

Chinese University Professors' Perceptions about Ethical Issues in Classroom Assessment Practices

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate Chinese university professors' perceptions about the ethicality of classroom assessment practices. In a survey of Chinese professors, participants completed a questionnaire with 15 scenarios that depicted ethical and unethical assessment practices. Participants consisted of 555 professors from 143 universities located in 29 provinces in China. Overall, professors had high agreement about the ethicality of assessment practices with assessment experts on six scenarios, moderate agreement on five scenarios, and low agreement on four scenarios. Results indicated that ethical issues should be discussed according to the context of assessment. Additionally, developing guidelines of ethics in assessment should involve stakeholders, policy makers, administrators, researchers, and instructors.

Introduction

In Chinese universities it is commonplace for instructors to experience situations in which students complain about unfair grading practices. For example, student complaints focus on professors not providing any grading criteria prior to a test. Instructors also face dilemmas in making difficult choices related to reporting assessment results fairly, considering student effort in grading, and observing university rules in assessment.

These issues in assessment practice are related to the professional ethics that focus on the "principles of conduct." Such ethics guide professionals' behaviors and actions (Brandt & Rose, 2004). Specifically, in the field of education, professional ethics is defined as the "norms, values, and principles that should govern the conduct of educational professionals" (Husu, 2001, p. 68). Ethics has been the focus of studies in higher education (Richman & Alexander, 2007).

Along with the essential roles that ethics play in professional behaviors and actions, these principles of conduct also are considered to be important in educational assessment where ethics addresses the rules of behavior or norms that should govern educators' assessment practices (Johnson, Green, Kim, & Pope, 2008). The issues of morality and ethics should be considered in educational assessment (Pope, 2006). For example, morality is an issue in assessment because poor assessment can significantly affect students, and educators should "Do No Harm" when assessing students (Taylor & Nolen, 2005, p. 7). As one specific case of "Do No Harm," "avoid score pollution" is also applied as an ethical principle in assessment practices (Green, Johnson, Kim, & Pope, 2007). A student's score is "polluted" if it does not accurately reflect his or her mastery of knowledge. This pollution is a result of a teacher considering irrelevant factors, such as student effort or progress, when grading student work. A polluted score will do further harm to the students

(Pope, 2006). For example, when receiving a progress report the parents of a student might be misinformed about their child's proficiency in learning to read if the teacher only focuses on the child's gains in reading and omits some of the challenges the student is experiencing. Omission of the challenges pollutes the progress report.

Although there have been many studies about professional ethics, the study of ethics in assessment practice is comparatively recent. For example, Green et al. (2007) studied educators' ethical judgments in relation to assessment and they found that respondents had strong agreement with one another (e.g., 90% agreeing about the ethics of a practice) on fewer than half of the scenarios on ethical issues in the United States. A study by Johnson et al. (2008) documented the division of perceptions between principals and principal candidates on ethical issues in assessment and reported strong agreement on half of the ethical scenarios. Similarly, Pope et al. (2009) studied teachers' ethical dilemmas in classroom assessment. They found that the majority of incidents that participants described centered on score pollution. In a recent study, Liu, Johnson, and Fan (2016) compared Chinese and U.S. pre-service teachers' perceptions about ethical issues in assessment and their findings indicated that the pre-service teachers from China and the U.S. had similar perceptions on 14 out of 36 scenarios. The authors also found that the respondents' perceptions of some scenarios were not in agreement with literature on classroom assessment.

In line with a variety of studies on ethical issues in assessment practice in the United States, ethical issues have also been investigated in other countries including the United Kingdom (O'Leary, 2008), Canada (Tierney, 2013), South Africa (Beets, 2012), and Turkey (Özbek, 2013). In particular, Maxwell, Tremblay-Laprise, Filion, Boon, Daly, Hoven, Heilbronn, Lenselink, & Walters (2016) conducted an international survey related to ethics education in pre-service teaching programs. The countries involved included the United States, England, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands. The researchers examined patterns of ethics education in initial teacher preparation and presented a view of the ethical challenges that pre-service teachers face and how well they were prepared for their teaching profession. However, research into ethical issues as related to assessment and ethics has generally not been explored in the context of other countries.

The aforementioned literature makes evident that ethical issues are universal and they play an important role in education and assessment. There is a need for continued exploration and investigation on this issue. Especially, the issue of ethics should be explored in a variety of cultural contexts. Previous research in educators' perceptions about the ethical issues in assessment practices have focused mainly on pre-service or in-service teachers in the United States (Green et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2016; Pope et al., 2009). These findings suggested that there is little consensus among educator professionals on ethical issues in assessment practices. So far, little research has been conducted to examine (1) the ethical reasoning that contribute to educators' decisions about the ethicality of assessment practices, and (2) the ethics of assessment practice in the context of higher education.

This study is significant in that it aims to investigate Chinese university professors' perceptions about ethics in assessment practices. Currently, an increasing number of Chinese students come to the United States for either undergraduate or graduate study. The classroom assessment practices they receive in China might impact their classroom assessment experience in the United States. In China some common assessment practices, including sharing students' assessment results and not communicating with students about grading criteria, may be considered unethical based on the guidelines developed in the United States. Therefore, it is important to understand Chinese university professors' views about classroom assessment practices. It will inform professional

development for Chinese professors, guide them in making decision about assessment practice, and support an ethical and fair assessment.

Ethical guidelines in educational assessment are universal, and it is necessary for Chinese university professors to be aware of, and follow these guidelines in classroom assessment practices especially considering the globalization of higher education. Applying these universally accepted ethical guidelines is not only beneficial for the Chinese students who study in the United States, but also contributes to ethical and fair assessment in higher education in general. The current study is significant because it included an open-response format to investigate the ethical reasoning that contributes to professors' decisions. Prior studies used closed-response formats that only allowed participants to indicate whether an assessment practice was ethical or unethical. The findings of this study could be informative in developing educational assessment texts, contributing to policymaking, and informing international higher education assessment practices.

The questions to be addressed in the study include:

1. What perceptions do Chinese university professors hold about ethical issues in assessment practices?
2. How are their perceptions of each scenario consistent or inconsistent with experts?
3. What is the professors' reasoning on the ethicality of assessment practices?

Method

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 555 professors from 143 colleges and universities across 29 provinces in China. The 143 universities included such well-known universities as Peking University and Zhejiang University. Also included were three-year technical colleges. As shown in Table 1, among the 555 participants, about two thirds were females. More than 95% had a master's degree or a doctorate. More than 40% were either professors or associate professors. About 62.6% of the participants taught courses in the humanities and social science, 30.3% taught courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and 7.2% taught courses in other disciplines. Approximately 40% had 10 or fewer years of teaching experience, and about 60% had more than 10 years of teaching experience.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

Demographics	Level	N	Percent
Gender	Male	184	33.9
	Female	359	66.1
Highest Degree	Bachelor	25	4.6
	Master	324	59.4
	Ph.D.	196	36.0
Professional Rank	Assistant Professor	40	7.3
	Lecturer	279	51.2
	Associate Professor	192	35.2
	Professor	34	6.2

Table 1. Participants' Demographics (continued)

Demographics	Level	N	Percent
Years of Teaching Experience	5 Years or Under	102	18.7
	6-10 Years	118	21.7
	11-15 Years	172	31.6
	16-20 Years	97	17.8
	21 Years or Above	56	10.3
Teaching Subject	Humanities and social science	341	62.6
	STEM	165	30.3
	Other	39	7.2

Instrument

The instrument of this study was a survey with 15 scenarios (see Appendix) about ethical issues in classroom assessment practices in higher education. The scenarios were designed based on the scenarios developed by Green et al. (2007), Johnson et al. (2008), and Liu et al. (2016), and they were revised to be applicable to the assessment context of Chinese higher education. The 15 scenarios aligned with six categories that describe professors' thoughts or actions about ethics in classroom assessment practices (see Table 2). The category of Standard Test Preparation which was originally included in previous studies was excluded in the present study since standardized tests are not commonly used in the assessment of Chinese higher education.

Table 2. Scenarios in Each Category

Category	Number of Scenarios	Scenarios
Bias/Fairness	2	1,10
Communication About Grading	3	5,7,11
Confidentiality	2	2,9
Grading Practices	4	4,8,12,15
Multiple Assessment Opportunities	2	3,14
Test Administration	2	6,13
Total	15	

The original scenarios were in English, and the research team translated the scenarios into Chinese. In addition, to support the content validity of the instrument, six Chinese university professors with expertise in English-Chinese language translation, higher education, and classroom assessment reviewed the scenarios in terms of language bias, contextual meaning, and relevance. The scenarios were revised based on the professors' suggestions and feedback.

The final version of the survey with the 15 scenarios and demographic items were transferred to SurveyMonkey. For each scenario the respondents were asked to indicate whether the assessment practice described was ethical or unethical by clicking on their choice. Additionally, for each scenario a text box allowed respondents to provide the reasoning for their decisions. The respondents were also asked to provide demographic information including their university

affiliation, gender, highest degree, professional rank, years of teaching experience, and the discipline taught (see Table 1).

Expert views were used as criteria for making judgment on professors' perceptions of ethical issues in classroom assessment. The expert views were those of authors of classroom assessment literature in the United States. Expert views were based on the 6 categories listed in Table 2.

Fairness is a key issue in classroom assessment. Student evaluation should be ethical, fair, useful, and feasible (The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation [JCSEE], 2003, p. 3). Students' grades should reflect their learning and provide information about their areas of strength and weakness (Ory & Ryan, 1993). Thus, it is an unethical practice for a professor to address only students' strengths (Scenario 1) or weaknesses. Student evaluation should reflect their mastery of learning objectives. Practices of evaluating students' learning by incorporating unrelated factors (e.g., problems at home in Scenario 10) into grading is considered unethical since it reduces the accuracy, and thus usefulness, of grades (Oosterhof, 2009).

Communication with students about grading is an important aspect of classroom instruction and assessment. Grading plans should be stated at the beginning of the course. Moreover, students should be informed of the activities to be considered in their final grades (Ory & Ryan, 1993) and methods to be used in determining their grades (Stiggins, Frisbie, & Griswold, 1989). Teachers should communicate to students the content they are to be tested on prior to assessment (Airasian, 2000, p. 23). It is considered an ethical practice for a professor to share with his or her students the methods used in determining the grades (Scenario 11). Not providing students with the methods used in determining the grades (Scenario 7) or using test materials that students were not informed of in advance (Scenario 5) is considered unethical.

In assessment, students' rights of privacy should be protected and professors should keep classroom assessment results confidential (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008). Confidentiality, in the context of measurement, means that the test results should not be revealed to anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know the scores (JCSEE, 2003; Worthen, White, Fan, & Sudweeks, 1998). Therefore, it is an unethical practice to let students grade each other's homework or test (Scenario 2) or to disclose students' test scores (Scenario 9).

Grading is commonly used to provide information about student learning, and teachers should ensure that scoring is not influenced by factors irrelevant to the performance or product that is being scored (JCSEE, 2003). Teachers should minimize the effect on scoring of factors irrelevant to the purposes of the assessment (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008). Such factors as student ability, effort, attendance, and attitude should not be graded (Brookhart, 2004; Oosterhof, 2009). Similarly, in assessing students, weighting the work should depend on whether the work is likely to provide good evidence about students' achievement (Taylor & Nolen, 2005). Therefore, it is an unethical practice for professors to consider student effort (Scenario 8) in grading, to add unwarranted points to students' test scores (Scenario 12), or to significantly weight student class attendance (Scenario 15). Evidence should be collected to help support student evaluation especially regarding borderline grading (Scenario 4).

To accurately and adequately assess students' learning requires multiple modes of assessment (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008). A variety of assessment procedures should be used (Gronlund, 2003) because no single task or test can accurately or adequately measure an important learning outcome (Wiggins, 1994). Therefore, using multiple methods of assessment is an ethical practice (Scenario 3). On the other hand, relying on one single method (e.g. multiple-choice questions) to assess students (Scenario 14) is considered unethical.

Much of the literature on test administration addresses teacher practices during standardized testing at the district or national levels. We draw on this literature in considering professors' practices during midterm and final exams that might pollute student scores. Thus, the process of test administration is very important and should be fair to all test takers (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008). In test administration, professors should avoid intervention that could possibly make the examination results more difficult or impossible to interpret (Sax, 1974). Coaching students or indicating in any way that their answers may be wrong should be considered as an inappropriate test administration practice (Popham, 1991). It is unethical for a professor to remind the students to check their answers to a specific question (Scenario 13) in a test. When administering a final exam (Scenario 6) it is unethical for the professor to direct one specific student to put the answer to each question with the same number on the answer sheet.

Data Collection

To reach the survey's target sample of Chinese university professors, we contacted former colleagues, classmates, and friends who teach at various colleges and universities in China. Each contact circulated an invitation to his or her colleagues and teaching associates to participate in the survey. A SurveyMonkey link was created and sent by email to all individuals. The online survey data collection period started on April 8, 2016, and ended on April 23, 2016, which was in the middle of the spring semester for most of the Chinese universities.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis software SPSS was used to analyze the data. The percentage of respondents who considered a scenario ethical/unethical was calculated to present a general view of respondents' perceptions. Respondents' agreement with the views of experts was reported for each scenario. Expert views were those from the authors of classroom assessment literature in the United States. Literature on ethical issues in classroom assessment did not appear to be addressed in the Chinese educational research literature. Scenarios showing 67% or higher of respondents agreeing with experts were considered to have high agreement. Scenarios showing between 33% and 66% of respondents agreeing with experts were considered to have moderate agreement. Scenarios showing 33% or lower of respondents agreeing with experts were considered to have low agreement. We used mixed-method in analyzing the data. In the qualitative analysis the respondents' written reasoning and explanations for each scenario were coded for patterns and themes.

Results

The results indicated that professors had high agreement about the ethicality of assessment practices with assessment experts on six scenarios, moderate agreement on five scenarios, and low agreement on four scenarios. In the following sections, we present the percentages of respondents who described the scenario as ethical or unethical and the respondents' agreement level with experts. In presenting the results, we compare the results of current study and previous studies aiming to examine similarities and differences of the findings on the ethical issues in different assessment contexts. Finally, we utilize qualitative methods to analyze the explanations and justifications of respondents.

Fairness/Bias

Both Scenario 1 and Scenario 10 have moderate agreement with experts. Table 3 shows that 52.0% of the respondents considered it ethical to address only students' strengths when giving feedback to students' assignments (Scenario 1). The percent was higher than those found in previous studies in which 40.8% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007), 36.9% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008), and 25.4% of American pre-service teachers and 28.2% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) considered it ethical to address only students' strengths in student evaluation. Similarly, approximately 36.7% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to bump the student's participation grade up due to his or her problems at home (Scenario 10). The percent was higher than those found in previous studies in which 24.9% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007), 18.5% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008), and 35.8% of American pre-service teachers, and 25.9% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) reported that increasing a student's participation grade up due to their problems at home is an ethical practice.

Table 3. Scenarios in Fairness/Bias

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
1. To enhance self-esteem, a professor addresses only students' strengths when giving feedback to her students' assignments since she believes that positive feedback is good for students' growth.	546	52.0	48.0	Unethical	Moderate
10. A professor who knows a student had a bad week because of problems at home bumps the student's participation grade up a few points to compensate for his bad score on a quiz.	547	36.7	63.3	Unethical	Moderate

The qualitative analysis of the professors' explanations indicated that some survey respondents who considered it ethical to address only students' strengths believed that the positive comments "do not hurt students," instead, they can help build/foster students' "self-confidence," "encourage" students in learning, help students become "active learners," and supports "their growth." Professors who considered it ethical to increase a student's participation grade due to his/her problems at home believed that this practice reflects the "good nature," "kind heart," and "caring attitude" of teachers. The professors who considered it unethical to address only students' strengths or to increase a student's participation grade indicated that professors have the "responsibility of pointing out students' weaknesses as well as strengths." Feedback should be "objective and fair" and not affected by "personal feelings." These professors indicated that professors should care for, and encourage their students in other ways rather than changing grades.

Communication About Grading

According to Table 4, Scenario 11 has high agreement, and Scenarios 5 and 7 have low agreement with experts. Table 4 shows 90.6% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to use a few surprise items in the test (Scenario 5). This is much higher than those found in previous studies in which 33.7% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007), 27.7% of American educational leaders

(Johnson et al., 2008), and 8.7% of American pre-service teachers and 77.0% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) reported that it is ethical to use a few surprise items in the test. Compared with American educators, Chinese professors and pre-service teachers tended to consider it ethical to use a few surprise items in the test. Slightly more than two-thirds (68.6%) of Chinese professors considered it ethical not to provide rubrics on how the assignment will be graded (Scenario 7). This result is different from those in previous studies. Both Green et al. (2007) and Johnson et al. (2008) reported that more than 98.0% of American teachers and educational leaders considered it ethical to provide students with rubrics on how the assignment will be graded. Results also show 92.5% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to share with students the rubrics for each task at the beginning of the semester (Scenario 11). This result is consistent with that in the study by Liu et al. (2016) who reported 97.1% of American pre-service teachers and 93.7% of Chinese pre-service teachers considered it ethical to share with students the rubrics used in each task.

Table 4. Scenarios in Communication About Grading

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
4. For the class-level final exam, a professor uses a few surprise items about additional topics that were covered in class but were not listed in the study guide.	545	90.6	9.4	Unethical	Low
7. When assigning a team project to work on collaboratively, a professor does not provide rubrics on how it will be graded, stating instead that he will assign a score based on students' overall performance on the project.	548	68.6	31.4	Unethical	Low
11. At the beginning of the semester, a professor shares with students the rubrics for each task. The professor leads students in a discussion about the rubrics, makes changes to the rubrics according to students' feedback, and gives students the final versions to guide their completion of the course tasks.	547	92.5	7.5	Ethical	High

The qualitative coding of the respondents' explanations helped reveal the reasoning behind their judgments. Professors who considered it ethical to use a few surprise items in the test believed surprise items can be used to "assess students' classroom participation and engagement," and test items should not be limited to the guide. Professors who considered this practice unethical believed that "test questions should follow the study guide because it directs and emphasizes the focus of learning." Among 218 respondents, only one instructor mentioned that "the teacher should have communicated with the students about the surprise item in advance." Professors who supported the idea of providing rubrics to students believed assessment without rubrics is "not objective." Students' involvement in developing the rubrics was "good for teaching and learning," and rubrics should be "open, fair, and transparent." Professors who considered it ethical not to provide rubrics

on how the assignment will be graded indicated professors should have the “flexibility of assessing students,” and not providing rubrics is good for “students’ creative thinking.”

Confidentiality

Table 5 indicates that Scenario 9 has high agreement, and Scenario 2 has low agreement with experts. About 80.1% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to let students grade each other’s paper and share the results in groups (Scenario 2). In comparison, Liu et al. (2016) reported 36.4% of American pre-service teachers, and 78.2% of Chinese pre-service teachers considered this practice ethical. It is notable that larger percentages of Chinese professors and pre-service teachers were not aware of the responsibility of protecting students’ privacy. Results show 26.8% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to disclose all students’ scores to a specific student (Scenario 9). Although the response from Chinese professors had high agreement with the expert view, the agreement level is not as high as those found in previous studies in which only 6.5% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007) and 4.6% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008) considered it ethical to disclose students’ scores.

Table 5. Scenarios in Confidentiality

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
2. A professor does not grade all class-level quizzes. Instead, he lets students grade each other’s paper and then share the results in groups.	548	80.1	19.9	Unethical	Low
9. At the beginning of the class, when a student requests to see her grade of a final exam, her professor shows the student the whole score sheet that includes all students’ final scores.	545	26.8	73.2	Unethical	High

The analysis of the respondents’ explanations indicated that the professors who considered it ethical to let students grade each other’s paper and share the results in groups believed that peer assessment was a “commonly used way,” and good for fostering “students’ collaborative learning.” Professors who considered it unethical expressed the concern that grading by students may “not be accurate, objective, and persuasive,” and it is the “professors’ responsibility” to grade the test. Among 216 respondents who provided their reasoning, only two professors explicitly mentioned the issue of confidentiality in grading. Professors who considered it ethical to disclose students’ scores believed that students’ grades should be “transparent and public.” Many professors indicated that students should understand where they stand in the class by having access to others’ grades. Most professors considered it unethical and believed students’ grades are private and should not be revealed to others, making grades public might “hurt some students” especially those who “do not have good grades.”

Grading Practice

Scenario 4 has high agreement, Scenarios 8 and 12 have moderate agreement with experts, and Scenario 15 has low agreement with experts. Table 6 shows that 80.8% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to change student’s score from B^+ to A^- because the tests and papers showed

the student had mastered the course objectives (Scenario 4). The percentage is much higher than those found in previous studies where 37.3% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007), 46.2% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008), and 39.3% of American pre-service teachers and 66.7% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) considered this practice ethical. Comparatively, a higher percentage of both Chinese professors and pre-service teachers seemed to consider it ethical to change student's score from B^+ to A^- .

In terms of considering student effort in grading, the results (Table 6) show 35.0% of Chinese professors considered it ethical. The percentage is much lower than those in previous studies in which 85.2% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007), 78.5% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008), and 74.0% of American pre-service teachers and 95.4% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) considered it ethical to take student effort into consideration in grading. Similarly, 36.1% (Table 6) of Chinese professors considered it ethical to add 20 points to the students' mid-term test to ensure passing the final exam was a possibility. This result is consistent with that found by Liu et al. (2016) who reported that 52.0% of American pre-service teachers and 40.2% of Chinese pre-service teachers considered it ethical to add 20 points to the students' mid-term test to ensure passing in the final exam. A majority (82.2%) of Chinese professors (Table 6) considered it ethical to count students' class attendance as 20% of their final grades, and it is in line with the findings of previous studies in which 74.6% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007) and 84.6% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008) considered it ethical to count students' class participation as 30% of the final grade.

Table 6. Scenarios in Grading Practice

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
4. As a professor finalizes grades, she notices the grade of a student is in between B^+ to an A^- . She gave the student an A^- because tests and papers showed the student had mastered the course objectives even though he had not completed some of his homework assignments.	551	80.8	19.2	Ethical	High
8. In grading a final exam, a professor always reads the student's name and considers his/her effort in assigning grades.	545	35.0	65.0	Unethical	Moderate
12. A professor is concerned that most students did not perform well on the class-level mid-term test. Based on the results, it has become mathematically impossible for about 70% of students to earn a passing grade. Thus, the professor adds 20 points to each student's mid-term score to make sure most students still have a chance to pass at the end of the semester.	548	36.1	63.9	Unethical	Moderate
15. A college professor counts students' attendance as 20% of their final grades.	545	82.2	17.8	Unethical	Low

Respondents' written explanations indicated that professors considered the practice of borderline grading (Scenario 4) ethical because they believed that giving students a higher score (here A-) is "encouraging" to students, and can help "build their confidence." Importantly, professors also thought that as long as the teacher can judge from the test and papers that the student has "mastered the course objectives," the teacher can be "flexible" in grading. Respondents who considered it unethical expressed the concern that students' final grades should be calculated "objectively," this practice is "not fair to other students," and "homework is an important part" of assessment and should be "taken seriously."

Some respondents who regarded it ethical to consider student effort in grading believed "effort is important," and students who "work harder deserve better grades." Other respondents considered it unethical and believed that looking at student' names and taking students' effort into consideration while grading is "not fair," and cannot "ensure the objectivity of grading." One respondent wrote, "If teachers can evaluate students using their personal judgment, why bother to have the test at all?" Professors who considered it ethical to add 20 points to the students' grades believed test items may be "too difficult," and it is "reasonable" and "necessary" for the teachers to adjust students' test scores. Some professors considered it unethical and believed it is "not fair" and professors should not "change students' test scores." One professor wrote, "It is very common in China. Some universities have rules about ensuring a certain percentage of passing. To avoid this, universities should abolish this rule." Professors considered it ethical to weigh heavily on students' class attendance since they believed that attendance is a "university disciplinary rule," it reflects "students' attitude to learning," and should be a "component of assessment." Professors who considered it unethical had the concern that attendance cannot be used to assess students' mastery of learning objectives, and 20% of students' final scores being decided by their attendance is "too high."

Multiple Assessment Opportunities

Respondents in both Scenario 3 and Scenario 14 have high agreement with experts. Table 7 shows 87.3% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to use multiple methods to assess students. The result is in line with those found in previous studies in which 99.4% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007), 100% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008), and 97.1% of American pre-service teachers and 69.0% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) considered it ethical to use multiple ways to assess students. A minority (28.3%) of Chinese professors (Table 7) considered it ethical to use only multiple-choice tests to assess students. This result is also consistent with the findings in previous studies where 21.9% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007) and 30.8% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008) considered it ethical to rely on multiple-choice tests.

Table 7. Scenarios in Multiple Assessment Opportunities

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
3. A professor uses observational checklists, and anecdotal notes, and interviews (student conferences) in assessing students.	551	87.3	12.7	Ethical	High

Table 7. Scenarios in Multiple Assessment Opportunities (continued)

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
14. An instructor uses only multiple choice questions in the end-of-course exam. She justifies this practice by stating multiple choice questions can be graded objectively and efficiently.	544	28.3	71.7	Unethical	High

Analysis of the participants' reasoning *in* the open-response parts of the items indicated that professors who considered it ethical to use multiple methods to assess students believed that multiple ways of assessment can "help better understand student learning." Most professors considered it unethical to use only multiple-choice questions to assess students because it cannot "comprehensively" reflect "students' mastery of learning objectives," and some students may "guess" on the test. Other professors disagreed and had the concern that other forms of test might be too "subjective" and might not "accurately and fairly" evaluate student learning.

Test Administration

Scenario 13 has high agreement and Scenario 6 has moderate agreement with experts. Table 8 shows 66.0% of Chinese professors considered it ethical to direct a student to align the test item numbers with the answers on the answer sheet. The result is in line with those in previous studies in which 69.2% of American teachers (Green et al., 2007); 60.0% of American educational leaders (Johnson et al., 2008); and 86.7% of American pre-service teachers and 62.1% of Chinese pre-service teachers (Liu et al., 2016) considered it ethical to direct the student where to record the answer on the answer sheet. A minority (19.8%) of Chinese professors (Table 8) considered it ethical to remind the students to check their answer to a certain question in a test. Similarly, Liu et al. (2016) reported that about 58.4% of American pre-service teachers and 20.1% of Chinese pre-service teachers considered it ethical to remind the students to check their answer to a certain question in a test.

Table 8. Scenarios in Test Administration

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
6. While administering a final exam, a professor notices that a student has skipped a problem and is recording all of her answers out of sequence on the answer sheet. The professor shows the student where to record the answer she is working on, and instructs the student to put the answer to each question with the same number on the answer sheet.	550	66.0	34.0	Unethical	Moderate

Table 8. Scenarios in Test Administration (continued)

Scenarios	N	% Ethical	% Unethical	Expert View	Agreement with Experts
13. While administering a class-level mid-term test, a professor notices that most students missed the same question. The professor reminds all students to check their answers to that question one more time.	546	19.8	80.2	Unethical	High

Written explanations from the respondents indicated that Chinese professors considered it ethical to direct students to record the answer with the same number on the answer sheet because they believed professors have the “responsibility” to correct students when they recorded their answers out of sequence. Respondents indicated this is a “reflection of a good heart” that a teacher should have. Other professors considered it unethical since they believed it is “against the administration rules,” is “not fair to other students,” and test-taking skills should be emphasized before the test, not in the test. A few professors considered it ethical to remind the students to check their answer and believed it is “reasonable” to remind students as long as the professor “does not tell students the answer.” Most professors considered it unethical and believed this behavior was “cheating and against administrative rules.” Testing is “serious” and administrators should “not interfere with students.”

Discussion

Assessment plays an essential role in the classroom. Based on current and previous studies, considering student effort or/and class attendance, as well as adding points in grading, presented serious ethical issues in assessment practices (Green et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2016). Over one-third of Chinese professors in the current study and over 70% of educators in the U.S. and China in previous studies considered it ethical to count effort in grading (Green et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2016). Additionally, more than 70% of educators in both current and previous studies considered it ethical to count students’ class attendance as 20% or 30% of their final grades (Green et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008). More than one-third of educators in China and the U.S. considered it ethical to add 20 points to students’ grades to compensate for low scores on a mid-term test (Liu et al., 2016). It appears that these ethical issues in assessment practice raise questions that require addressing urgently. Introducing “effort” when reporting about student learning will potentially artificially inflate the grade and make it more difficult to accurately represent students’ level of achievement (Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, & Arter, 2012). In addition, these assessment practices cause “score pollution” because grades in these scenarios convey information about students’ behavior rather than reflecting the extent to which students have mastered the instructional goals (Brookhart, 2004). Professors surveyed in the current study explained that some university policies included a rule of a certain percentage of students passing a course, thus it presents a dilemma for professors. It becomes a difficult choice between adding/reducing points in students’ grades and violating university policy. Therefore, establishing policy to address ethical issues in grading practice should involve stakeholders such as students, professors, administrators, and policymakers in order to ensure fair and equal grading practices in assessment. Professional development about ethics in assessment should explicitly address such issues as effort, attendance, and adding points to grades. Although university policy

and assessment practices are culturally specific, we do believe that ensuring ethical and fair assessment is a universal guideline that can be applied to assessment in any cultural context.

Examining the agreement levels between Chinese professors' responses and experts' views on the scenarios related to confidentiality, we noticed that students' privacy stands out as a key issue to be addressed. Confidentiality, in a classroom assessment context, refers to students' test scores being private and should be shared only with people who have a legitimate need to know the scores (Worthen et al., 1998). Professors have the responsibility of keeping students' test results confidential, and any assessment practice that involves disclosing students' test results to anyone without their permission are considered unethical. In the current study, although a low percentage (26.8%) of Chinese professors considered it ethical to disclose students' scores, it is still much higher than those in the studies (lower than 7%) in the United States (Green et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2016). Based on the current study, a high percentage of Chinese professors (80.1%) considered it ethical to let students grade each other's paper and share the results in groups. Most professors focused on the positive impact of the "collaboration" and "team work," but they disregarded their responsibility of keeping students' grades confidential. Revealing students' grades might "do harm" to some of the students, especially when they have low scores and feel embarrassed in front of their peers. Although 19.9% of the Chinese professors agreed with experts and thought that letting students grade each other's paper and share the results in groups was unethical, their reasoning seemed to emphasize more on the accuracy of assessment rather than on students' privacy. Evidently, the issue of confidentiality should be placed on the agenda in discussing classroom practices that involve confidentiality. Professors' awareness of confidentiality should be raised, and more specific and detailed policies about confidentiality issues in assessment need to be developed. We recommend that Chinese professors should be instructed that the test results should not be revealed to anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know the scores (JCSEE, 2003) to ensure that students' privacy is protected in classroom assessment.

Regarding the ethicality of sharing students' grades or letting students grade each other's paper in the context of Chinese higher education, we identified little literature. Based on our personal teaching experiences and our observed assessment practices of our colleagues in the universities in China, we noticed that sharing students' grades is a common practice in China. We anticipate that this study could motivate other researchers to explore in depth about the ethical issues in classroom assessment in China and other cultures in the world.

With more than 60% of educators considering it ethical to direct the student to record the answer on the answer sheet in the final exam in the current study (Scenario 6) and previous studies (Green et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2016), test administration is another issue that requires our attention. Popham (1991) emphasized that coaching students or indicating in any way that their answers may be wrong should be considered as inappropriate test administration practices. Directing one specific student in aligning his or her answers with items on the answer sheet is unfair to other students who might have the same problem but may not be noticed and reminded on the test. Test-taking skills should be instructed before the test, not during the test. As Johnson et al. (2008) pointed out, the context should be considered in the training of future practitioners, and the environment with different test administration guidelines may foster different perceptions of ethical practices. It is important for the professors to follow the test administration guidelines in different test situations.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study lies in the fact that only 15 scenarios distributed over six categories were used to explore Chinese university professors' perceptions about ethical issues in assessment practices. Fifteen scenarios are not enough to cover all situations in assessment practices, though, we believe these scenarios are typical and represent common ethical issues in assessment. We suggest that additional scenarios should be developed in future studies based on the specific assessment context. For example, the scenarios used in the current study are situated in the context of Chinese higher education, and they should be modified when used in other cultures. The current study required the respondents to judge each assessment scenario as either ethical or unethical. Real practice in education is more complicated. Although this study allowed the respondents to explain their judgment, it would not be enough to fully understand the issue and guidelines used to deal with the ethical issues in assessment practices. Future research should include open-ended responses or focus group interviews to help interpret ethical issues in depth.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that discrepancies exist between the views of Chinese professors and experts in the field of assessment regarding ethical issues in classroom assessment. Among the 15 scenarios of assessment practices, Chinese professors had high agreement with assessment experts on six scenarios, moderate agreement on five scenarios, and low agreement on four scenarios. The scenarios on which Chinese professors had low agreement with experts are in the categories of communications about grading, confidentiality, and grading practice. The findings appear consistent with the context of higher education in China where instruction is predominantly professor-centered (Boyle, 2000; Wang, 2007).

We believe ethical issues in classroom assessment are universal and the ethical guidelines in the United States could be applied in Chinese higher education. For example, the guideline that student evaluation should be ethical, fair, useful, and feasible (JCSEE, 2003) in the United States is also applicable in the assessment context of Chinese higher education. Therefore, it is important for the Chinese professors to be aware of the assessment guidelines. Professors should involve students in setting grading rules, and grading standards should be clearly communicated with students to ensure the fairness in assessment. Moreover, students' privacy should be considered while sharing assessment results with students. Understanding these ethical guidelines in assessment will help Chinese universities professors design grading criteria, report assessment results, and use assessment results to inform their instruction. This might ultimately reduce students' complaints about unfair grading practices, and guide professors in making decisions about ethical issues in classroom assessment.

An important method used to help Chinese professors understand ethical guidelines in classroom assessment is through professional development. Previous studies suggested coverage of professional ethics is often neglected in teacher education programs (Warnick & Silverman, 2011), and pre-service teachers felt a need for training in ethics (Boon, 2011). Ethical issues in assessment practices should be emphasized in all levels of education. It should be included in the curriculum in higher education, and professors should have opportunities of professional development on ethical issues in assessment. Professionals who have expertise in ethics and assessment should be invited or employed as coaches or instructors in professional development in higher education. In addition to cultivating professors' ethics awareness, ethics should be integrated with course instruction in general education (Quesenberry, Phillips, Woodburns, &

Yang, 2012). Through the emphasis of ethics education in instruction and assessment, we expect improvement in the fairness of assessment in Chinese higher education.

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Appendix

Scenarios

1. To enhance self-esteem, a professor addresses only students' strengths when giving feedback to her students' assignments since she believes that positive feedback is good for students' growth.
2. A professor does not grade all class-level quizzes. Instead, he lets students grade each other's paper and then share the results in groups.
3. A professor uses observational checklists, anecdotal notes, and interviews in assessing students.
4. As a professor finalizes grades, she notices the grade of a student is in between B+ to an A-. She gave the student an A- because tests and papers showed the student had mastered the course objectives even though he had not completed some of his homework assignments.
5. For the class-level final exam, a professor uses a few surprise items about additional topics that were covered in class but were not listed in the study guide.
6. While administering a final exam, a professor notices that a student has skipped a problem and is recording all of her answers out of sequence on the answer sheet. The professor shows the student where to record the answer she is working on, and instructs the student to put the answer to each question with the same number on the answer sheet.
7. When assigning a team project to work on collaboratively, a professor does not provide rubrics on how it will be graded, stating instead that he will assign a score based on students' overall performance on the project.
8. In grading a final exam, a professor always reads the student's name and considers effort in assigning grades.
9. At the beginning of the class, when a student requests to see her grade of a final exam, her professor shows the student the whole score sheet that includes all students' final scores.
10. A professor who knows a student had a bad week because of problems at home bumps the student's participation grade up a few points to compensate for his bad score on a quiz.
11. At the beginning of the semester, a professor shares with students the rubrics for each task. The professor leads students in a discussion about the rubrics, makes changes to the rubrics according to students' feedback, and gives students the final versions to guide their completion of the course tasks.
12. A professor is concerned that most students did not perform well on the class-level mid-term test. Based on the results, it has become mathematically impossible for about 70% of students to earn a passing grade. Thus, the professor adds 20 points to each student's mid-term score to make sure most students still have a chance to pass at the end of the semester.
13. While administering a class-level mid-term test, a professor notices that most students missed the same question. The professor reminds all students to check their answers to that question one more time.
14. An instructor uses only multiple-choice questions in the end-of-course exam. She justifies this practice by stating multiple choice questions can be graded objectively and efficiently.
15. A college professor counts students' attendance as 20% of their final grades.