTL and faculty.

Lack of human resources to support policy implementation. The study found that the department lacked “human” resources to support assessment implementation and administration, especially when the policy was introduced. One program leader discussed that before the hiring of the assessment specialist in January of 2020, much of the administration and implementation of the assessment fell on the shoulders of program leaders who were not so clear about the guidelines and policy, which made it difficult:

Uh no, to be honest with you. **It’s not clear**, I mean, now we have a new role, as I told an assessment specialist, so she is trying to help us with that. I mean before we didn’t have an assessment specialist **it was just a delegation task.** (P5)

Now that this position was filled, program and department leaders felt that this person could provide support and clarity for leaders at the program level and to the faculty about the assessment policy and implementation procedures. As one participant noted, “so having her actually helps, because I have many questions and then 20% of that was all through her” (P5). The divisional leader noted that the senior specialist would play a role by “forwarding all the needed information about exams and about the, uh, like the platform or the resources” (P6).

Three years before the assessment specialist's arrival, it was revealed that there was a lack of support in the department's assessment process. The evidence suggested that no one in the department worked extensively with the CAU. As a result, the absence of assessment support left much of the policy's interpretation and its implementation to program leaders and teaching faculty. It created communication and cognition of the policy issues because program leaders and the divisional chair were not working closely with the assessment unit, so they were not involved in developing the assessment policy and procedures. The lack of knowledge made it difficult for leaders to explain the rationale or the "why" behind tools and procedures during the process.

Poor access to policy information and resources. Another area of concern was accessibility to the policy, procedures, and resources related to assessment. Many participants mentioned there was no central directory that they could go to access policies and procedures on assessment. When participants in the Health Sciences department were asked about where they could access information and resources about assessment, most faculty and program leaders discussed how they would go into the course file or into their old emails to access information on assessment policies or procedures. One participant emphasized that previously, they used Course.net in the department, but this was no longer operational (P4). The faculty who were interviewed felt it was a "good idea" to have a central directory or repository to access the assessment policy and procedures and questioned why this did not exist. In contrast, those in leadership reported that the assessment information and resources were "there" for faculty, however, there were different answers as to where this could be accessed. One assessment leader noted that:

I'm sure **other people will have access to it**, but if you go to **the portal**, where it says academic services. You know there is, you have a drop down and then you have like it says health sciences so there we have, you know, like a central repository where we sort of provide, you know all these documents for the staff members that they can also, you know, save their exams, design or

get their exam documents, they are there as well, and we use it to manage the whole design process as well. (P7)

Another leader agreed that the information was there, but discussed that there was an issue of access to resources stating that “I had to send quite a lot of guidance to faculty of how to find the information, but again I just did it in a simple way and took screenshots and say, now you click now you click there” (P8). Therefore, this reveals a problem with leadership communicating and rolling out the policy, namely addressing where to find the information and resources to support implementation.

Limited Power and Capacity over the Assessment Process

There was a perception among faculty and leadership in the department that the CAU controlled the process and policy and held most of the process's power and capacity. It was evident that the CAU was responsible for formulating the assessment policy, guidelines, changes to procedures, and tools used during the implementation process, like the CAP/ASD documents. During each semester, the CAU had the authority to oversee and manage implementation, especially the procedures and guidelines associated with implementing faculty-wide assessments across campuses, which safeguarded the quality of assessment and processes and lending further evidence to the importance of quality and accountability.

It was felt by several in the department that the CAU were responsible for the policy and the processes, which guided the implementation of assessment each semester. One program leader noted that the power comes from the “system” and “it is the manager, uh, the assessment manager up there” or “the assessment unit” that holds the power (P5). Those in the department thought that the CAU controlled the process, and the policy was imposed on them by the CAU, as one participant confirmed in their account:

I mean, there is a **central assessment unit**, but what they are doing is **they just send mandates and orders and requirements and deadlines**. They're not really, uh, they work like **an auditor and a police**. Policing rather than consulting and mentoring. That's, that's, my uh experience.

That's, the way I see them, the way they function here. (P9)

Another program leader corroborated the CAU's power and noted that they were responsible for policy formulation and policy changes. The program coordinator described how "we have the Central Assessment Unit, CAU. Most the policies related, related to examination processes, management processes or uh whenever we have any changes related to assessment, they, you know, formulate such policies" (P7). It was apparent that the faculty and department leaders were not involved in the development and formulation of policy or procedures for assessing student learning at the institution.

It was revealed that this interaction and perception of power were impacting faculty's motivation. One department leader noted that assessment became an onerous duty rather than something important to improve the quality of education at the institution:

Uh it **becomes more a task rather than a big picture and for improvement purpose**. It's like a task I have to do in a certain deadline rather than, you know, as a process. So, it becomes and **end result rather than a process** by itself for improvement. (P9)

Therefore, rather than focusing on implementing the process meaningfully and focusing on quality and improvement, faculty were just trying complete and comply with the many different responsibilities.

Another leader in the department agreed and felt that they were not concentrating on improving quality beyond the final examinations, which they added, only accounted for 30% or a small part of the assessment of student learning in the courses (P8).

Loss of Power over Assessment Process and Teaching

There was a perception among teaching faculty that they were losing control over teaching and different parts of the assessment process due to the new assessment policy and procedures. Prior to implementing the new assessment policy, participants claimed that they had more control over individual coursework and the courses' assessment. They also had the power to decide how students were assessed for their final summative assessment for a course. However, this changed after introducing the new assessment policy, which mandated final examinations for individual courses and contained strict processes over course assessments.

Though teaching faculty in the department recognized the need for the final assessment of courses, it was almost unanimous that individual instructors were not in agreement to have final examinations for all courses in the programs. An analysis of the interviews established that many felt that the faculty-wide examination process was limiting their teaching and academic freedom, and restricting the course's learning. However, while the institutions respected academic freedom, they were unequivocal that the student experience and quality should take precedence over this by ensuring alignment with program goals. As the policy document *Enacting Assessment at Latifa* outlined "The assessment policy is based upon the principles inherent in good teaching practice and affirms academic freedom while recognizing that the student experience of the curriculum is fundamental and should be aligned with the goals of the individual programme and the Division" (p. 1).

Control over Course Assessment Decisions

While faculty and leaders felt that they had little control over the assessment process and policy, numerous interviewees believed that they had control and discretion over some assessment process elements. They believed that they had discretion over the number of assessments, what kinds of assessments were part of the courses during the term (coursework assessment), and what questions

appeared on the examinations. However, this control entailed one crucial caveat. If many different instructors taught the course, the SCTL led the course that determined the assessment strategies and questions that appeared on the final examination. Consequently, in the implementation process in the course, the SCTL held most of the power, and it was noted by faculty that some SCTL's were more collegial and collaborative with the assessment decisions than others. However, this was overseen by the CAU, which could change the process and tied the implementation and completion of assessment to the faculty's performance appraisal.

Control over Practical and Skills-based Clinical Assessment in Courses

Students were also assessed using practical or skill-based assessments for courses in labs or during work placements in the Health Sciences department. It was well documented that the department and faculty had control and discretion over these types of assessments, and these were not subject to compliance with the CAU. As a result, the CAU appeared to be directing attention and resources on summative assessment at the end of core theory-based courses rather than clinical or practical courses which was left to the department to manage and implement. Many interviewees in the department questioned why the CAU seemed less concerned over the quality of assessment in practical courses and over course work assessments than they did over the faculty-wide assessments. Interestingly, when discussing the practical and clinical-based assessments, there was no criticism or frustration expressed by faculty or leadership who felt that this type of assessment was essential; moreover, unlike the examination process, the process for practical assessments was clear and straightforward. Interestingly, this part of the assessment process was overseen by the department and the Program Academic Committee (PAC) and not the CAU and was generally deemed effective by those in the department.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges faced by actors in the implementation process in an institution?

When participants were asked explicitly about the challenges to assessment implementation in the department, there were a plethora of responses. After data analyzing the different responses, it emerged that the challenges depended on their role and responsibilities in the process (See Table 12), although some common themes emerged about the process itself. Faculty who were teaching and responsible for implementing the policy felt the process itself was a challenge and the time involved in the process. While leaders recognized and acknowledge these challenges faced by faculty, they also felt there were challenges such as faculty resistance and a lack of ownership and decision-making by some leaders.

Table 12

Challenges to Implementing Assessment

Overarching Themes	Description
Theme 1: Challenges faced by teaching faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complicated implementation process• Time Commitment• Meeting deadlines
Theme 2: Leadership Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resistance to change• Lack of ownership and decision making

Complicated Assessment Process

One of the key challenges that emerged from the analysis is the process was positioned from a quality-compliance position and done from a top-down perspective. It created an onerous auditing process with many checks focused on ensuring faculty were complying with procedures, deadlines, and approaches to writing the final assessments, which took the entire semester (16 weeks) and were added on top of other administrative duties. As Participant 3 described:

Faculty you're supposed to teach here, but same time you have **so many administrative roles** that go beyond probably your job description, So, you're academic and you have an operational role on the campus, but you have academic roles across campuses and the **administrative roles are just never ending.**

In addition to the process over the semester, faculty's compliance with the faculty-wide examinations document guidelines was compulsory. During the examination period, a team enforced administration at each campus, creating a very stressful atmosphere around student assessment. Many participants discussed how it led to a demanding and stressful environment because of the added responsibilities and the different areas of compliance for teaching faculty and leadership during the assessment process. According to leadership and faculty, this was especially difficult for new faculty, as Participant 7 noted, "it's a little bit complex. So, uh I would say, for me, it's fine, but for anybody joining, you know, it would take a while for the person to adjust to the different processes offered, the design of exams and management of assessments."

Time Commitment

Time also emerged as a significant challenge faced by all participants. Given the time that needed to be committed to the auditing and writing process, many of the teaching faculty expressed that there was just not enough time to realistically commit to the process at certain times during the semester because of other duties and responsibilities. Participant 2 provided a typical responsible from faculty, identifying time as a major challenge:

Time, time, you know we are all teaching 20 hours, and when **we have this deadline and that deadline**, the assessment is something I don't want to worry about from the beginning of my semester to the end, **it's kind of an ongoing process.**

Faculties perceptions of time was validated by those in leadership. Participant 7 offered a detailed explanation of the challenge faced by faculty:

they have a **very limited time window to do this**, and in addition to designing the exams, they all you know, they have to do their classes. **They have other responsibilities** such as advising. Uh they have a lot of other responsibilities. So, I you know, from time to time, I do get a couple of **people complaining about the difficulty** or the difficulties they face in, meeting up with the target and carrying out the normal, you know, expected uh duties and responsibilities.

It is evident that the ongoing process, which took place over an entire semester, took too much time which some participants felt was especially difficult if you were new to the institution or teaching the course for the first time. This was corroborated by leaders who expressed that at the mid-management level, they were responsible for implementing the assessment in the different programs, which resulted in many responsibilities. Subsequently, it created issues with time. Mid-managers asserted that at one stage of the process they had to review up to 40 different examinations in two weeks. The lack of time available was due to the extra responsibilities added to department leaders and faculty, and a shortage of human resources (support staff) within the institution to support different changes at the institution. The suggests that there was a relationship between the goals of quality and accountability and an increased number of assessment responsibilities and duties for leadership and staff in the department.

Meeting Deadlines

Another major challenge discussed by participants was the many deadlines that existed throughout the semester during the assessment process. Indeed, the policy established many deadlines for completing documentation such as the CAP and the ASD documents, the writing of test items, the moderation of test items, and the writing and moderation of the examinations themselves. Many participants expressed their displeasure with the compliant nature of these deadlines and said how the

deadlines and timelines were “unrealistic” because of the new strategic direction’s added responsibilities. They felt little consideration was given to the scope of their responsibilities when these deadlines were enforced during the semester.

Challenges of Leadership

Leadership in the department held specific perceptions of the challenges which differed from teaching faculty. First, they felt that faculty were being resistant to some of the changes because of the work environment before the new policy and some had been at the institution for a long time and were used to doing things a certain way (P8). One leader noted that faculty needed to see the bigger picture and assess the situation and changes from more of a growth mindset. Another leader in the department observed that the longer that the faculty had been at the institution the more resistant to change they were because they were used to doing a certain way in the institution prior to the implementation of quality processes (P8).

The second challenge mentioned was related to the lack of ownership and leadership from those in different department programs. Some leaders felt that people were not taking ownership of their program to make decisions. This included senior managers arguing that program coordinators needed to take more ownership in addition to program managers wanting the SCTL’s to take ownership over their course team. However, it was argued by some that department members were not making decisions because of the top-down culture where mid-managers and faculty were typically told what to do. As a result, upper management felt they had to make too many unnecessary decisions about assessment rather than support or guide mid-managers during the semester.

I feel there is this at least in my area, there is a shortage, **lack of people willing to take the ownership of their own program** so they can be empowered, make a decision, so people are not making decision. And it’s a lack of ownership or maybe, maybe, maybe not. Maybe it’s really

that they're used to it, it's a culture of being told. They wait, **they're waiting for people to tell them**, so that's a really, that's a major challenge which makes my uh you know, makes my job a lot easier if **they can take the ownership of their work** and tell me what they need and how they're going to do it. And I'll support them and I can guide them and, and, you know that. So, everything comes to me and I have to **make a decision** and walk him through it. And then, **you know, they go back and they don't know how to translate that to their faculty**. And then you end up with like not getting all the way down and then things are not implemented well. There's no continuity in the process. And a lack of, I would say a lack of leadership. Yeah, a **lack of leadership** and it's because of uh, not being able lead is, a problem. (P9)

This statement acknowledges that leadership was an issue, suggesting it could be associated with the top-down structure of governance and the approach to leadership that existed as part of the institutional culture. This was corroborated by mid-managers, who claimed that they were not empowered to make decisions on assessment or learning and were typically delegated tasks. Indeed, the documentation and managers and faculty responses suggested program coordinators held an oversight role, carrying out administrative and auditing duties during the assessment process over the semester.

Verification of Codes and Themes

The qualitative findings outlined above were verified using NVivo 12 software. NVivo 12 is a software which allows a researcher to store, manage, analyze, and explore data throughout a research study. For this study, the software helped with the trustworthiness of the research, specifically allowing the research to validate the codes and themes found during the manual analysis to ensure reliability and credibility. To analyze the data, the policy documentation (Appendix 5) and interviews, which were already transcribed manually, were uploaded to NVivo 12 to re-code and analyze for themes.

The analysis began by focusing on the research questions. There were four overarching research questions guiding the study. The first question pertained to examining the assessment policy using deductive and inductive analysis. To verify the codes and themes the researcher started with deductive codes related to goals, processes, assessment, procedures, roles, and tools. After thematic analysis of the codes, the following (see Figure 14) sub-themes emerged which related to the main themes related to question which included goals of the assessment policy, approaches to assessment, and tools to ensure quality.

Figure 14

Assessment Policy Themes and Sub-Themes

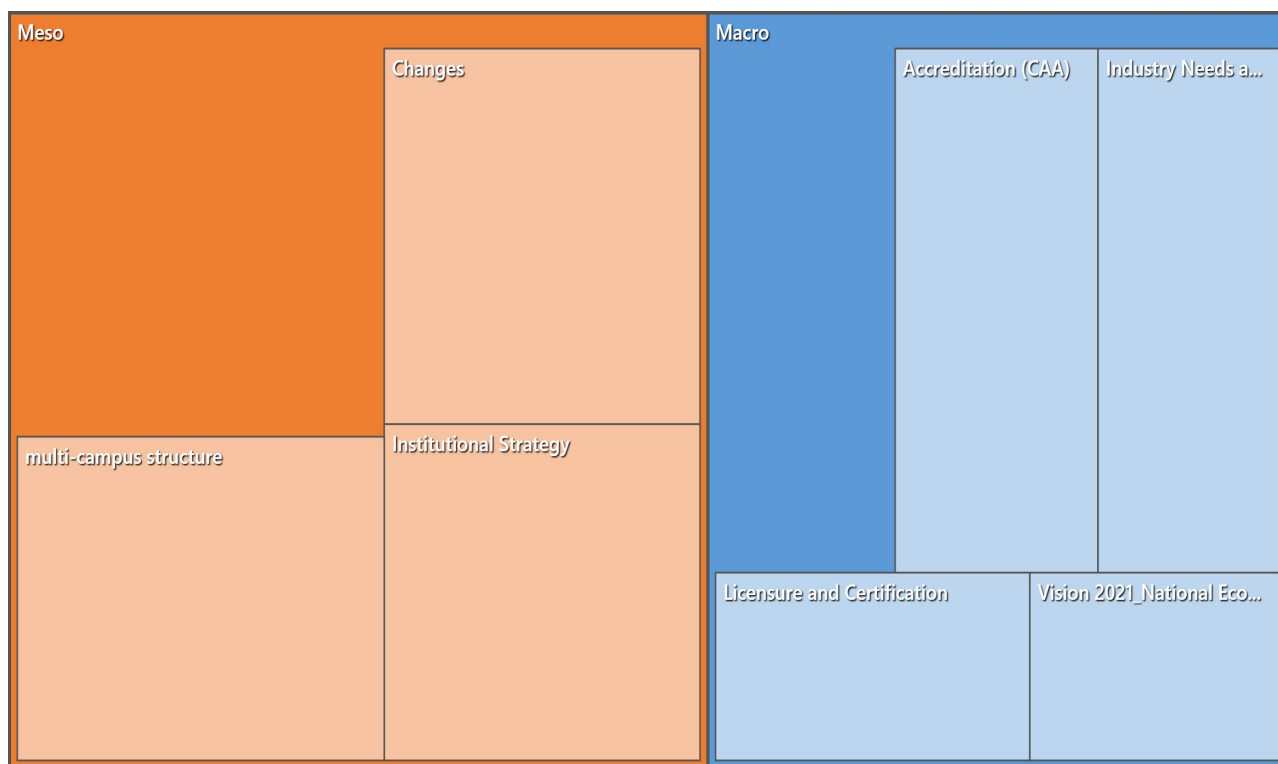
Assessment Policy					
Name	Files	References		Created By	
Goal of policy		12	59	DV	
Accountability		9	14	DV	
Alignment		10	41	DV	
quality		14	49	DV	
Standardization		13	50	DV	
Improve Learning Ex		7	23	DV	
Measurement of Lea		9	35	DV	
Assessment Approach		13	68	DV	
Criteria referenced		5	16	DV	
Summative Assessme		12	72	DV	
Coursework Assessm		11	33	DV	
Tool for Implementation		9	29	DV	
CAP/ASD		8	28	DV	
ECAAF File		7	17	DV	
Moderation		6	19	DV	

The figure shows the organization of the themes after analysis, demonstrating the number of files that were referenced and also the total number of references in the policy documentation and interviews.

After verifying the codes and themes for the first research question, multi-level analysis was initiated beginning with the macro and micro level to answer question two. Question two explored how macro and meso level factors influenced assessment policy implementation in the department. The documentation and interviews were first analyzed deductively to identify factors at the macro, meso or micro level factors. After this, the macro and meso level codes went through another round of inductive coding where the main themes emerged from these two different levels of analysis. From documentation and interviews, the following sub-themes emerged as the primary factors influencing assessment policy at the macro and meso level at the institution (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

Hierarchy Chart (Macro and Meso-level Themes from analysis using NVivo)



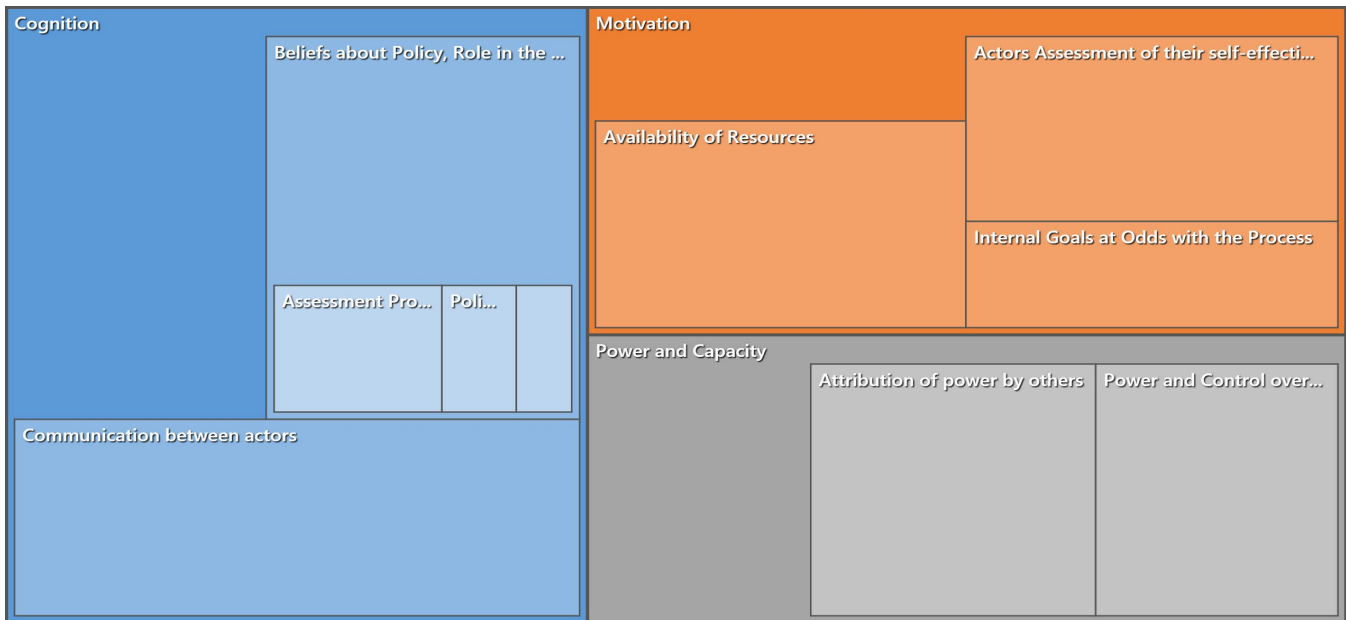
This hierarchy chart (Figure 16) displays how the themes emerged based on the number of coding references for each item from both the interviews and policy documentation. The darker colors for each

specific level of analysis and the larger the quadrilateral the more direct references from the data. The figure clearly shows the different macro and meso level themes which were generated from the analysis of data. At the meso level, the main factors that were found to be influencing assessment implementation were the Strategic Plan (Latifa 2.0 and 4.0), a culture of change which existed institutionally, and the multi-campus structure of the institution. At the macro level, the main themes included Vision 2021 (National Policy), Accreditation (Quality and Accountability), industry needs and demands, and Licensure and Certification of graduates. This process of analysis confirmed the coding and thematic analysis which was done manually by the researcher.

To analyze the data related to question three and determine the micro level factors influencing assessment implementation, a more deductive approach using CIT and the variables proposed by Bressers such as cognition, motivation, and power/capacity. This deductive, bottom-up approach allowed for the exploration and relationships between different factors in the implementation of assessment by actors. For the micro level. the following hierarchy map (Figure 16) shows the themes based on the number of coding references which emerged from each of the main codes, relating to the main themes of cognition, motivation, and power/capacity.

Figure 16

Hierarchy Chart for Micro-level Codes and Themes



Note: Sub-themes emerged in the actors’ cognition. There were beliefs (understandings) about the policy goals, policy process, and their own role.

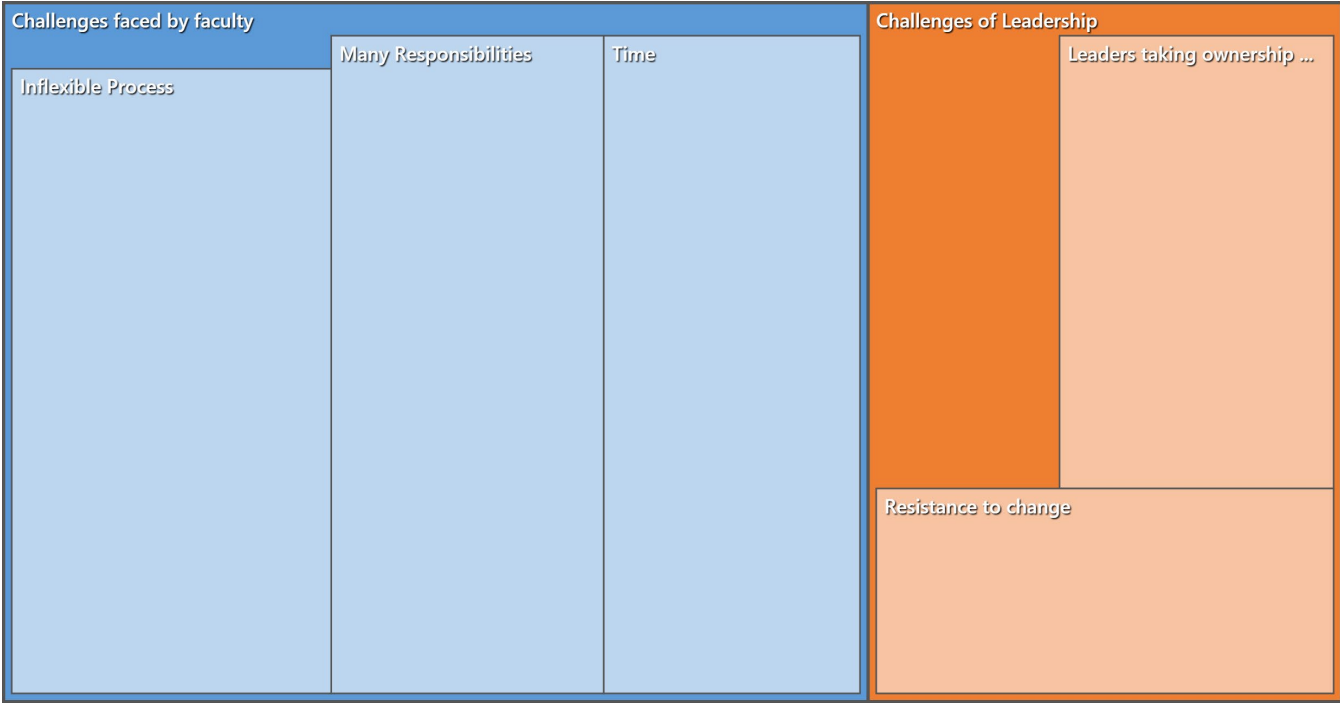
For cognition, the three main sub-themes of communication between actors and actors’ beliefs or understanding about the assessment policy, process and their own roles were found to be influencing their cognition. The motivation of actors was determined by the availability of resources, the actors’ own beliefs about their self-effectiveness to implement the policy, and also their own internal goals and values related to assessment. Lastly, the sub-themes of attribution of power by others, and power and control over resources were also confirmed as sub-themes, paralleling CIT. Interesting, some inductive coding was done to ensure that all possible codes and themes were explored, but the majority of these codes ended up merging into one of the three main themes and sub-themes. For example, there was cognition (beliefs/understanding) of the policy, the process, and their role which differed depending upon their role. That said, from these sub-themes the main understandings of the factors influencing

assessment at the micro level emerged. Perhaps most importantly, connections and relationships were explored between the different factors.

For the last question, which examined the challenges of implementing the assessment policy, codes and themes were also verified. The challenges were identified using inductive coding from the interviews of the participants using the software. After round one of deductive and inductive coding, another round of coding was done and the codes were analyzed for themes and patterns, merging the codes into thematic categories. It was discovered that there were two different perspectives about the challenges; one category related to the challenges faced by faculty and the other were challenges of leadership (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

Challenges faced by Actors in the Implementation of Assessment



From within these two themes of challenges (faculty versus leadership), different sub-themes emerged (see Figure 17). Based on the number of references for each code and themes related to challenges, the

codes and themes verified the manual analysis of the data. The challenges faced by faculty were the inflexible process of implementation, the many deadlines, and time due to added responsibilities at the institution. For leadership, there were challenges related to faculty in the department being resistant to change and some leaders and managers failed to take ownership and make decisions about assessment.

Summary

After analyzing and verifying the themes, the findings point to several influences on assessment policy implementation. Contextual influences exist externally at the macro level, which impacted the meso level context where the policy was formulated and implemented by the institutional actors. The meso level influenced the characteristics of policy actors' who interacted and carried out the policy's implementation. Looking from the bottom-up using CIT theory, it was found that actors at the ground level significantly influenced the assessment in so much as their cognition, motivation, and power/capacity influenced the implementation of the assessment policy. The main finding was the influence of the policy process itself, which focused on goals of quality, accountability, alignment, measurement, and standardization. The process was complex and rigorous, taking place in a large multi-campus institution which was undergoing a barrage of changes, and mandating much of the students' summative assessment through final examinations. Moreover, it was revealed that faculty and leaders faced the challenges such as interpreting a complex process, time, and deadlines. According to leadership, there were also difficulties with faculty being resistance to change and some leaders failing to take ownership over the process and making decisions throughout the assessment of student learning.

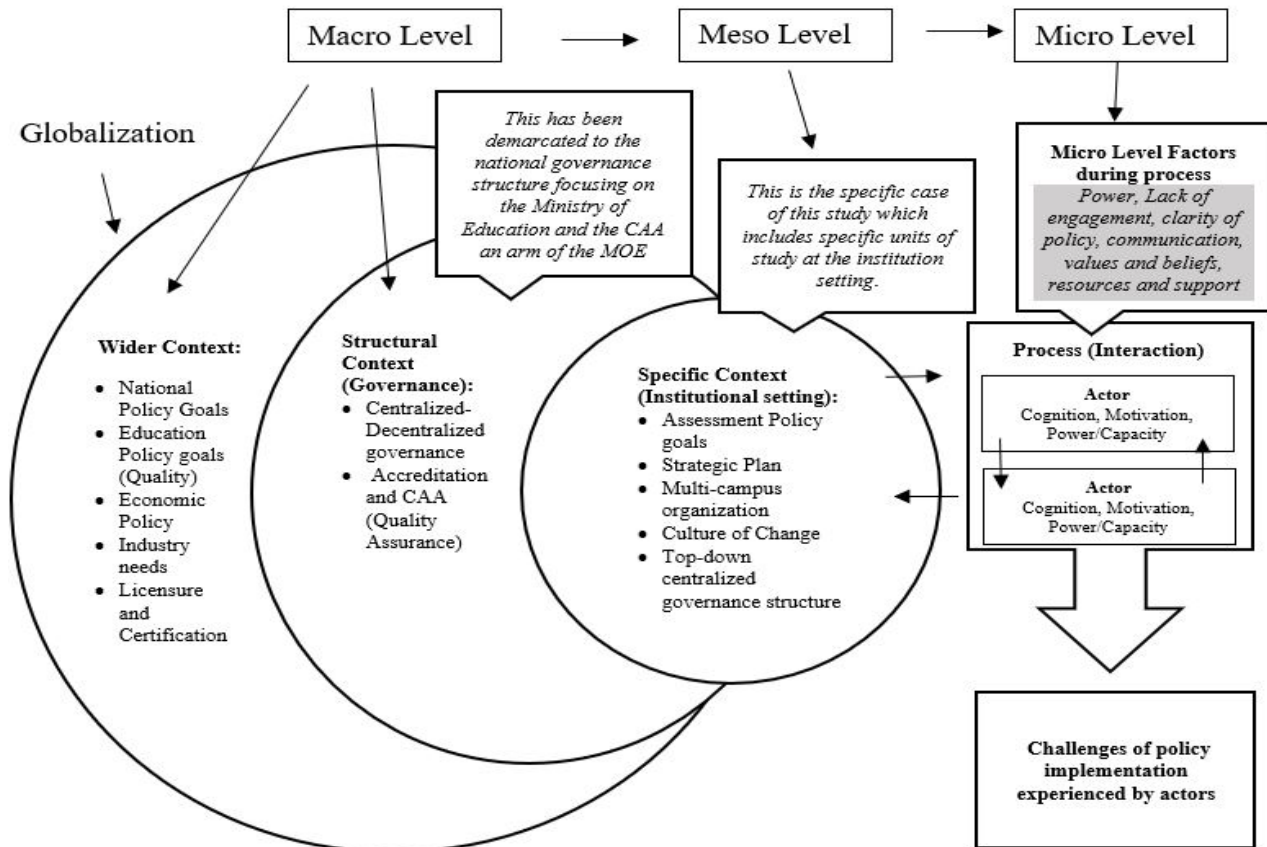
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

This qualitative case study sought to explore the implementation of assessment policy at one higher education institution in the UAE. The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed discussion and present interpretive insights into the findings reported in Chapter four. The intention of the discussion is to provide understanding and insight into factors that influence assessment at different levels both inside and outside the institution. The discussion is directed by the conceptual framework and pertinent literature, thus setting the results yielded by the current investigation into an appropriate context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Data was collected using documentation and semi-structured interviews with nine Health Science department members at the institution of study. The data was analyzed, coded, and organized by research question and after analysis, there were a variety of factors that emerged linked to the conceptual framework. For the discussion, I have synthesized major themes and sub-themes and organized them according to five different areas from the framework and literature. In particular, the discussion content of this chapter are based on the following key themes: (1) policy design influence on assessment implementation; (2) macro-level and its influence on assessment policy implementation; (3) meso-level and its influence on assessment policy implementation; (4) actors' characteristics at the micro-level influence on policy implementation and finally; (5) a discussion on third-generation policy implementation research in developing countries which is of importance to this context. The discussion is guided by the conceptual framework, the findings and the themes which are linked to the context and the implementation of assessment policy in higher education in the UAE (see Figure 18).

Figure 18

Conceptual Framework



Policy Design influence on Assessment Implementation

The study findings revealed that the policy design at the meso level was a key factor in the assessment implementation in the Health Sciences Department. The policy, which was developed locally at the university, provided a framework that included goals, tools, and specific procedures that guided the implementation of assessment adopted for different courses. These findings parallel the results reported by other authors (OECD, 2017; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979; Tezera, 2019). In particular, Tezera (2019) opined that policy design “determines whether and how a policy can be enacted” (p. 93).

In the Health Sciences Department, the assessment policy framed how assessment was implemented in terms of tools and the processes followed by actors during each semester. This positioning, in turn, also determined how resources were allocated and how faculty members devoted their time to the assessment.

Congruency between Curriculum and Assessment Policy Principles

There is robust evidence in the literature suggesting that assessment policy and practice should be aligned with the curriculum. For example, in their study of assessment policy implementation in Hong Kong, Chan et al. (2006) pointed out that where there was a shift to an outcomes-based curriculum, consideration of assessment must follow any re-orientation of the curriculum because “skills can hardly be measured by paper and pencil test” (p. 4). Kotze (2002) argued that if an institution opts for an outcomes-based education model, “learners must not only acquire knowledge but also demonstrate skills and develop values” (p. 76). Other researchers have similarly suggested that competency-based assessment should sufficiently capture a particular competence in all of its complexities, including (1) adequate knowledge base, (2) professional performance of complex tasks, and (3) capacity for life-long learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; van der Vleuten et al., 2010).

It was determined to implement an outcomes-based curriculum, skill development was an integral strategic goal at the institution to ensure employability of graduates in the private sector. The participants in the Health Sciences department beliefs and perceptions mirrored this goal. This is a significant finding because research on outcomes-based assessment specifies that the assessment method is strongly influenced by the learning outcome (Crespo et al., 2010). For example, examinations would be most appropriate for knowledge-based learning outcomes, but this method of assessment is not ideal for assessing skills or encouraging lifelong learning. Hence, when framing assessment policy, different assessments should be developed for different learning objectives, which parallels Boud and Associates’

(2010) suggestion that diverse methods should be used for summative assessment and be based on real-world contexts.

Despite this goal, data analysis revealed inconsistencies between the assessment policy and curriculum. In particular, the assessment policy did not reflect the institution's own mandate and movement towards competence-based education focusing on skills and competencies. Kotze (2002) opined that, in the contemporary outcomes-based education, the emphasis "is mainly on skills" and "is an attempt to reform certain education practices in order to prepare learners better in schools to cope with the demands of life" (p. 76). That said, parts of the assessment policy did not parallel the institution's mission to "provide and academic and professional education to prepare graduates to meet industry needs" (Latifa University, 2017, p.1). Namely, the implementation of the FWA to summatively assess student learning at the end of courses stood in juxtaposition to competency-based learning and assessment and the goal of preparing students to meet the industry needs. While the examinations were expected to result in a robust, valid, and reliable assessment process that would ensure consistency in the summative assessments (accounting 30% of the grade) conducted at different campuses and departments at the institution, available research indicates that this assessment approach is actually incongruent with the competency-based curricular objectives (Crespo et al., 2010; Kotze, 2002). In this study, the finding was affirmed by the responses provided by several study participants, indicating that the summative assessment practice adopted by the institution did not support competency-based assessment, leaning towards more traditional means of summative assessment at the conclusion of each course, focusing on content and knowledge. This practice contradicts most literature which emphasizes the use of non-traditional assessment practices when assessing student outcomes, arguing that "strong evidence of achievement of the totality of outcomes can be provided by larger-scale tasks that require students to demonstrate coherent, integrated learning, not isolated or atomistic performance" (Boud & Associates,

2010, p. 3). Most of the literature is unequivocal in the assertion that assessment policies should be underpinned by principles that are non-traditional, authentic, and contextualized, which focus on evaluating learning and contribute to student understanding of the subject matter.

Another factor influencing implementation was the policy used a one-size-fits-all approach to the assessment of student learning, presenting specific challenges. As one leader noted, “uh we're trying to apply one size fits all, which uh even within the health sciences I can't even do one size fits all. It, it doesn't work. I mean you know someone in VETs, you can't ask them to do stuff that social work do or nurses do” (P9). Kotze (2002) supported this suggesting that “if learners experience assessment as fixed predetermined procedures of recollection and reproduction, then the aim of education is defeated. Little, if any development, is possible in such an approach to assessment” (p. 78). These concerns were shared by the participants, many of whom felt that the final examinations given to the Health Sciences students failed to test for in-depth understanding of the subject matter and did not assess the skills needed for successful employment. Alternatively, they felt that students in-depth understanding of subject matter would be better measured with performance based or clinical assessment along with alternative, more authentic assessment tasks rather than examinations.

Participants suggested that the institution's decision to move towards the standardization of final assessments was guided by the misconception that all courses aimed to instill the same values and principles, which seemed to be associated with values of precision and objectivity in the measurement of student learning. However, the HEA (2012) noted that assessment of learning lacks precision and objectivity and assessment in reality, is not amenable to either. Therefore, by valuing these principles, policy makers were actually threatening the validity of assessment because assessments such as tests and examinations actually diminish the learning experience in the classroom. As one participant in Health Sciences suggested:

You know, yes, they're, all health sciences, but they're all unique. I mean, when you talk about health information management there, they deal primarily with technology and screens. Minimal contact with people versus social work which is all about counseling and talking to people. And then you get to nursing and E.M.S. It's technical and people and risks and you know, and then you get to VET, which is, you know, animals, you know, and, and so they are unique. So, they're not all the same. (P9)

Thus, in some instances at the institution, the strictness of the edict may have impacted the implementation of assessments and learning, especially for courses or programs furthest removed from the assumptions underlying these values. Hence, when formulating and implementing an assessment policy, its core principles and values must align with the curriculum objectives which might vary from one department to another or even one program to another.

The study findings also revealed that, despite some incongruences, the institution had made some positive improvements in the formulation of the assessment policy. It was found that certain assessment policy features were framed effectively, supporting the outcomes-based approach to the assessment. For example, there was congruency between the learning activities and the coursework assessment which, according to the policy, was under the faculty's control within the Health Sciences Department. While these coursework assessments were summative and formative in nature and measured different learning outcomes, the more decentralized approach where the department and faculty had more power and control over assessment decisions, allowed the faculty to develop practical skills-based assessment that supported knowledge application in some real-life contexts. The faculty and leadership spoke highly of the course work assessments, the clinical based assessments, and the practical assessments which took place on campus in laboratories or during their work placements; participants felt these were effective measures of student learning. Moreover, these assessments also performed a formative function in that

they allowed the faculty to provide timely feedback to students, thus promoting the attainment of learning objectives. In addition to course work assessments, there were clinical based summative assessments which were controlled and implemented by the different programs. Indeed, according to Kotze (2002), assessment policy implementation often “functions as a tool for learning and a powerful agent or mechanism in the construction of competence” (p. 78).

Tensions among Assessment Policy Goals

More than four decades ago, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1979) explored the conditions for effective policy implementation, arguing that the program (policy) should be based on sound theory. In particular, they opined that, if the policy decisions contain unambiguous directives and are implemented correctly, they are likely to lead to the desired outcomes. More recently, Gornitzka et al. (2005) highlighted the importance of aligning policy implementation with all policy standards and objectives. They further argued that “effective implementation depends on the nature of the policy to be carried out and the specific factors contributing to the realization or non-realization of policy objectives, which vary across policy type” (p. 42). Additionally, Streeck and Thelen (2005) reasoned that policies are, in fact, institutions in that “they constitute rules for actors other than for policy-makers themselves, rules that can and need to be implemented and that are legitimate in that they will if necessary be enforced by agents acting on behalf of society as a whole” (p. 12). Therefore, available evidence supports the hypothesis guiding the present study that policy goals must be clear and its implementation framework must be underpinned by sound theoretical principles.

Analyses, however, revealed discrepancies among different assessment policy goals and sound theoretical assessment principles, which undermined effective assessment implementation. For example, one goal focused on the measurement of students’ knowledge (quality and accountability purpose) while another concentrated on improving student learning. Although both goals were rightfully included in the

new assessment policy, precedence was given to tools and procedures aimed at assessment of student learning for quality and accountability purpose. Knight (2002) referred to this phenomenon as a feed-out function, “in that the grades and classifications can then be treated as a performance indicator for the student, department, institution, employer, funding body, quality agency or compilers of league tables” (p. 276). Analysis of the literature reveals that the new policy was positioned from a quality and accountability perspective rather than assessment for improvement or learning perspective. The literature suggests that sound assessment “should not be just used as evidence that learning outcomes have been achieved” (HEA, 2012, p. 19). Instead, it can be both formative and summative, there can be fewer yet more challenging summative assessments, and it is important to ensure assessments are fit to purpose (HEA, 2012). However, because assessment at Latifa University is underpinned by a quality and accountability-based purpose, the majority of the tools, resources, and processes were devoted to the measurement of student learning outcomes rather than the improvement of learning. Thus, the policy was positioned from an accountability perspective, which Archer (2017) believes can influence assessment. As he described:

While each purpose of assessment may contribute to the quality of education, the resources such as educator time, student time, marking load, administrative burden, and technology employed to operationalize these purposes belong to a shared pool. An over-emphasis of any one of the purposes of assessment will affect the other sides by diverting resources from one or both of the other essential assessment functions, thereby adversely influencing the quality of education. (p. 3)

From this excerpt, the tension between summative assessment focusing on quality and accountability and meaningful assessment of learning outcomes is revealed, which are opposing positions in assessment. Still, it is significant to note that this tension is not uncommon in higher education, as ample

body of evidence suggests that incongruences between the accountability and improvement paradigms make it difficult for institutions to devise assessment policies (Ewell, 2009; HEA, 2017; Knight & Brown, 2004). Knight and Brown (2012) noted that these discrepancies persist because “different audiences want different data for different purposes at different times” (p. 13). Although the policy recognizes that assessment can be both formative and summative, it is apparent that a priority was placed on the summative aspect of assessment in terms of time, resource allocation, and process activities like moderation and auditing which means formative assessment takes a ‘back seat’ to summative assessment.

Summary

While policy guides the process of assessment implementation, “policies do not fail or succeed on their own merit; rather their progress is dependent upon the process of implementation” (Hudson et al., 2019, p. 1). Hence, in addition to evaluating the policy adopted at Latifa University, macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors influencing its implementation were also analyzed from both top-down and bottom-up perspective, focusing specifically on the context and the actors (Honig, 2006; Hudson et al., 2019; OECD, 2017).

How does the macro level factors influence policy implementation?

One of the studies aims was to identify external factors influencing assessment implementation at Latifa University. The findings revealed that an assortment of macro-level factors influenced the assessment policy and implementation at this institution, which in turn influenced the strategies adopted at the Health Sciences Department. Although these factors were distal and far removed, globalization, internationalization, national-level economic goals, education reform concentrating on quality and accountability - all influenced implementation in complex, yet subtle ways. This is very much in line with the results of extant studies on the implementation of educational policy in other countries where

researchers have acknowledged that a variety of outside contextual factors have a dramatic impact on educational policy implementation (Fullan, 2007; Honig, 2006; OECD, 2013). However, as existing research on this subject primarily pertains to the US and the European context, conducting the present study in UAE, a developing country in the Middle East, will have important implications for other countries with similar cultural, economic, and educational contexts.

Influence of Globalization on UAE Education Policy at the Macro Level

The impact of globalization on the UAE and education reform parallels past trends prevalent in developed countries. Evidence revealed that the UAE wanted to be economically competitive in the globalized world, creating pressure to improve the country's quality of education. Therefore, the UAE's macro-economic goals influenced the UAE's education policy which focused on quality and accountability aims. Support for this finding can be seen in the UAE national policy document which stated "the global economy will witness significant economic changes in the coming years and the *UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda* aims for the UAE to be at its heart" (Government of the UAE, 2018b). It was found that the UAE government's primary aim was to develop a knowledge-based economy, meaning that intellectual ability was correlated to economic success, which is often a common goal of top-performing countries (Matsumoto, 2019). In particular, as part of this goal, the country believed by investing in intellectual capital it could diversify its economy in the post-oil boom through innovation, research and development (Government of the UAE, 2018b).

It was obvious from Vision 2021 that its national identity was firmly secured to its international status, further highlighting the impact of globalization. This was confirmed by Matsumoto (2010) in her study of the UAE, suggesting while the country has developed very quickly, it has largely fixated on its own international status at the expense of its cultural identity. Proof of this can be seen in the UAE's Vision 2021 which stated when addressing the national priorities that "each of the national priorities are

generally compared against international benchmarks” (Government of the UAE, 2018b). Further evidence detailed that “the National Agenda has set a target that our students rank among the best in the world in reading, mathematics, and science along with raising high school graduation rates to international standards” (Government of the UAE, 2018b). In the shadow of globalization since the post-oil boom, higher education has come under greater scrutiny as the national government realizes the importance of establishing a first-rate education system if they are going to achieve their aims of creating a knowledge-based economy and “being one of the best countries in the world.” For HE in the UAE, this has meant that federal universities like Latifa University have increasingly sought accreditation based on international benchmarks. Indeed, the Health Sciences program at Latifa has one program accredited by a Health science entity in Australia. Although improvements are being made, as recently as 2017, it has been argued that higher education in the UAE have failed to produce ‘knowledge workers’ who can create knowledge in areas such as software, patented inventions, published books or original research since it does not stimulate creativity or innovation (Ashour, 2017) suggesting education reform goals are justified, but further improvement is needed.

The findings also indicated that the UAE is clearly following educational reform trends in other developed countries in the face of a more globalized and interconnected world. Over the past decade, many developed countries turned to policy reforms to improve and safeguard the quality of higher education. For example, developed countries moved to outcomes-based education and as Al Sharari (2017) noted, it has impacted governance of HE with many countries developing government entities which oversee the licensing and accreditation of programs at colleges and universities. Corresponding to this trend, it was revealed that the UAE initiated several reforms in higher education, including raising standards of teaching and teaching qualifications, implementing smart systems, using English as the main language of instruction, and encouraging public institutional programs to seek international

accreditation signaling increasing international engagement. Additionally, more recently, the MOE improved the regulatory framework of the CAA to safeguard quality and public institutions. Overall, the reforms were meant to ensure that higher education in the UAE met international standards to increase the UAE's standing and reputation on the world stage while also guaranteeing students who are educated in the UAE were employable and also had some outward mobility in terms of education and employability. Therefore, there is a mix of international and national interests which impacts the UAE and higher education. Overall, all of this reflects the impact of globalization and internationalization at the national level including the UAE's national economic policy and education policy and also how this impacts higher education in the UAE.

Quality and accountability influence on the meso level

There is a plethora of literature on the impact on quality initiatives on institutions in higher education. These studies have found that one of the main impacts of quality assurance was on the “institutional structures and policies in terms of fundamental structural and policy changes within institutions and substantive changes in a specific area of policy or part of an institution” (Liu et al., 2015, p. 20). Moreover, when there is a focus on quality from external organizations, institutions typically developed institution-wide quality management policies and procedures which “generally involved a shift in authority from basic academic units to the administrative center of the institution” (Liu et al., 2015, p. 20). Such was the case at Latifa University where implementation moved towards a more complex centrally controlled assessment process.

In this study, it was evident quality reform at the macro level, which was a feature of globalization, led to a number of policy and procedural changes at the meso level, especially those directed at teaching, learning, and assessment. The institution sought to improve the quality of learning through policy reform by overhauling the assessment policy and process. It was revealed that two of the

main goals of the new policy were to ensure that assessment practice met current national and international standards, and also to guarantee that there was a consistent quality experience for all students. Unfortunately, it was visible that quality and accountability took precedence. These findings parallel both Ewell (2009) and Fulmer et al. (2015) who identified accountability within the education system as a feature that affects the implementation of assessment worldwide. The authors argued it impacts educational quality at the meso and the micro level because it directly influences the work expected of the teachers. This was clearly reflected in the tools and the designation of resources to assessment implementation during the semester. According to actors in the department, as a result of policy reform, there were extra assessment responsibilities during the semester and overall the entire process was more complex, revealing two unintended consequences of the new policy.

Another meso level impact was the CAU standardized summative assessment practices utilizing traditional assessment. This is typical of education reforms in the 21st century because as Zajda (2021) asserted, “the new emerging paradigm is of standards driven and outcomes-defined policy change” (p. 133). Indeed, the institution equated consistently and standardization with quality. As a result, the CAU encouraged faculty wide examinations, resulting in learning that encouraged memorization and recall, and not the development of skills or dispositions. According to those in the department, this decision had a backwash effect, compromising the quality of assessment and learning in courses, which suggests standardization does not always equate to quality. Moreover, this also provided evidence that more importance was given to quality assurance through the measurement of student learning instead of assessment for the purpose of learning. Archer (2017) contended that the over-emphasis of one of these purposes will adversely impact the quality of education, corresponding with other pertinent literature which suggests that in some instances, quality assurance has unintended consequences on teaching and learning in higher education (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Morley, 2003).

In this case, it was found that the summative examinations compromised the quality of teaching and learning in the courses in the department. Researchers maintain that if examinations are used as the main method, it impacts learning and assessment, which becomes passive and neglects skills development, as well as higher-order outcomes (Carless, 2015; Halinen et al., 2014). Indeed, this was confirmed during the interviews of the participants who criticized the use of final examinations to assess course learning outcomes, preferring more subjective practical assessments, which they argued, allowed for assessment of skills and dispositions. While measuring student learning is an integral aspect of any assessment policy, numerous studies point to the importance of competency-based assessments that are less standardized and more qualitative in nature (Dierick & Dochy, 2001; Knight, 2000) which reiterates the HEA's (2012) assertion that assessment need not be positioned from a paradigm of precision and objectivity.

This reform model focused on quality and accountability underscores the problematic nature of internationalization and formulating educational policy in the UAE due to globalization, which has been traditionally over-reliant on Western countries' policies and practices. As Godwin (2006) noted, "the development of the UAE education system was based on Western models and the current K-12 curriculum in the government schools is a hybrid of Western pedagogical models" (p. 10), which might not always translate well to the UAE context. While this quote illustrates the problem in the K-12, this problem is endemic to all systems of education in the UAE. Although selective, public higher education borrows certain policies and practices from different countries around the world. Indeed, the assessment policy itself relied on foreign assessment policy strategies, westernized literature and practices to formulate the policy. While it is important to consult existing practices and available empirical evidence, HE institutions in the UAE could adopt innovative practices that reflect the nation's culture, industry needs, subject areas, and curriculum. More importantly, policymakers and leaders need to examine and

understand the process that was used to implement the policy. The literature is unequivocal in their agreement that policy borrowing can be problematic if it is not adapted to its local context (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016; Mastsumoto, 2019).

Influence of a Centralized/Decentralized System

This study focused on educational policy implementation in UAE, which is a rapidly developing country characterized by a centralized–decentralized system of governance over education. Much of the extant policy research has focused on Western countries in which North American models have been adopted. Thus, their findings cannot be directly applied to the UAE, where education policy implementation begins at the national level and is then cascaded down through the Ministry of Education and is subjected to the accreditation process led by the CAA. In the UAE, public institutions have power and agency over institutional policy design and implementation as long as it aligns with national educational policy goals and accreditation standards. This aligns with existing literature which suggests when reforming education, developing countries adopt a more decentralized approach which is borrowed from western models of governance. In the UAE, the evidence revealed that public higher education had moved to a centralized-decentralized system to implement education reform as a response to globalization.

Findings pertaining to the assessment policy at Latifa University also exposed that the institution employs a centralized, top-down model within its campuses, paralleling the UAE government's centralized approach to governing the country. Karlsen (2000) coined the term “decentralized centralism” where power is transferred to local organizations, which it is argued, produces more innovation and school development (Tan & Ng, 2007). Nevertheless, when policy is formulated at the national level and the subnational level has some degree of autonomy, challenges may occur depending upon whether the local context is receptive or unreceptive (Hudson et al., 2019; Norris et al., 2014). In

the UAE, globalization led to the centralization of oversight of education and standards while decentralizing autonomy over policy and procedures to allow public institutions to respond to the economic demands of the global economy.

Although the MOE has standards and control through the CAA, the decentralized system gave the institution and leadership power over institutional policy. While it was found that the institution was receptive to national policy initiatives and aligned its policies and goals accordingly, the broad CAA assessment standards allowed the institutional actors who had control over assessment to devise and implement assessment policy. Consequently, the real influence existed at the institutional level with the a few main actors having authority and control over the formulation and implementation of policy within a highly centralized institutional system. It was revealed that central actors at the meso level had difficulties devising the policy and engaging multiple actors at the ground level who have diverse sources of knowledge and backgrounds, which is a common influencing factor found in the research (Hudson et al., 2019, Lipsky, 1980).

It was evident that the centralized system at the institution, which will be discussed below, had a more significant influence on assessment, especially on faculty during the process, more so than the external centralized-decentralized governance structure which had given the institution the autonomy to formulate and set policy. However, this might bring into question whether the CAA and the MOE should provide more direction on assessment policy and processes like the Higher Education Academy does in the U.K. Clearly, the adoption of a centralized-decentralized system of governance in a country with values based on strict hierarchies of power and collectivist ideals creates certain tensions due to the conflicting values and beliefs of a largely international faculty at the institution. For example, much of upper management and some department heads are local who tend to have a more collectivist and hierarchical mindset, and so when they make decisions, they do so believing that it is for the greater

good of the group, and therefore, decisions will be respected and implemented. In contrast, international faculty have a more individualistic value and believe in shared power which can complicate implementation if there are local faculty working with international faculty. It was revealed that part of this tension existed at the institutional level, where a centralized governance model was utilized, giving the central administration autonomy and power over setting its own goals and priorities.

Summary

While several macro-level contextual factors have been discussed above, further investigations are needed to explore the effects of globalization and other factors on different educational policies and their implementation across different institutions in the UAE. In particular, given that study participants felt that culture influenced assessment policy, but were unable to elaborate on these responses further, the role of culture in policy implementation warrants further study.

How do meso-level factors Influence Policy Implementation?

Several factors specific to this institutional context that influenced assessment implementation emerged during the analyses. Several authors identified institutional setting as an important driver of educational policy implementation (Bell & Stevenson, 2015; Berman, 1978; Honig, 2006; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Viennet & Pont, 2017). For example, Dwiyanto (2002) found that the implementation of public policies is primarily affected by (1) bureaucratic culture, (2) service ethics, (3) discretionary authority, and (4) incentives system. In contrast, at Latifa University there were three important institutional characteristics identified in the study affecting assessment policy implementation: (1) the governance structure and approach to implementation, (2) the organization's multi-campus structure, and (3) institutional culture. This highlights that no two institutional contexts are alike and it is difficult to generalize from one institutional setting to the next, especially when studying different policy sectors

such as education or health care. Nonetheless, it seems that the governance structure and institutional culture are two common factors that would influence the implementation of any institutional policy.

Top-down Approach to Governance influence on Implementation

As noted earlier, Latifa University adopts a centralized, top-down governance structure in its approach to decision-making and policy implementation. The institution thus retains explicit control over the design and implementation of the assessment policy, which is cascaded down from the upper leadership and management and the CAU to individual departments, from the department level to mid-managers at the program level, and finally to the faculty in charge of teaching specific courses. This top-down implementation process is adopted in most government agencies in the UAE, where an authoritative model based on a strict hierarchy of power has traditionally been used (Matsumoto, 2019) as it aligns with their own cultural beliefs.

The established literature highlights the influence that a highly centralized system can have on institutional implementation. Unfortunately, it can still produce unintended outcomes especially when actors at the micro levels have differing perspectives and beliefs. Research contends that if a policy is going to succeed, it is vital for those at higher levels of management to have some understanding or grasp of what happens at the ground level (Berman, 1978; Hudson et al., 2019, Lipsky, 1980). This echoes the bottom-up school of thought which argues that discretionary power can determine the success or failure of a policy (Lipsky, 1980). It was found that the faculty in the Health Sciences were unreceptive to some parts of the policy and process because it failed to align with their beliefs and knowledge about assessment, highlighting that those who formulated the policy may have not considered some of the issues to implementation on the ground level. This is what Bressers (2004) referred to as “passive cooperation” whereby parties “neither hinders nor stimulates the application of the policy instruments” (p. 291). Evidently, this underscores the authoritarian centralized, top-down

approach to implementation that was adopted, limited the scope for any decisions at the departmental level and also the autonomy of mid-managers and faculty over assessment decisions, specifically in terms of summative assessment.

In general, when a top-down approach to policy implementation is adopted, implementation begins with an authoritarian decision (Matland, 1995). At Latifa University, upper managers at the institutional level and the CAU were responsible for the formulation and oversight of the assessment policy implementation each semester. During the formulation and implementation stages, little to no input or feedback is typically sought from the administrative staff and teaching staff who will be in charge of the actual implementation process, which can lead to resistance and possible difficulties in achieving policy goals. Indeed, the institution is microcosm of the macro level governmental approach which creates some issues. As Palumbo et al. (1984) noted, “if local level implementers are not given freedom to adapt to local conditions it is likely to fail” (p. 61). Although there was no evidence of open resistance to the policy in the Health Sciences Department, many participants voiced their frustration and disagreement with parts of the policy and the implementation process which resulted in passive cooperation. The assessment policy and its implementation were a cause of concern among those in the department who felt that the process could be streamlined and less complicated.

The actors also voiced concerns about the loss of discretionary authority, or the lack of power they had to make decisions, which were taken out of the department and faculty’s hands and were entrusted solely to the CAU. While this observation should not be interpreted as an indication that the policy was a failure, there was a very “passive” approach to its implementation where faculty were not heavily invested in the process due to empowerment issues. Thus, it can be conjectured that, if bottom-up approach to policy formulation and implementation had been considered, opposition and disagreement would be diminished. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that, when teaching faculty and

students are included in the policy formulation process and are given some discretionary power over policy implementation this improves its overall outcomes (Fullan 2007; Lipsky 1980; OECD, 2017).

Another issue that the lack of autonomy brings to light is the absence of trust this signaled to actors. In top-down models, actors are often seen “as impediments to successful implementation, agents whose shirking behavior needs to be controlled” (Matland, 1995, p. 148). However, this stance is problematic because if policy is to be effectively implemented at the department and program level, actors need greater autonomy. As discussed previously, participants indicated that they held little power and autonomy over different aspects of the decision making, especially as it related to final summative assessments. Bottom-up theorists suggest, a more flexible strategy will allow for actors to adapt policy to local difficulties and contextual factors (Maynard-Moody et al., 1990). Thus, a more centralized/decentralized approach could potentially support the implementation of assessment policy where actors in departments have autonomy to adapt the central policy to their local context to ensure that assessment is meeting the needs of students in the department. As Matland (1995) supported “decentralization should occur within a context of central control” (p. 150). However, it is important that this decentralization should include the devolution of real power and autonomy rather than just the delegation of tasks and responsibility to local levels (Karlsen, 2000).

The Effect of Multi-Campus Organization on Policy and Actors' Cognition

As a part of this study, the influence of a multi-campus system on policy implementation was also examined. The findings revealed that one of the broader issues facing the institution during policy formulation was determining how assessments could be implemented consistently across such a sizeable multi-campus organization without sacrificing the quality of learning or the validity and reliability of assessments. Added to this was the CAA who developed guidelines on consistency across multi-campus organizations to maintain accreditation. As a result, consistency permeated the language and the policy's

writing and was one of its main goals. To maintain consistency, the institution concentrated on developing and implementing tools (CAP/ASD) to support a robust process aimed at maintaining reliability of assessments because courses are taught at multiple campuses, which could lead to inconsistencies if not implemented properly.

In addition to influencing the assessment policy and tools, this specific meso-level factor influenced policy implementation by individual actors. According to Bressers (2004), structural and contextual features influence implementation, as they affect individual actors' cognition, power/capacity, and motivation. The multi-campus organization at Latifa University influenced the "cognition" because it impacted the communication among actors during the implementation of course-level assessments. This was particularly problematic for courses taught at different campuses due to the difficulty in finding time to coordinate meetings among staff. As the study participants pointed out, at times, it was challenging to communicate complex processes across different campuses due to each actor's individual responsibilities and workload, especially if multiple emails had to be exchanged. Thus, more effort is required at the institutional level to improve communication among actors during the assessment implementation process, especially the over-reliance on email as the main mode of communication which impacted actors' cognition.

Influencing Factors Derived from a Culture of Change

Another meso-level contextual factor that emerged from the analyses was the institutional "culture of change" which also permeated the Health Sciences Department. Honig (2006) argued that the institutional culture shapes what people will and can do in the implementation of a policy. Nearly five decades ago, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) argued that organizational culture and other context-specific characteristics influence policy implementation and must be studied by looking at the context of the organization and providing detailed explanations of the conditions under which it is implemented.

At Latifa University, a period of continuous and comprehensive change coincided with the implementation of the new assessment policy. The study participants spoke of the copious changes to other policies and processes that increased their existing workload because of many administrative duties that they were expected to perform. In addition, they opined that the continual changes to the assessment procedures impacted their cognition and motivation, as it was difficult to keep up with these changes, some of which were poorly explained. This was further exacerbated by the number of changes and issues with clarity of the policy which was linked to how it was communicated. In addition, there were issues with the timing of these changes as they were rolled out simultaneously giving faculty little time to process information. Moreover, this was compounded by the types of changes, which were both large scale and smaller scale, giving faculty in the department a plethora of information to translate into action. As a result, faculty in the Health Science department expressed indifference to the assessment policy, which undermined their engagement with the process. There was only passive cooperation (Bressers, 2004) as it was viewed as a task to complete rather than invest time to improve the quality of learning or assessment at the institution. Consequently, it was very difficult to invest serious time to improving existing assessment instruments and processes due to the excessive workload and constant changes to the way policy was implemented.

Top-down governance impacts leaders' power

Various studies on both policy implementation and assessment implementation discuss the importance of leadership. The HEA (2012) stated that, “The most important factor in successful implementation of changes in assessment practices will be committed leadership” (p. 13). They also argued that it is essential for leadership to have certain traits such as being sensitive to people, the local needs, and context. Moreover, in some instances when implementing assessment, leadership might have to persevere in questioning taken-for granted assumptions about assessment and entrenched assessment

practices (HEA, 2012). This assertion underscores the autonomy that leaders need over the assessment process in order to establish more progressive policy. Clearly, in large organizations like higher educational institutions, strong middle leaders play a critical role in the implementation of policy.

Based on the findings, it was apparent that top-down governance constrained actors at the program and department level from making different decisions about the implementation of assessment. In this study, it was evident that program coordinators and the divisional chair in the Health Sciences department rarely questioned assessment policies or procedures as there were no formal opportunities or processes to do so. Moreover, it appeared that managers accepted the structure and hierarchy as part of working “culture” at the institution in the UAE. Therefore, rather than leading, managers at the program level merely administered the policy and followed their responsibilities as tasks were delegated as part of a chain of command. Based on this response, autonomy was not devolved to the department or leadership in programs. Instead, responsibilities were delegated and participants acknowledged and accepted that the process and decisions related to assessment were largely made by the central administration or further up at the department level.

Actors at the micro-level influence on policy implementation

Implementation of any institutional policy is a complex process in which individual actor’s characteristics play an important role. However, these actors do not work in isolation and, as emerged from this study, the policy and the context also frame their understanding and impact the implementation of policy resulting in both intended and unintended outcomes.

Power/capacity and actors influence on implementation

Power was a major factor that influenced assessment policy implementation in the department. This is a central tenet of Bressers’ (2004) CIT and other studies on policy implementation. Available evidence indicates that power can have an unfavorable influence on implementation, placing undue

stress on teachers, which can in turn limit their capacity to implement policy reform (Evans, 2001; Porter et al., 2015) because they are the ones to translate policy into actions, and their actions are also evaluated. Extant research further reveals that, the more power faculty has over the process and methods, the less frustration and the more faith they have in the process itself (Bressers, 2004). In his study of assessment, Al Hamly (2009) found that school leaders and the managerial process impacted assessment because teachers felt they had no voice in the assessment design and implementation and lacked autonomy. They were also affected by constraints placed on them and the decisions made by school managers related to the oversight of the process, reflecting a top-down approach to implementation.

These conclusions are pertinent to this study. It was evident that the faculty's lack of autonomy over the assessment process caused them great frustration as they expressed dissatisfaction with a didactic assessment process, controlled by the CAU. Interestingly, the Health Sciences Department faculty were of view that clinical-based assessments and assessments given to students during the semester—which were outside the jurisdiction of the policy implementation process and the CAU—were more beneficial to students and more accurately contributed to their learning process, suggesting the more closely aligned the policy tools with actors' goals and knowledge, the more buy-in from actors. This supports literature the applicable literature which suggests that when actors at the micro level have power/capacity, they are able to make more appropriate decisions about implementation to the benefit of end user, in this case about learning and assessment. Moreover, the literature suggests that there will be less resistance (Lispky, 2010; OECD, 2017). In this study, the lack of power and control over students' summative assessment process frustrated those actors responsible for assessment in the Health Sciences department, and unintentionally, demotivated their involvement with the assessment process a whole.

Lack of engagement of actors in the process influences implementation

Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) argued that “support for the policy is built by involving actors, thus minimizing opposition from actors about the policy throughout the implementation process” (p. 39). Data analyses also revealed lack of engagement of actors in the Health Science Department as well as those on the policy process’s ground level. As noted by the department leadership and faculty, when the policy and tools were initially introduced, there was little opportunity to participate in the policy’s formulation. In addition, during the implementation process, there were few formal mechanisms to give feedback about the assessment process and tools. They did have several informal discussions with managers during the course assessment evaluation, but these allowed for feedback on the appropriateness of different tools and not on the process itself.

As the policy implementation process includes many stages, some researchers argue that policy formulation should not be divorced from its implementation, and stakeholders should be a part of both (Schleicher 2016; OECD, 2017). According to the Schleicher (2016), engaging stakeholders in policy design serves different functions, as it ensures that the key message and rationale of the policy are appropriately conveyed to actors, and builds consensus around the objectives, tools, and other means to achieve the policy goals. Hence, had the institution engaged faculty in the Health Science Department and other departments in the policy formation, there may have been more support for the policy because its design could have reflected the department, faculty, and perhaps students’ goals, all of which are geared towards improving learning.

Clarity of Policy and its influence on Cognition during Implementation

Several study participants shared that the policy goals were not clearly delineated to the Health Sciences Department faculty. According to Williams-Jones and MacDonald (2008), policies should be clear and concise, contain clear explanations of the key terms, provide a logical corollary to help the

readers understand key terms in diverse settings, and include procedures and related ethical guidelines. Moreover, they should be relevant to those that are expected to implement them and adhere to pertinent government policies. If policies meet these requirements, actors will feel more directed and hence more motivated to carry out the new policies (Williams-Jones & MacDonald, 2008). Similarly, according to the OECD (2017), the way a policy is designed, i.e., the “the way a policy is debated and framed, the logic it suggests between the policy problem and the solution it offers and the feasibility of the latter determine to a great extent whether a policy can be implemented and how” (p. 38). Moreover, “the overarching goals and logic (or vision) of a policy need to be refined in operational terms” (OECD, 2017, p. 37). At Latifa University, however, only senior leaders were aware of the broader goals of the policy, which suggests issues with how the policy is cascaded down as those in leadership did not unpack the goals and expectations of the policy for the program coordinators and divisional chairs. Consequently, the goals were not shared further with the teaching faculty. As a result, most of the staff believed that the policy’s only goal was to ensure that student learning was accurately measured. This gap in understanding illustrated the importance of policy design and clear communication of its main objectives.

Faculty’s lack of understanding or “cognition” of the wider goals and context of the assessment policy focusing on quality, consistency, and learning suggested that the way policy was introduced, operationalized, and communicated was inadequate. Archer (2017) advised that “all actors in an educational system should be cognizant of the goals of the education system as a whole when developing and engaging with assessment” (p. 1). In the policy introduction stage, its main goals were insufficiently discussed, which might have contributed to the misunderstandings regarding the need for this policy and the use of faculty-wide assessments as the main form of assessment to measure student learning. Likewise, there were few opportunities during the semester for the staff to confer about the

policy and processes to gain clarity about the tools or processes. Had some of the wider goals been shared and discussed in the initial stages of policy formulation, faculty in the Health Sciences Department might have better understood the process and the tools used to ensure quality and consistency in its implementation. Again, this highlights the importance of the clarity of the policy and also the role of managers or leadership in providing clarity, bringing into question who was interpreting the policy for faculty during its implementation.

Influence of Communication on Implementation

The study revealed the importance of communication in policy implementation. The analysis of findings indicated that communication was an influence impacting the implementation process at the ground level. In that sense, the study confirms the view of many researchers that inter-organizational communication can undermine policy implementation (Bridgman & Davis, 2004; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). At Latifa University, two main problems with communication were identified, one of which was preference for email rather than direct exchange of ideas about the policy and process. This is understandable, given that this is a large institution offering Health Science programs at multiple campuses. However, email made it difficult for those at the periphery of the decision-making process to keep abreast with the changes to the policy processes and tools because emails are not dialogue and merely allow for the dissemination of information. Furthermore, it is also detached which could lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, emails should be followed up with meetings between mid-managers and faculty about any new policies or changes to existing policy along with training.

Inter-organizational communication was further impacted by limited opportunities for discussion during the semester. There were few department meetings among faculty and leadership at the program level to discuss policy and procedures, while course-level teams struggled to coordinate schedules around teachers' workload. Again, this did not allow for any dialogue about the policy process during

the semester, which further exacerbated the actors' confusion and leading to passive cooperation among leadership and faculty.

Analyses further revealed that these communication issues stemmed from the top-down nature of governance. In top-down forms of governance and policy implementation, higher authority figures determine the policy and then filter this down by communicating and delegating other tasks and responsibilities. In this case, the policy was transferred down to the Health Sciences Department faculty at the program level by the department-level leadership in communication with the higher authorities outside the department (Academic Council and CAU). The top-down implementation compromised the ability of actors to give feedback or suggestions about the policy and tools. In addition, the study also found that there were no other platforms that enable faculty to communicate or provide feedback to the higher authorities. Simply, they had no mechanisms to comment on some of the challenges of implementing the assessment policy at any stage of the process. For example, faculty that took part in this study described how, during the semester, they had questions about specific procedures and wanted to make sense of tools or procedures, but they had no formal means of doing so. In contrast, while there was more opportunity for managers within the department to communicate about the policy, information followed a top-down approach where they were delegated responsibility and were simply passing along information initiated at the department level. This issue could have been avoided if institutional leadership considered some elements of a bottom-up strategy which gives all actors a voice during the process and permits actors to feed information about policy and procedures up the hierarchy to the managers.

Actors' Values and Beliefs influence on Implementation

Ample body of literature suggests that the faculty's conceptions and beliefs can influence student assessment practices (Brown, 2004; James & Pedder, 2006; Pierra & Flores, 2016). For example,

Spillane et al. (2002) argued that during implementation actors attempt to make sense of the policy and the process, which in turn affects their beliefs and attitudes toward the entire process. As Spillane et al. (2002) highlighted, sense-making is not a simple decoding of the policy message; in general, the process of comprehension is an active process of interpretation that draws on the individual's rich knowledge base of understandings, beliefs, and attitudes" (p. 391). This is similar to Bressers' (2004) ideas on cognition of actors, which are frames of reference or interpretations of reality, and can influence the implementation process because actors can either accept, modify, or ignore ideas promoted by the policy (Spillane et al., 2002).

Research indicates that resistance to change arises when those affected by the change cannot see its benefits or its goals contrast with their values, beliefs and/or practices. Thus, the closer the perceived alignment between a program's proposed practices and current practices, the greater the probability that changes will be viewed favorably (Graczewski et al., 2007; Spillane, 1999). In addition, the closer the changes align with the values of actors themselves the less resistance which will be encountered during the implementation process. Indeed, this study revealed that actors held different beliefs and understandings of the policy and valued assessment and processes unlike those in the policy which impacted its acceptance and cooperation. This revelation also raises the question of whether policy should align first with institutional values or actors' values at the micro level. Moreover, it also raises the question of whether it's feasible to align policy to all values and hence this demonstrates the importance of communication of the policy by leaders.

It was established that the Health Science Department faculty had their understandings of assessment based on their own beliefs and values about assessment and the process, which influenced its implementation. While the Health Sciences Department faculty supported the introduction of summative assessment in their courses, they did not have confidence in the method of summative assessment

implemented in the department or the process that supported its application because it did not align with the values and beliefs in assessment. They felt the assessment of students should focus on skills through practical and clinical based assessment and supported by a more simplistic process. Hence, this also highlights the difference in the institutions values which favored a top-down model of implementation which favored standardization as opposed to a more decentralized democratic process where departments adapted policy to their programs and curriculum.

The analyses further revealed a significant discrepancy between the assessment policy and faculty's own beliefs about how students should be assessed, which was based on past experiences in other institutions and their own understanding of how students are best assessed in the Health Sciences Department. This is congruent with Segers and Tillema's (2011) argument that teachers believe that assessment should "involve more than the replication of knowledge and cater to the individual student's needs" (p. 53). These beliefs influenced the faculty's perceptions on the assessment adopted in the department, which in turn impacted their motivation to implement the assessment policy because they had difficulties understanding the use of standardized examinations to perform summative assessment in almost all the courses taught in the department.

During faculty-wide discussions, it also became apparent that their beliefs and understanding influenced their motivation, as most admitted that there was only passive cooperation (Bressers, 2004) as they were only trying to fulfill responsibilities in order to appease the CAU. They also felt pressure to meet the assessment process deadlines rather than focusing on developing meaningful assessment that impacted student learning or trying to improve existing practices at the course level. In their view, the use of summative assessment was too rigid and the process to implement these too complex, and it neither aligned with their beliefs nor with previously used and proven assessment approaches at previous institutions and those used at the institution prior to the implementation of the new policy.

The findings also expose the importance of leadership during the process of implementation of the policy between actors. Indeed, most of the principal literature cites leadership as one of the most important factors influencing policy implementation (HEA, 2012; OECD, 2017). Leaders should possess certain traits or skills in order to effectively facilitate the process. In this study, the findings demonstrate the importance of effectively communicating policy goals, discussing why these may align or not align with faculty's understanding. In addition, leaders need analytical skills, unpacking and translating it to faculty so there is a shared understanding among actors at the micro level. In this case, it was found that it was important to communicate "why" certain procedures existed along with the "how to" for faculty. In addition, according to the HEA (2012), leaders should be strong during assessment policy implementation in order to challenge existing assessment policy traditions in the institutions (p. 13).

According to literature, there are a variety of approaches to leadership that can be used to facilitate policy implementation in this context. Unfortunately, there is dearth of research on the best approaches to lead policy implementation. That said, considering the tenets of different leadership models, it could be suggested that distributed leadership might be the most appropriate model to help actors implement policy. Distributed or "shared" leadership recommends that leadership responsibilities and accountability are shared by those with relevant skills and expertise, rather than resting with any one individual in a school. This leadership approach would allow power and capacity over resources and decisions to be shared as it permits different stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process. Moreover, given the top-down nature of implementation, it could help with developing openness and trust in the organization. According to Harris (2008), there is "empirical evidence to support a strong relationship between distributed patterns of leadership and organizational performance" (p. 176).

Resources and Support influence on Implementation

It is widely acknowledged that resources exert a significant influence on assessment policy implementation (Bressers, 2004; Lipsky, 2010; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). Indeed, several researchers have identified resource availability as one of the key factors influencing implementers' motivation (Bresser, 2004; Locke, 1996; Mooketsi & Chigona, 2016). This was confirmed in the present study, as it was established that during the process of implementation, access to information and training were limited and human resources were lacking, which influenced actors' motivation and commitment to the process. Participants commented on the absence of central repository for the main policy and supporting documentation in the department. The faculty teaching the courses also commented on lack of training on some of the policy tools, as most of the training provided focused on summative assessment tools, namely the use of Blackboard for the final examinations. Moreover, as limited human resources were allocated to support the policy implementation in the department, such as the absence of an assessment specialist and adequate numbers of administrative staff, other staff members had to complete the necessary work, especially managers at the mid-level who took on most of the responsibilities for the auditing of the summative assessment. These difficulties in the Health Science Department confirm the need for adequate resource allocation at the beginning and throughout the assessment process implementation. Overall, this involves assessing the existing capacity to deliver assessment, namely "knowing what is being done well, and what needs improving and how to best build this capacity" (Hudson et. al, 2019, p. 7).

Third-generation Policy Research in Developing Countries

When placed in the grander scheme of policy research, this study provides limited contribution in the form of new revelations about factors influencing policy implementation. However, that does not mean that this study does not have its merits, as it provides an important understanding to policy

implementation in a centralized institutional system where it is assumed that policy is successfully cascaded and translated into action. Additionally, since it was situated in the UAE, the study comprises practical knowledge for assessment policy researchers as well as different stakeholders in the country, and can inform the educational leaders in other contexts where there is a centralized-decentralized government. As O'Toole (2000) argued, "the practical world is now just as much in need of valid knowledge about policy as it has ever been" (p. 265). In other words, in developing countries like the UAE, policy research is pivotal to determine the policy's impact and improve existing policies and their implementation.

This study illuminated policy implementation in a rapidly developing country influenced by globalization. It highlighted the complexity of this process in a particular context and provided practical findings to illustrate many influences that can impact policy implementation. As Honig (2006) argued, "without detailed information about the conditions under which certain interventions work, decisions makers will not know if the failure of a particular reading curriculum, for example, stemmed from their choice of curriculum or poor conditions for the implementation" (p. 3). Moreover, in conducting this study, third-generation educational policy analysis grounded in Bressers' (2004) deductive CIT was employed as this allowed for multilevel analysis, which has thus far primarily been used in water restoration and environmental research. In the third-generation policy research, new models which synthesize top-down and bottom-up strategies have emerged (Barrett, 2004). As UAE is a rapidly developing country, focusing this study on this particular context allowed the researcher to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to analyze the policy implementation, thereby providing a snapshot of the complexity of policy implementation and highlighting the importance of context when analyzing policy. The analyses also revealed the enormous influence of globalization and internationalization on education policy and higher education in the UAE.

Third-generation implementation models can assist the decision-makers in the developing countries like the UAE, where different policies have been implemented to progress the country forward economically, socially, and educationally. Gornitzka et al. (2005) recommended that, in such contexts, a case-by-case approach might be required as it is difficult to formulate combined theoretical models that are universally applicable. For developing countries, Bressers' CIT is an alternative theoretical lens through which to examine policy implementation due to its focus on context and actors. Indeed, this approach allowed for a robust analysis of the implementation process underpinned by a clear deductive theoretical model, exploring actors, the context at multiple levels, and the policy design itself. Policy research using new modes of analysis is vitally important to developing countries to advance policy, tools, and the systems that are in place to achieve successful outcomes. There is no question that policy and implementation studies in developed countries are vital to their long-term development and success.

Summary of Factors

The current investigation uncovered several factors influencing assessment policy implementation in the Health Sciences Department. Overall, these factors can be grouped into three broad categories—the policy, the context, and the actors' characteristics. For any researcher embarking on a baseline exploratory study of policy implementation, focusing on these three components would be an acceptable starting point. While the policy sets the implementation strategy, the findings and analysis reported here indicate that the context and the human element or the actors' characteristics are interrelated, and act jointly on the implementation of the assessment policy. The examination of the meso level, highlighted the importance of the institutions approach to governance which influenced the approach to policy implementation, ultimately affecting actors on the ground level. This study also confirmed that, when implementing policy in HE, where the policy is developed at the institutional level

in response to national educational and goals, actors influence policy implementation and should be considered during the policy formulation stage and throughout the implementation process.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this qualitative single case study was to explore the implementation of assessment policy at an academic institution in the UAE. The findings reported in the preceding chapter are discussed here further in relation to the research questions and focus on four main themes that emerged from data analysis: (a) the policy framework; (b) the macro-level context influences the institutional context (meso) and actors at the micro-level during policy implementation; (c) the institutional contextual factors—including the governance structure—influence actors' engagement in policy implementation; and (d) the actors and their characteristics have a major influence over the assessment policy implementation at the department level. Next, the implications and limitations of the main study findings for assessment policy design and implementation, along with final recommendations for policy and practice and directions for future research. Lastly, the successes and challenges of the study are briefly outlined.

Importance of Policy Framework in Policy Implementation

This study confirmed the prevalent view that policy design matters in the implementation of assessment policy. As Berman (1978) opined, “the policy’s technical validity and its implementation effectiveness cannot be divorced; taken together, they constitute the domain of implementation analysis” (p. 8). As the findings reported in the preceding chapter revealed, while there were some incongruences in the policy goals, principles, and tools, some were inherent in the policy design. There was a delicate balance between the institutional actors' values and beliefs about assessment, internal policy goals, and external demands for quality and accountability from the central government. It was also evident that the goals, tools, and processes contained in the policy influenced assessment implementation in the department. Indeed, strict and detailed parameters were put in place that standardized the assessment approach across all departments at the institution. The policy focused on objectivity and precision as

measures of reliability and validity, yet this actually threatened the validity of assessment because it weakened the learning experience focusing on knowledge rather than the development of skills. Clearly, the way the policy was framed exerted a significant influence on the course assessment implementation in the Health Sciences Department because it directed the implementation through the allocation of resources because it was positioned from a quality and accountability paradigm. Therefore, it is important to position assessment policy so it is aligned with the values of the institution and an outcomes-based approach to assessment which measures and supports learning.

Importance of Context in the Study of Policy Implementation

The context of the policy being investigated is a crucial factor in its implementation. As was revealed in this study, factors at both macro and meso level had a profound impact on the implementation of assessment and were unique to the UAE and this institution. At the macro level, wider contextual factors influenced the assessment policy goals at the institution. As a result of globalization, it was found that institutional strategic goals were aligned with national socio-economic goals focusing on the knowledge economy. At the meso level in the institution, the top-down governance structure had a profound effect on the actors' communication, their power/capacity of the department to make decisions about summative assessment, and the faculty's and mid-managers roles in the policy process, which had implications for policy implementation. In addition to this, the existing culture of change influenced the actors' motivation and cognition. Lastly, the multi-campus structure influenced the policy framing and actors in specific ways, namely the decision to use faculty wide examinations to assess students to ensure consistency of the measurement of student learning across campuses.

Actors interpreting and implementing policy at the Micro Level

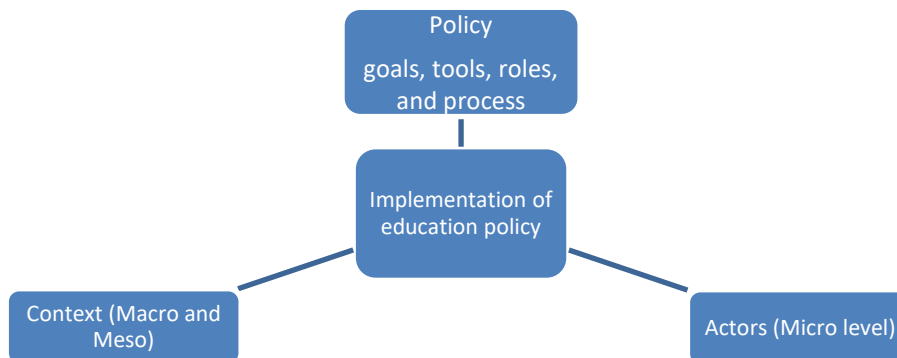
It can also be concluded that any examination of policy implementation should include all pertinent actors, as they influence the process in explicit ways, but are also influenced meaningfully by the macro and meso level context. Specifically, actors at the micro level may have divergent beliefs about assessment and implementation due to their different roles in the implementation and position in the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, actors shape how the implementation process unfolds at the micro level, yet they are influenced by the context which influences their characteristics and the perspective through which they interpret the policy. As a result, there is a considerable gap between those directly involved in policy formulation and design and those who are furthest from the decision-making process.

Model Adopted for Implementation Analysis

One of the difficulties that arise when studying educational policies stems from the lack of agreement on what should be included in the analysis. In the present study, the policy design, the context, and the actors emerged as the key factors influencing the implementation of education policy, as shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19

Critical Variables in Education Policy Implementation



First, the policy sets goals and frames the implementation process for the actors in charge of its implementation. The goals, tools, roles, and processes of implementation, which are underlined by theory, provide a frame of reference for these actors. Second, the contextual variables at the macro and meso level exert a considerable influence over the institutional assessment process. Context is recognized as an important variable in many conceptual models of policy implementation; however, in the model adopted in the present study, i.e. Contextual Interaction Theory, it is further divided into the macro- and meso-level factors. Finally, actors are also a highly influential variable as they are the ones responsible for implementing the policy at the micro level. The actors are inevitably influenced by the policy and context, but also by their own interpretations or “cognition” of the policy, which is guided by their beliefs, conceptions, or past experiences. Moreover, power and capacity influenced the actors. Power was linked to their control over resources and the power assigned to them during the process while capacity was related to the resources provided allowing actors to act during the process. A lack of resources reduced actors’ capacity and hence their overall power during the process. It was apparent, given the simplicity and transparency of this model, CIT can be adopted by novice researchers or policy makers striving to frame and understand the implementation of policy.

Implications of the Study Findings

This study has several implications for policy research, assessment policy, and implementation in the UAE. The UAE’s own Policy Council at the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (2015) argued that research should be “fed directly into the policy making process” and that there is an awareness “of the need for evidence-based policy making and the importance of engaging the academic community” (p. 3). This study demonstrated how policy cascaded down from the government to higher education institutions and micro-level actors. While it focused on one specific department, its findings indicate that the success of educational policy was largely dependent on its alignment with national

policy goals and the support of factors that influence its implementation. Moreover, this study illustrated the influence a top-down, centralized institutional governance model has on implementation of policy due to the influence of the actors' characteristics and over the policy process. Indeed, it was seen that power and autonomy was limited over some aspects of assessment due to quality control processes as part of assessment. Nonetheless, it was revealed that it is important for mid-managers and leaders to unpack, translate, and communicate policy to actors during the process.

Overall, this study also contributes to the extant body of assessment research, as it reveals the complexity of the assessment implementation process at the institutional and departmental level. Indeed, there are many external and internal factors influencing assessment which need to be considered during the formulation and implementation of assessment policy. For developing countries, if policies are used from Western countries, these should be contextualized to the context in which they are implemented.

Although most of the findings yielded by this study have already been reported in pertinent literature, as it was conducted in the UAE and presented using a different model, it presented a comprehensive examination of how assessment was operationalized at the ground level in non-Western parts of the world in a centralized-decentralized education system and a highly centralized institution. Overall, this analysis could serve as shared guidance and benefits policymakers in higher education or in other government bodies in the UAE where policy implementation occurs, and countries that adopt a similar style of governing in their countries. These findings could be fed directly into the policy making process within different entities in the UAE. More broadly, some of the complexities of assessment policy might resonate with both policy implementation researchers and those who study assessment beyond the UAE borders.

In addition to external stakeholders, this research has many implications for the institution itself. It provides a detailed analysis of the policy and the implementation process that can help institutional

leaders and the CAU at Latifa University further improve the institution's assessment process and policy, especially in the domain of policy positioning, support for the process, and impact of a top-down governance and implementation model. Surely this study could help inform the institutions policy formulation and implementation processes, along with improving its current assessment policy and process.

Limitations

This study is limited in that it only looks at a specific group at one period of time. This case study cannot be generalized into other populations, although there may be transferability of findings. This meant that it was my responsibility as a researcher to provide a detailed description of the research situation and methods, and then let the reader decide the level of applicability to their own context. Moreover, the study of the population may not be reflective of the same attitudes and understandings at other campuses in different faculties, and there are also the difficulties with small-scale qualitative studies which may be less reliable because of the low quantity of data (Denscombe, 2010). However, this was addressed by triangulating data and collecting qualitative data from key informants (multiple faculty and leadership) involved in assessment at the one campus.

Another limitation was my position as a faculty member and my own bias about faculty's assessment perceptions and understanding and my own views of assessment policy, implementation, and practice. Based on my initial observations and interactions with some faculty, I believed that there were inherent problems with assessment policy and faculty's implementation and the idea of measuring student learning drives their understanding of assessment. Additionally, I supposed, based on some research studies (Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998; HEA, 2017), that one of the outcomes of the assessment policy is that when implementing assessment policy there are certain challenges faculty

encounter when implementing formative assessment. This limitation will be mitigated by outlining my position as a researcher.

Recommendations for Assessment Policy and Implementation

Several recommendations for institutional leadership, policy implementers, and the faculty responsible for implementing assessment policy can be made based on the findings yielded by this investigation. It is worth noting that, as this policy process continually evolves in real time, some of the recommendations that have emerged in the early stages of this study have already been implemented. For example, one recommendation was to improve communication and dissemination of information by having a central repository for institutional policies. In February 2020, the institution introduced a public space for all stakeholders to access the assessment policy and other institutional policies. This ongoing effort to improve policy implementation confirms the institution's firm commitment to the continuous improvement and strengthening of the internal review of processes. Overall, given that multiple external and internal factors influence the assessment policy and its implementation, several recommendations for improving assessment implementation are given below.

Policy Design

1. Policy goals should strike an optimal balance between assessment for quality/accountability purpose and assessment that focuses on student learning. This can be done by acknowledging that student learning assessment can serve both formative and summative purposes.
2. Policy goals, tools, and the implementation process must reflect the institution's values and goals pertaining to teaching and learning, which is underpinned by an outcomes-based curriculum.
3. A framework with innovative solutions to assessment of student learning should be developed, such as "authentic assessment" for final course assessments, as it focuses on

content and skills that are useful in real life. Authentic tasks can serve both as instructional tool, providing much-needed feedback to students, and as an assessment medium that certifies a student's competency towards an outcome.

Actors at the Micro Level

1. Policy designers should consider how power is distributed in the implementation process. Power needs to be balanced and shared across all levels of hierarchy, allowing all faculty members to help formulate assessment policy and its implementation.
2. The institution should concentrate on building continuous capacity to implement assessment building professional development on AfL, authentic assessment, and innovative assessment practices. At a rudimentary level, innovative assessment methods are original and novel to a specific context (Mowl, 2006).
3. All actors and stakeholders should be involved in all stages of the policy process, especially during the initial stages of policy formulation. Before implementing a policy, the management should initiate “continuous collaboration with a range of stakeholders at multiple political, policy-making, managerial and administrative levels as well as the engagement of local ‘downstream’ implementation actors such as end-users, frontline staff and a range of local service agencies” (Hudson et al., 2019, p. 4). This is a commonly held principle which facilitates effective implementation of education policy (Haddad & Demsky, 1995; OECD, 2017; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). According to Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980), this can build support for the policy while limiting actors’ opposition.
4. Instead of using just email, allocated time in meetings to discuss policy and procedures among faculty and managers so that policy is translated for consistent understanding.

Meso-level Changes

1. Practical value of institutional policies, including assessment, should be monitored by allowing for feedback on the policy and processes (systems). At present, most of the evaluation of assessment implementation takes place at the end of the course and focuses on the assessment tools as part of the course evaluations. Thus, there is a need for mechanisms that all stakeholders can use to provide feedback about the policy implementation process, including the policy's goals, tools, and procedures. This correlates with Hudson et al.'s (2019) observation on "policy tracking," which requires "the establishment of some form of central 'delivery unit' to track progress on the progress of policy implementation" (p. 6).
2. Internal human resources and training needs must be considered when implementing new policies and policy changes involving curriculum, teaching, and assessment. Special focus should be placed on the communication to department leaders and faculty about the wider goals of the policy and why certain tools and processes exist.
3. A program-level approach to assessment with bottom-up approaches to policy implementation should be considered, rather than a centralized approach to assessment.
4. Centralized-decentralized system of governance at the institution permitting greater autonomy of departments over teaching and assessment policy. This would provide more autonomy to department leaders and mid-managers to make decisions over assessment policy implementation. However, it is important to note that this should include devolution of power and not just a delegation of tasks. At the department level, a distributed leadership model where mid-managers have the capacity to make decisions and greater opportunity to communicate with faculty.

5. Leadership training for managers on how to manage policy implementation. Training can focus on areas such as communication, interpretation, resource allocation, and unpacking policies for faculty.

Recommendations for Further Research

Even though extant body of policy research highlights the problematic nature of a single case study design, it was chosen due to the lack of institutional policy research in the UAE. This approach allowed for an exploration of a typical case that facilitated gaining in-depth understanding of the assessment policy implementation in the Health Sciences Department at Latifa University, thereby providing a much-needed insight into the practicalities involved in policy implementation. The single-case design also allowed for a thick description of the case being studied. Still, this approach is not without its weaknesses, as the findings yielded cannot be generalized to any other context. Nonetheless, administrators or policy-makers at other academic institutions may benefit from gaining insight into the processes described here. To build upon these preliminary findings, authors of future educational policy research studies in the UAE should adopt a multi-case and longitudinal design, as this would allow policy implementation in different institutions to be monitored across time as well as compared with the experiences in other settings. It would also be beneficial to extend this line of investigation across different disciplines and multiple campuses to look at how policy is implemented more comprehensively by focusing across different departments at all of the campuses at the institution to probe if actors across the institution interpret and influence the policy similarly.

Studying Culture and its Influence on Educational Policy Implementation

The present study did not focus on culture, as the framework did not allow for identification of any specific cultural features or their role in policy implementation. Consequently, it would also be beneficial to study the impact of culture on the UAE's educational policy or its influence on assessment

policy in specific contexts. As Hill and Hupe (2014) argued, “implementation inevitably takes different shapes and forms in different cultures and institutional settings” (p. 1). As part of this culture, a more in-depth study of institutional culture on policy implementation is warranted and how this culture impacts the actors when they are implementing educational policies, and more specifically, how some institutional cultures effects leadership in different stages of the policy process, including implementation. That said, this study underscored the importance of greater alignment between values (micro, meso and macro) and culture in a centralized-decentralized system when formulating and implementing policy. It was evident that if the policy does not align with the values, beliefs, and goals of the institution and actors in the department, it creates tension in policy implementation, even in a highly centralized system. Moreover, it also showed how some policy can be at odds with the UAE’s own cultural and institutional context. Therefore, when borrowing and implementing policies like assessment, the cultural values and pedagogical beliefs of individuals and the institution must be considered. Certainly, this will remain an issue if the UAE continues to borrow policies and also depend on foreign faculty working in the country as part of internationalization.

Evaluating Intended and Unintended Policy Outcomes

Once policy is implemented, some unexpected outcomes will inevitably arise. Thus, it would be prudent to evaluate some of the intended and unintended outcomes of national education policy in the UAE to determine if the country’s educational policy should be discontinued, amended, or expanded. At the institutional level, such investigations would help justify more significant investments in current policies or ascertain other needs or specific initiatives that need addressing. Given that the UAE has undergone tremendous educational change due to large investments in different public policies, evidence of successes or failures of prior policy-making is needed to inform future policy formulation. Such initiatives should involve diverse government entities and research institutions. While the government

admittedly has become more aware of the need for policy research (Policy Council, 2015, p. 3), there is still a need for collaboration with researchers to inform policy-making and implementation practices.

Researcher Reflections on Success and Challenges

As I consider this study in its totality, there were many successes and challenges. A particularly valuable benefit of this study was uncovering Bressers' (2004) CIT, which underpinned policy implementation analysis. Before finding this framework, I struggled to conceptualize a framework to study education policy implementation in the UAE. Indeed, analyzing any education policy's implementation is difficult given the number of determinants that can influence the process and the different models available and found in the literature. That said, the framework rooted in CIT allowed me to probe contextual factors and examine actors on the ground level to establish how they influenced the implementation of assessment. Most importantly, it allowed to discuss relationships between different levels of analysis and actors' characteristics at the micro level. Strong connections could be made because of the clarity of CIT, which allowed me to discover some of the interactions between contextual factors and actors' characteristics. This is especially useful for researchers conducting studies in developing countries where context is of particular importance and given the different factors that can influence education policy implementation.

The second notable success was the support received for the research at the institutional level and in the UAE as a whole. Currently, there are many financial incentives to conduct widespread research in different areas such as education, healthcare, technology, energy, water resources, and space exploration. Although there were a few challenges during the proposal writing stage and in the data collection phase, barriers or opposition to the study were practically nonexistent at the institution. This study was conducted during a time where there is currently unprecedented support for research. Presently, it is seen as an imperative for the UAE due to its commitment to reform and long-term

success. The government and academic institutions realize the vast contribution of research to understanding the world, which will help the UAE realize its aims and goals through national social, education, and economic policies.

Nonetheless, a few challenges were encountered during the study. As previously mentioned, one of the main challenges related to finding a suitable framework to study policy implementation due to the lack of agreement or parsimony on the type of model to adopt. As Najim (1995) argued, research on implementation is “exceptionally rich in empirical evidence, but it is seriously fragmented in way of broadly accepted causal theories” (p. 3). Hence, the aim of this thesis is not to explain how implementation works, but rather outline how some factors influence the implementation of assessment in the UAE. Second, despite comprehensive support for institutional research, lack of a transparent process to gain access to the institution, obtain approval for the research study, and attain ethical approval at the institution in the UAE presented considerable challenges at the start of this study. Unfortunately, due to changes in policy, the processes or procedures in place to gain approval to perform institutional research were unclear when I embarked upon this study. For example, there were multiple unknown gatekeepers at the central level and at the campus level which needed to be contacted for approval of this study. There was also no central location to access information about the approval process. As a result, other faculty members who had done research were contacted to understand the process and identify the relevant gatekeepers. The last challenge was setting aside my own assumptions and understanding of the assessment policy and implementation process which was made more difficult during this study because of my own experience with the policy in a different department at the institution. This was contested with rigor through a paper trail, reflection on the process, and reflexivity and bracketing of my own assumptions.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how actors and contextual factors influenced the implementation of assessment policy in an academic institution in the UAE. As the goal was to uncover useful information about assessment and implementation of policy on the ground level, a single exploratory case study design was adopted, focusing on the perceptions of key actors in the implementation process in one department, while also examining a variety of public documents from the institution and from different external government departments.

The findings yielded by this study indicate that the policy design, context, and actors are the key factors influencing policy implementation in very complex, yet interconnected ways. In the UAE, there are clear macro factors influencing the meso-level processes as well as actors at the micro level. As Bressers (2004) argued, the wider and structural contextual factors are crucial in policy implementation, and in the study included the governance structure, institutional strategic plan, the institutional culture, and the structure of the college. The policy and contextual factors influence actors on the ground level, as they shape actors' cognition, power, and motivation in explicit ways, as was demonstrated in this case study focusing on the Health Sciences Department. While the results reported here are only applicable to the institution in which this research was conducted, they nonetheless contribute to the understanding of the complexity and nuances of assessment implementation in the UAE and beyond, especially countries that adopt a centralized approach and may be in the midst of transformation through improving quality enhancement processes. This investigation also confirms the value of Bressers' (2004) CIT in educational policy research.

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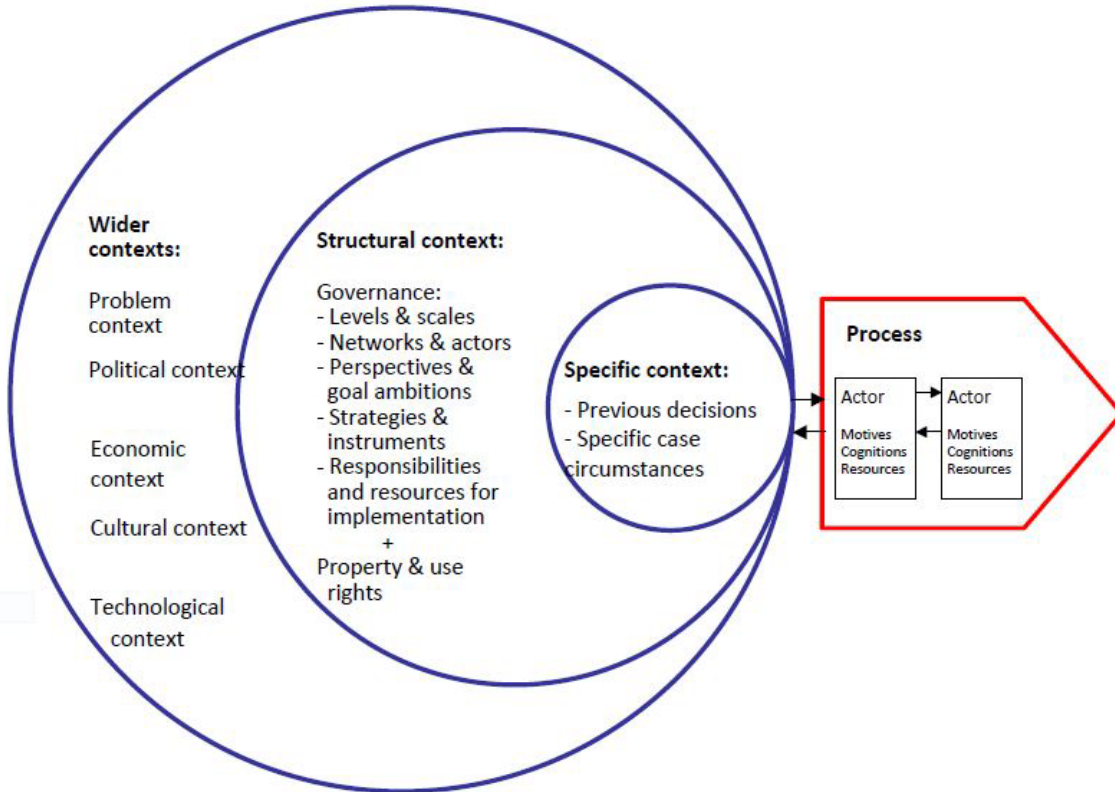
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Appendix 1: Contextual Interaction Theory

Contextual Interaction Theory (Bressers, 2004).



Appendix 2: Consent Form



Before submitting your consent form to the CFREB, check Chapter 3 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) to ensure that your form meets the requirements listed in Articles 3.1 and 3.2:

<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter3-chapitre3/>

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

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Supervisor:

Dr. Catherine Chua
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catherine.chua@ucalgary.ca or 403.210.7557.

Title of Project:

A case study of assessment policy implementation and how actors and multi-level contextual factors influences implementation at an institution in the UAE

Sponsor:

None

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is two-fold. It aims to explore how key actors implement assessment policy and also examine how different they and other contextual factors are influencing the implementation of assessment policy and practice (outcomes) within the institution. The overall aim is to further the development of assessment policy and educational policy implementation research in the UAE and other developing countries.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

The student researcher would like to conduct an individual interview with you. There will be one interview, with a possibility for some follow-up beyond that. Participation in the follow-up is completely voluntary. The student researcher, Dean Vanvelzer, will be taking notes and using a digital audio recorder to capture the interview. We would meet for approximately one hour to discuss the process of assessment policy implementation and your beliefs and understandings of assessment policy implementation, and contextual factors that are influencing assessment policy. Only the student investigator, Dean Vanvelzer, and the project supervisor, Catherine Chua will have access to the interview notes and the recordings. The information provided will be kept anonymous. Participants will be provided a copy of the interview transcripts and interpretations to check them for accuracy and edits and to provide feedback. You are under no obligation to participate and, if you do consent to participate, you may without consequence, decide not to continue your involvement or to refuse to answer any questions. If you decide to withdraw your participation after the interview, any data collected from you will be withdrawn from the study. Additionally, once interviews are completed and transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and, if you choose, make additions, corrections, or deletions to the record of the things you have said. You will then have the right to withdraw no later than the beginning of the analysis of the data collection. Further, at any point, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it. Most importantly, at no time will you be judged or evaluated, and will at no time be at risk of harm.

To ensure that I capture the most accurate interpretation during data collection, you as a participant will be audiotaped during the interview.

Your participation is completely voluntary, so you may refuse to participate altogether. In addition, you may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

There is also a group interview the will be conducted. Your participation would be valued. Would you be interested in participating in the group interview as well?

Yes: ___ No: ___

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your teaching assignment or position, your citizenship and country of teacher training, your educational background, the number of years you have been at the institution, and the number of years you have been teaching.

A complete list of the questions that will be asked in the interviews is provided at the end of this consent form. These differ depending upon your whether you are in a position of leadership.

If you wish to audio recorded, only the student researcher, Dean Vanvelzer, and the project supervisor, Dr. Catherine Chua, will have access to the recordings and the recordings will never be shown in public. Dean Vanvelzer will be editing the transcripts for speech ticks, grammar, repeated words, etc. for the only purpose of smooth reading (not for content).

There is only one option for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. Please review the question and options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission to be audio-taped:

Yes: ___ No: ___

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

This study is not considered 'high-risk'. In this research project, there is no anticipated harm or predictable risks associated with your participation.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Only the student investigator, Dean Vanvelzer and the project supervisor Catherine Chua will have access to the interview notes and the recordings. The information provided will be kept anonymous. Participants will be provided a copy of the interview transcripts and interpretations to check for accuracy or to provide edits and/or feedback. You are under no obligation to participate and, if you do consent to participate, you may, and without consequence, decide not to continue your involvement or to refuse to answer any question. If you decide to withdraw your participation after the interview, any data collected from you will be withdrawn from the study. Additionally, once interviews have been completed and transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and, if you choose, make additions, corrections, or deletions to the record of the things you have said. You will have the right to withdraw no later than the beginning of the analysis of the data collection. Further, at any point, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it.

This study aims to understand how actors and multi-level contextual factors influences implementation at an institution in the UAE. The methodology employed by the researcher will be a case study. Anonymity of individual is difficult to assure when its members later read a case study of a group. Therefore, as part of informed consent, as a potential participant, you need to know anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

The data collected in this study will be held in strict confidence, and will be stored on an external hard drive which will be coded and held in a secure location, to which only Dean Vanvelzer and Catherine Chua will have access. Further, they will retain the interview notes and digital audio recordings on the hard drive locked in a secure cabinet until five years after the time of convocation after which time they will be destroyed in a manner that safeguards privacy and confidentiality. A final copy of the dissertation can be made available to you if requested.

“Would you like to receive a summary of the study’s results?” Yes: ___ No: ___
If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)

“Are you interested in being contacted about a follow-up interview, with the understanding that you can always decline the request?” Yes: ___ No: ___

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print) _____

Participant’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Mr. Dean Vanvelzer
Lecturer, Faculty of Education
971528307818, dvanvelzer@hct.ac.ae
and Catherine Chua, Werklund School of Education, catherine.chua@ucalgary.ca or 403.210.7557

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/210-9863; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix 3: Interview Questions



Interview Guide for Faculty as Key Informants

A case study of assessment policy implementation and how actors and multi-level contextual factors influences implementation at an institution in the UAE

Key informant name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

Interview Procedure

The following open-ended questions have been designed to guide our scheduled one-hour conversation. The interview is divided into four parts and will be audio-recorded. You may ask for the recording to be stopped at any time or replayed for clarification and to ensure accuracy. I will also be taking notes during the interview; you may have a copy of these notes at the conclusion of the interview if you wish.

Information on Key informant

Citizenship and country of teacher training _____

Educational background _____

Number of years you have been at the institution _____

Number of years you have been teaching _____

Interview Questions: Faculty

1. Please tell me your role and describe your involvement in assessment implementation/formulation. Is your role clear to you?
2. How have school leaders helped you in carrying out the implementation of assessment policy?
 - a) Was training provided? Ongoing training?
 - b) How would you like leaders to improve their support of you in assessment of students?
3. How have your school leadership communicated the policy to you?
 - a) What platforms or methods have been used to communicate policy?
4. What are the support systems/structures and resources that your leaders have put in place to support the implementation process?
5. To what extent do you feel that you understand the assessment policy and the procedures to the implementation of the policy?
 - a) Do you feel you have sufficient knowledge of assessment policy goals and practice?
 - b) In what areas of assessment do you feel you need more understanding?
 - c) Do you feel you understand how to effectively assess students in courses?
6. How much power/capacity do you have to carry out assessment at the course level?
 - a) Do you have discretion to make changes?
 - b) In what areas of assessment implementation do you have the most discretion (power/capacity)?
7. What are your perceptions about the assessment policy and its support of student measurement and student learning?
8. How would you describe the interaction among actors during the implementation of policy?
 - a) How does this affect the implementation of assessment? How could this be improved?
9. How does the institution influence you in during assessment implementation?
10. What external factors in the social, cultural or political context outside of the institution influence assessment policy?
11. What are the challenges to implementing assessment in your role as a faculty?

Appendix 4: Interview Questions



Interview Guide for Key Informants in Leadership Positions

A case study of assessment policy implementation and how actors and multi-level contextual factors influences implementation at an institution in the UAE

Key informant name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

Interview Procedure

The following open-ended questions have been designed to guide our scheduled one-hour conversation. The interview is divided into four parts and will be audio-recorded. You may ask for the recording to be stopped at any time or replayed for clarification and to ensure accuracy. I will also be taking notes during the interview; you may have a copy of these notes at the conclusion of the interview if you wish.

Information on key informant

Citizenship and country of teacher training _____

Educational background _____

Number of years you have been at the institution _____

Number of years you have been in leadership _____

Interview Questions: Leadership

1. Please tell me your role and describe your involvement in assessment implementation/formulation. Is your role clear?
2. How do you as an institutional leader help support the implementation of assessment policy?
 - a) What resources do you provide to help with the implementation?
3. How have communicated the policy to teaching faculty?
 - a) What platforms are used to communicate to faculty?
4. To what extent do you feel that you understand the assessment policy and the procedures to the implementation of the policy?
 - a) Do you feel you have sufficient knowledge of assessment policy goals and practice?
 - b) In what areas of assessment do you feel you need more understanding?
5. How much power/capacity do you have to carry out assessment at the course level?
 - a) Do you have discretion to make changes?
 - b) In what areas of implementation do you have the most discretion (power/capacity)?
6. What are your perceptions about the assessment policy and its effectiveness in measuring and supporting student learning?
7. How would you describe the interaction among actors during the implementation of policy? How does this affect the implementation of assessment?
8. How does the institution influence you during the process assessment implementation?
9. What external factors outside of the institution influence assessment policy implementation and how you implement assessment?
10. As a leader, what approach do you utilize to facilitate the implementation of assessment?
11. What are the challenges to implementing assessment in your role as a leader?

Appendix 5: Macro and Meso Level Documents

Macro Level Documents

- UAE Vision 2021 (Government of the UAE, 2018)
- Ministry of Education Strategic Plan, 2017 to 2021
- Vision and Mission, Ministry of Education
- Quality Education in the UAE, 2020
- Commission for Academic Accreditation
- Procedural Manual for Institutional Licensure (CAA, 2019)
- Procedural Manual for Initial Program Accreditation (CAA, 2019)
- Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation (CAA, 2019)

Meso Level Documents

- Latifa University's Strategic Plan, 2017 -2021
- Latifa University's Strategic Plan, 2021 to 2026
- Chapter 7: Latifa Academic Quality Assurance Manual, 2017-2018
- Course Assessment Development Guidelines, 2018
- Directive, Assessment and Grading Procedure, 2016
- Directive, Exam Administration Guidelines, 2017
- Accreditation at Latifa University
- Division of Health Sciences Application for Initial Accreditation (Nursing, 2017)

Appendix 6: Deductive and Inductive Coding of Macro, Meso and Micro

Interviewer: [00:21:12] So they just have the FWA, you don't have course assessments?

 P2: [00:21:15] We have so many course assessments, but nobody is checking those.

 Interviewer: [00:21:17] Oh, I see. So they're, they're focusing more on the FWAs.

 P2: [00:21:20] Yes, yes.

 Interviewer: [00:21:21] Okay, good. Got it. So do you feel like you understand how to effectively assess students in their courses?

 P2: [00:21:31] Um, no, I don't think so. I'm not sure. I don't know.

 Interviewer: [00:21:39] Like, based on your own experience and knowledge, do you feel like you could effectively assess? Do you have effect like effectively?

 P2: [00:21:47] Yes. I can do it. Yeah. I would love to have more training on what is the latest in assessments. How do we assess the students on what level the students are graduating? So do I have to get them ready for board exams or, uh, clinical assessment exams? So, yeah, those kind of trainings would be nice.

 Interviewer: [00:22:09] Yeah,

 P2: [00:22:10] Definitely.

 Interviewer: [00:22:10] Have you ever had assessment training in your 14 years?

 P2: [00:22:14] No. no.

checking ←

- (course assessments)

 COG

 CH - not checking on coursework just FWA's.

← understanding of assessment

← training (RES)

 ← external factors

 } MA - licensure (board exams).

← training on assessment

Appendix 7: Data Analysis (Meta Matrix – Macro and Meso Factors and Challenges)

	Meso Factors	Macro Factors	Challenges
P1 -faculty -new to XXX -1 year	-setting in the institution (different campuses) -audit processes put into place (CAP/ASD/ECAF) -the way you assess depends on course and student levels -been changes at the institution and to the assessment policy -practical assessment vs theoretical	-Linking assessment to the practical field -Accreditation of programs and standards -culture in UAE “Arab culture is different” -market value demand – what is needed in hospitals	-no formal training on assessment when coming to institution -Learning to use technology (gradebook and setting up FWA) -formatting is difficult – need to follow CAP/ASD -difficulty making changes to the assessment -being able to communicate with others due to others busy schedules (time)
P2 -faculty -14 years	-guidelines to follow (CAP and ASD limit me) -checking our FWA’s and give us feedback (quality and audit processes) and moderation -different campuses and different instructors in different courses (organizational structure of XXX) -programs and course in HS -CAP and ASD to check and align -checking on whether deadlines have been met and work completed -assessment linked to performance appraisal -Assessment Unit oversight -many changes at the institution -assessment changes based on whether it is single campus or multiple campuses	-licensure of programs and board exams (many licensure exams in the UAE), need to prepare students for licensure and employment -heard there was a history of academic fraud in the country?	-those giving direction and leadership are unqualified people -policy restricts gearing assessment to practical field -Being able to vary assessment -Process focuses on 30% of final mark (FWA) -busy workload (other responsibilities) -many deadlines -stressful environment -hand is tightened by assessment unit
P3 -faculty 1.5 years at XXX	-quality review process (checking) -responsible across different campuses -SCTL coordinates assessment across different campuses - many changes at the institution -changes to the assessment policy -many policies and guidelines that keep changing -keep changing regulations -CAP/ASD standardize across campuses -FWA must meet standards -clinical courses vs. theory courses in nursing (clinical courses assess in a different way) -no regulation by assessment unit over practical exams – controlled by PAC -Non-FWA’s no regulation -performance related assessment on simulators -regulations related to assessment -standardizing assessment across campuses -HCT 2.0 policy but now changing to 4.0 – using old assessment policy	-no discussion or cognition of outside macro level factors (spoke mostly to the meso or institutional or case specific context in the interview)	-new joiner (access to information and training) -too much regulation and focus on FWA’s (final examination) -strict process (regulatory) -workload related to FWA and design and process -time because (difficult process when you teach new courses) -deadlines and too much checking

<p>P4 Faculty 5 years at XXX</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -multi campus course vs. single campus course -the higher the semester the great the cognitive complexity and this changes the level of the assessment -policy is implemented differently by HS “ahead of time” -theory vs. practical vs clinical courses (each assessed differently) -non FWA vs FWA and multi campus vs single campus -new changes coming with new policy -everything seems to change frequently (there was no reason for changes to assessment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -said maybe accreditation but has doubt whether accreditation has direct control or influence over assessment -no communication about why they did these changes so not aware of an external factors that influence assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -many roles and responsibilities -lack of P.D. and training – ineffective, just give information, not really training -lack of information and where to get information -not enough meetings on assessment -if first time teaching a course, very difficult to develop FWA –lack of material and resources -many deadlines create stressful environment -leadership (need someone competent in the document that they are explaining) -tight deadlines creating stress
<p>P5 Leader and faculty 2 years at xxx 1 year in leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -vision 4.0 -auditing processes in place (quality assurance) -power is centralized for FWA –have more control over coursework -institution has changed vision to ensure that students have skills and competencies certification in the programs -when students graduate they have international certification -meeting jobs KPI’s (sponsorship) -CAPSTONE PROJECTs -partnerships with industry -KPIs in institution to meet these needs (employability and soft skills) – change assessment at the program level -Nursing is competency based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -countries vision which impacts XXX (Emiratization and increasing skilled workers) -oversaturation of Emirati’s in government sectors so want in private sector -certification for students - this has been blended in the programs -some students get sponsorship and have job -institution is changing and reforming to meet industry guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -time because of the large course load responsibility which impacts quality because small team (those in leadership are leading two courses) -lack of infrastructure (technology platform doesn’t support final assessment) -lack of communication (operations vs academic) which results in tight deadlines and doing simultaneous tasks -deadlines compared to her previous job nothing compared to here -lack of support staff to help in leadership -changing of guidelines and processes
<p>P6 -Leader and faculty -7 years at xxx</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -different programs in HS -quality assurance processes in place -multi-campus structure –standardize between campuses -power and control is centralized -moving from HCT 2.0 to 4.0 (New Vision) -assessment at multiple campuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -preparing students for the private sector and passing exam – thinking about how to prepare students for this exam (practical assessments, questions that reflect what might be on licensure exam, and having a mock exam at the end of the program) -CAA is part of the context overseeing assessment -The National Vision of the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -students are over assessed -lack of discretion and power in departments over assessment -pushing people to meet deadlines -linking people together during the process -assessment approach is impacting creativity and innovation
<p>P7 -leader and faculty -4 years at xxx -2 years in leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -recent introduction of HCT 4.0 strategy and pillars – produce technical leaders and innovators (as a result, have had to review program outcomes) -by reviewing the program have to review the assessment -change in the institution has great ramifications on the exam, or the quality and nature of exams -campuses across the country and have to design exams across the country, it would be different if there was only one campus (process to ensure consistency) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -national and international accreditation for HIM (Health Information Management Association of Australia) -partnerships with other international bodies – have to meet their requirements in terms of assessment of students -overall government policies (teaching and assessment process) –i.e. (drive towards using technology) -market policy (employability) – drive towards jobs for Emirati’s within Health Sciences division -the ministry sponsors some of these programs, if program is sponsored student will have job waiting for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -difficulty in making changes to assessment -workload and responsibilities make it difficult to implement process -bureaucratic, lots of administrative task with a focus on compliance -many deadlines -time involved in the process -process focuses on regulation and compliance -complex and complicated, convoluted process -for new joiners it would be very complicated to understand

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -fifteen HIM courses all with final exams (program structure) -quality processes put into place which has impacted assessment -constant change in the institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> them and there are specific targets in terms of the quality they want -impacts the quality they try to aim for, not just local but international because students are competing internationally in the marketplace -Industrial Academic Committee which invites partners to give feasible feedback and ask what they want in terms of quality or skills or attributes and based on feedback make improvements to the design of the exam 	
<p>P8 -leadership -3 months at XXX</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -size and structure of the campus – multi-campus organization -culture in the institution (last minute culture) -many changes to structures and processes – it’s a massive learning curve -centralization and guidance from campus (different messages) – conflict between the two -different programs approach assessment differently which makes it difficult to assess the division approach -far ranging programs with different courses (practical, apprenticeship, practical courses, clinical courses and approach to assessment is completely different -new faculty and leadership (new Executive Dean and Senior Assessment Specialist) -big team because of all the programs in H.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -last minute culture in the UAE -the programs that are offered are dictated by the needs of the county and the workforce because health care workers are needed in the country -no Emirati left behind policy which comes back to the Vision 2021 of the country -accreditation effects the policy and the implementation of assessment -all of these effect assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -lack of focus on course assessment in the process -last minute culture in the UAE -meeting other participants in person during the processes -little experience with the process but giving feedback to faculty on assessment -communication is a challenge –trying to get points across through email, especially there is a big team
<p>P9 -leadership -9 months at XXX</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -different programs they all assess differently (some with minimal contact with people others more contact like social work –focus on consistency system wide (p 90 -institutional culture does not allow for people to have ownership of work –have to tell someone what to do – makes it difficult to make decisions and people are afraid to make the decisions -culture of change (p. 11) always moving and changing, new ideas and new initiatives -very punitive in the institution -PAC – program assessment committee –oversee different programs and their unique needs –ensure there is consistency and using appropriate assessment measures in curriculum -KPIs for the institution –quality assurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - industrial partners’ expectations –very important to listen to them -CAA is all about quality and having quality measures – focused on quality -The nations vision linked to institutional policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -system is very rigid and trying to apply a one size fits all which doesn’t work in the HS – the details needs to be left to the expert in the curriculum -people are afraid and hesitant they don’t want to make mistake or bear the responsibility (asking leaders to micromanage) –makes it difficult to make decisions -very stressful from the faculty (motivation) -lack of people who take ownership in leadership positions

Notes:

-challenges are different depending upon faculty role (ED vs SAS vs DC’s/PC’s vs faculty)

Appendix 8: Example of Micro Level Matrix: Factors influencing implementation at the Micro level

Actors Characteristics: Cognition

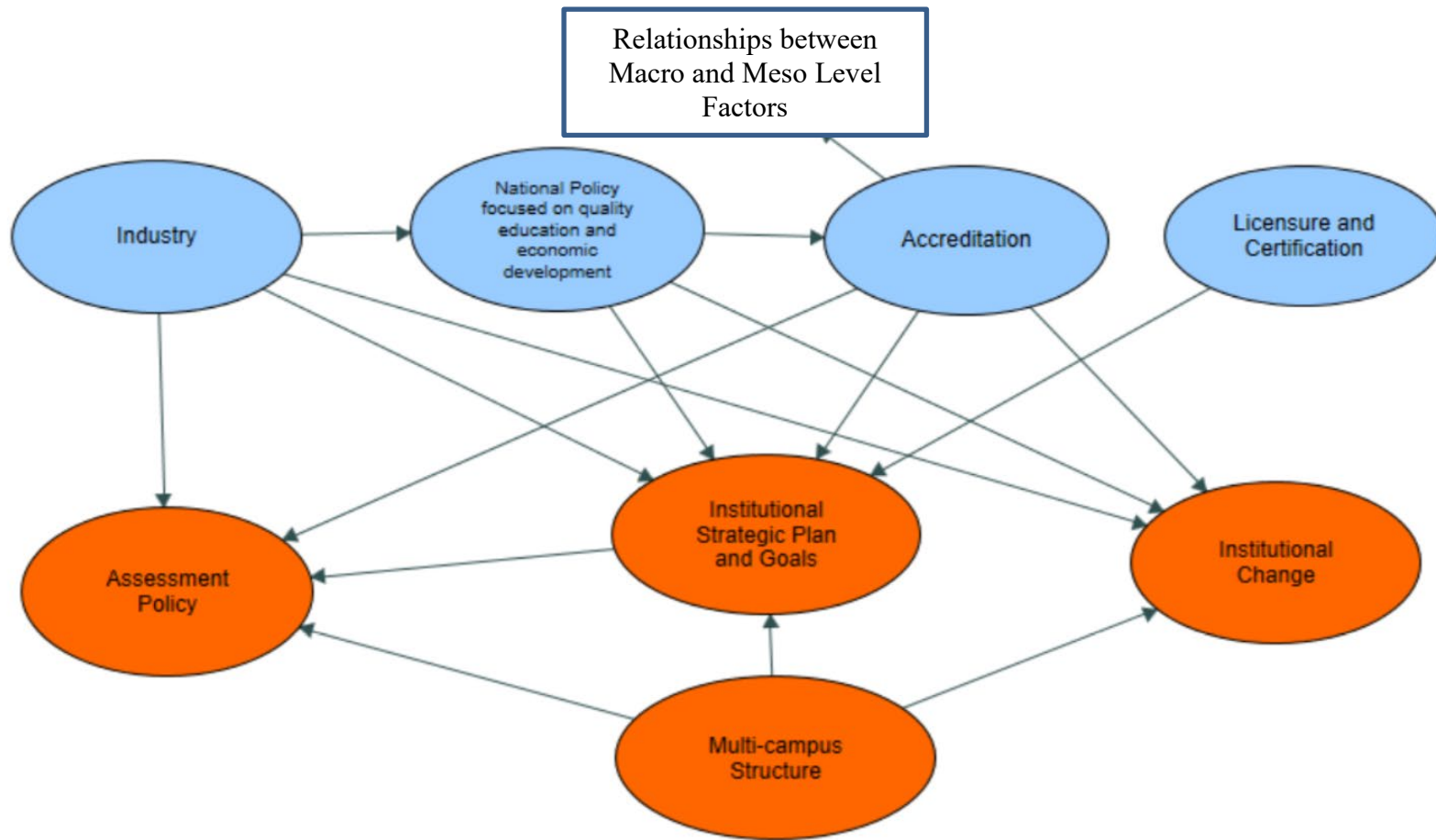
Actor	Cognition of goals and policy (interpretation of reality)	Communication between actors (influences cognition)
P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -after a year, things are clearer but still learning –clash with schedule to attend -says it is clear but had difficulties discussing the purpose of the assessment policy –have their own perception of what the goals of assessment –related to measurement of student learning and engage students in learning -could not identify all goals. Just learning goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no orientation provided when first arrived (no communication about assessment and policy) –after two months finally got some training on assessment. Asked colleagues to get help – can ask for support by direct communication -the policy is communicated mostly through email
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -design the assessments –have freedom over coursework and assessment but final exam is more controlled and restricting, because of certain guidelines -one person is responsible for the FWA -not well documented what she/he has to do for the role as course team leader –has to ask how do I do this? Is this my responsibility. If I want to change something (Restricting factor) p. 3 -when asked about goals she discussed the tools and procedures -feels it is not very flexible -Doesn't understand the purpose of assessment guidelines – cover learning outcomes? -Goals of assessment relates to measuring student learning -not aware of the bigger goals of the policy and process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -updates and changes are just communicated through email -can ask assessment leaders if I have an issue -few meetings, only annual meetings at the beginning of each semester -PC in common course and program coordinator pharmacy -no platform where they can access information
P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -goal of assessment is same as everywhere evaluate the outcomes Described Role – develop different assessments (practical skills assessment develop for students) – can review colleagues work – team leader for course as well -not aware of the bigger goals of the policy and process -more cognizant of her role and the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -communicated done through email. About the guidelines and procedures. Summary emails in bullet points. -keep checking to see that we have submitted our assessments, early so they can check and return – too much checking -communication usually involves the final assessment and checking (auditing) the faculty's completion of tasks and tools

P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -described role in assessment –implementing assessment according to the assessment strategy (participant is a part of the PAC), also SCTL role which is leadership role for the course -role and responsibilities are not clear and there are too many roles -goals of assessment is to assess students understanding and course material which depends on the level of the student –the higher the student the higher the complexity (not aware of any other goals of assessment and policy at HCT) -not aware of the bigger goals of the policy and process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -goals were not shared or discussed -only the course syllabus is shared each term and then you follow this to implement assessment -feel when information is communicated it is not understood and properly passed through -communicated through email then there might be some small session or gatherings (beginning of each semester as part of the forums) –here they might go through new guidelines -PAC meetings as a regular meeting but not everyone is involved - but no divisional meetings -time challenge too busy to meet (in the meetings they discuss a lot of things but very briefly -due dates but without proper explanation
P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understands some of policy assessment goals but not all clear – seems to understand some of the larger goals of the policy (external goals) –not just measurement of student learning -says that she thinks the policy and guidelines is vague (don’t have an explanation, it’s just the policy and you have to follow it). How can I explain the why when I don’t even know? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sent through email –lack of communication means that it is interpreted at the department level -policy and guidelines are introduced to departments and leadership with little explanation as to why – some people say it’s to meet change in vision -CAR was introduced but have not read into it yet (proper explanation)
P6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understands role of coordinate of the different activities during the implementation process (oversees PC) –some confusion what is divisional task and operational task -DC is also PC in Health Sciences -goals of assessment is to assess students but not everyone agrees as to what the goals of assessment should be (knowledge vs skill) -does not identify some of the larger goals of the policy and process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -by email and some meetings (meets with PC’s regularly -through emails or direct meetings (DC meets with PCS every week) -PAC meets once a month -if there is an emergency will call a meeting -feels communication around assessment is good
P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understand role in the policy process but says this has evolved and took some time to understand -has some understanding of the goals of assessment. To measure student learning -discusses some of the larger goals of the process in the policy -goals of assessment is to ensure that students are able to meet up with requirements of the program learning outcomes (assess skills, abilities and knowledge) -process is clear but is changing – currently exploring how to assess skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -CAU communicates (policy is communicated through this unit – processes and if there are any changes -Dean from division meets with management team (communicate any information from the CAU) -information trickles down from higher management, to management, to faculty -meetings in Program Academic Committee

P8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -really not focusing on quality in regards to all parts of assessment – focusing just on part of assessment (Final assessment procedures) - understands the larger goals of a policy and the process (linked to quality and accountability) -understand the process and becoming more cognizant of the process -taking time to understand her role because it is a new role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -simplifies the information and then passes it on to -moving forward, wants to implement training so she can communicate everything they need to know so everyone is on the same page -management meetings and through email and by phone – email is difficult when you have a big team and people misinterpret the information
P9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -goals were for evaluate students, evaluate the quality of the program, and assurance for continuous improvement -Confused about which assessment policy -understands the larger goals of a policy and the process (linked to quality and accountability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -communicate with Quality Assurance Manager and Assessment Specialist then with PAC chairs (guardians of the curriculum) -PAC communicates with each other to ensure they are doing things consistently

Note: A matrix was completed for the themes of power/capacity and motivation.

Appendix 9: Relationships between Macro and Meso Level



Note: A diagram was also done for factors and the meso level factors to micro level factors.

Appendix 10: (Emerging themes from the Analysis of data)

<i>Overarching Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
Theme 1: Goals of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the quality of learning • Improving the implementation process • Alignment of outcomes, learning, and assessment • Standardization of assessment across the institution • Measurement of Learning Outcomes • Holding actors accountable for implementation process
Theme 2: Assessment methods to ensure Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria referenced assessment • Variety of assessment tasks • Standardized summative assessment through examinations
Themes 3: Tools to ensure Quality and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course syllabus • Course Assessment Plan (CAP) • Assessment Specification Document (ASD) • Course Assessment File • Moderation

Macro and Meso Level Factors influencing Assessment Policy

<i>Overarching Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
Theme 1: Macro level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National educational and economic policy • Industry needs and demands • Accreditation of Programs • Licensure of Graduates in Health Care fields
Theme 2: Meso level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Strategic Plan • Large multi-campus organization • An institutional culture of change • Top-down approach to implementation

Micro level (Actors influence on the implementation of assessment policy)

<i>Overarching Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
Theme 1: Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognition of goals • Cognition of role in process ⇒ manager's role in assessment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognition of process • Communication of policy and process
Theme 2: Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal goals and beliefs at odds with process • Assessment of actors own self-effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ too many responsibilities impact effectiveness and understanding
Theme 3: Power/Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ lack of human resources to support policy implementation ⇒ poor access to policy information and resources • Limited power and capacity over the assessment process • Loss of power over assessment process and teaching • Control over course assessment decisions • Control over practical and skills-based clinical assessments in courses

Challenges to implementing assessment

Overarching Themes	Description
Theme 1: Challenges faced by faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complicated implementation process • Time Commitment • Meeting deadlines
Theme 2: Challenges of Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to change • Lack of ownership and decision making

Appendix 11: Marking and Grading Rubric Descriptors for all departments

GRADING/MARKING RUBRIC

GRADING/MARKING CRITERIA	ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS												
	<i>Achievement that does not meet requirements</i>			<i>Achievement that minimally meets the course requirements</i>			<i>Achievement that satisfactorily meets the course requirements</i>		<i>Achievement that is significantly above the course requirements</i>			<i>Achievement that is outstanding relative to the course requirements</i>	
	<i>Significantly below course requirements</i>		<i>Below course requirements – achievement that narrowly does not meet the requirements</i>										
	<i>Assessment has not been submitted at all, is not-existent or not carried out</i>	<i>Clearly does not meet the requirements</i>											
Letter Grade	F			D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A
Percentage for Gradebook	0	30	59	60 – 63	64 – 66	67 – 69	70 – 73	74 – 76	77 – 79	80 – 83	84 – 86	87 – 89	90 - 100
GPA	0			1	1.3	1.7	2	2.3	2.7	3	3.3	3.7	4

1. *With reference to section 8 of the Assessment Handbook, the following serves as a set of various assessment criteria and grade descriptors suitable for many different assessment tasks.*
2. *The assessment rubric can be customised in the following two ways:*
 - *by selecting grading/marking criteria which suit a specific assessment task*
 - *by adding specific details under the criterion and its corresponding achievement indicators. NOTE: Don't change the original language - just add clarification, if needed.*
3. *The Grading System is accessible at XXX*

