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Parents' Conceptual Involvement in Their Children's Education: An Assessment-Oriented View

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Parents' underlying beliefs concerning pedagogical issues may be an indispensable key to understanding the diverse activities that parents engage in with their children. Assessment, as a multifunctional educational mechanism, has long engaged the minds of not only teachers and students but also their parents. Thus, this study sought to delve into parents' conceptions of their children's assessment with respect to external variables including gender, major, and degree. In doing so, Parents' Conceptions of Assessment (PCoA) was administered to a subset of 180 parents. The construct validity of the inventory was substantiated via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Analyzing the data, it was found that 'Improvement' was the parents' dominant view toward assessment. Moreover, running MANOVA, parents' educational degree played a significant role in the assessment-related conceptions of 'Relevance' and 'Affect'. The results are discussed and implications are provided in the context of education.

Les croyances des parents relatives à certains enjeux pédagogiques pourraient s'avérer être des indications indispensables pour comprendre les activités diverses qu'ils entreprennent avec leurs enfants. L'évaluation, ce mécanisme pédagogique multifonctionnel, préoccupe depuis longtemps non seulement les enseignants et les étudiants mais également les parents. Nous nous sommes donc penchés sur les conceptions qu'ont les parents de l'évaluation de leurs enfants par rapport à des variables externes, y compris le sexe, le domaine de spécialisation et le diplôme. Un échantillon de 180 parents ont passé un questionnaire sur leur conceptions de l'évaluation. La validité conceptuelle du répertoire a été appuyée par la modélisation par équation structurelle. L'analyse des données a révélé que le concept de « l'amélioration » résumait le point de vue dominant des parents quant à l'évaluation. De plus, selon une analyse multivariée de variance, la scolarisation des parents a joué un rôle important dans leurs conceptions d'éléments liés à l'évaluation, notamment la « pertinence» et « l'influence ». Nous discutons des résultats et évoquons des incidences pour le domaine de l'éducation.

Learning does not occur exclusively in schools. Parents can embark on encouraging their children's learning by valuing and underscoring education as a path toward a better life (Korkmaz, 2007). Parents can contribute insights and knowledge that complement the professional skills of school team (Comer & Haynes, 1991). Parents' meaningful involvement in their children's education is a sort of investment made by parents for the future prosperity of their children (Smits & Hosgor, 2006). Although, there are multiple causes for low academic achievement of students, lack of cooperation among schools, parents, and their communities

has been found to have a critical role in this vein (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). Nowadays, the productive partnerships between parents and teachers, technically referred to as *mesosystem*osystem grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological system theory, are considered rather vital in educational attainment. In a learning community, students, teachers, administrators, and parents are deemed as equal participants to mingle the in-and-out-of-school learning experiences (Day, 2000). The rationale behind developing this mode of partnership is to boost learning opportunities (Warren & Young, 2002). Over the last few decades, research on parental involvement has augmented notably (Marschall, 2006). Several studies (e.g., Calfee, 1997; Purcell-Gates, 2000) have documented the link between parent involvement and a broad range of schooling outcomes, claiming that when children's learning is supported at home, a positive academic achievement is shown at school.

Given that behaviors reflect beliefs and influence individuals' ultimate intentions, parents' underlying beliefs concerning schooling and different didactic issues may be an indispensable key to understanding the diverse activities that parents engage in with their children. As Sternberg (1985) denotes, studying the implicit theories of laypeople is beneficial to grasp what they truly mean. What matters here is how these theories or beliefs relate to people's behaviors. In retrospect, unveiling core beliefs of various parties in the school community (especially parents) toward teaching and learning seem to impact numerous pedagogical processes (Warren & Young, 2002). Assessment, as a multifunctional educational mechanism with varying purposes (Boud, 1995), has long engaged the minds of not only teachers and students but also their parents. For many years, community and specifically parents have looked at assessment as a reliable tool for accomplishing social goals (Brown, Kennedy, Fok, Chan, & Yu, 2009), and thus, have expected teachers to implement assessments frequently as a rudimentary schooling tactic.

On the whole, parent participation should underpin all strands of school policy particularly assessment, given that "assessment does not stand outside teaching, but stands in direct interaction with it" (Gipps, 1994, p. 261). Therefore, to better understand parents' hidden perspectives and plan appropriate development, it is necessary to make assessment-related conceptions explicit and visible. Pioneered by Brown (2004), whose work laid an important theoretical foundation for the study of assessment-related beliefs, different conceptions of teachers and students toward assessment within the Iranian context have been meticulously probed in a number of studies set out by Pishghadam and colleagues (e.g., Pishghadam, Adamson, Shayesteh, & Kan, 2013; Pishghadam, Brown, & Shayesteh (2013); Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2012). However, idiosyncratic perceptions of parents as a part of the teaching and learning system have not been researched. Thus, this study attempts to shed new light on parents' conceptual understanding of assessment by drawing links between four conceptions of assessment put forward by Brown (2004) (i.e., improvement, external, affect, irrelevance) with respect to external factors, including parents' gender, major, and degree, and subsequently compare and contrast their insights with those of teachers and students from previous studies done in the field to see if they indeed contradict or complement one another. In sum, the current study intends to meticulously answer the following questions:

1. Do parents conceive of assessment as a means of students' improved learning (improvement), a result of uncontrollable external factors (external), a tool for positive social and emotional impacts (affect), or an irrelevant issue (relevant) to their children's academic achievement?

2. Does parents' gender significantly influence their various conceptions of assessment?
3. Do parents' majors significantly influence their various conceptions of assessment?
4. Do parents' educational degrees significantly influence their various conceptions of assessment?
5. Do parents, teachers, and students have similar conceptions toward assessment?

Theoretical Framework

Assessment

Assessment in the classroom has become a prevalent denominator in academic contexts across different countries and educational cultures (Remesal, 2007). Assessments as a multifaceted phenomenon, serve diverse functions. They maintain program selection decisions and evaluate students' improvements. Assessments can also provide information to administrators about teaching effectiveness (Biggs, 2003) and to students about learning enhancement (Gibbs, 2006), as well as manifest schools' quality assurance and creditability (Ramsden, 2003). In brief, according to Remesal (2006), assessment can proceed from one extreme of a pedagogical conception of assessment to the opposite extreme of an accounting conception of assessment. The former indicates that assessment functions as a tool for the teaching and learning improvement and the latter insight implies that assessment is a tool for social control, a means to approve students' final results, and consequently is looked at as a way of exposing teachers' expertise.

Another analogous perspective toward assessment centres around the distinction between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). While the first idea views assessment as transmission of knowledge and a mechanism of testing students' ability to recreate information, the second idea views assessment as a facilitating process of critical thinking and an integral constituent of the learning course for problem analysis and application (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002). The heterogeneity of conceptions of assessment is likely to mirror the diversity in prior experiences and the way assessments function within an educational regime (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2012). Recently, a body of research has been devoted to conceptions of assessment, probing teachers' and students' conventional beliefs and understandings, to provide the groundwork for better understanding the influence of assessment on learning and teaching (e.g., Brown, 2004, 2008). However, the role of parents as undeniable academic members has seemingly gone unnoticed thus far.

Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment

In schools, assessments are generally school- and teacher-based, often because radical decisions upon the final certification of the students are principally made by the relevant teachers (Remesal, 2007). Accordingly, teachers are required to be assessment literate (DeLuca & Bellara, 2013). Assessment literate teachers are familiar with how to develop, administer, and score assessments, and provide accurate data-driven decisions about student learning (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2012). Teachers' apprenticeship is in part influenced by their basic beliefs concerning teaching, learning, and the aims of assessment (Brown, 2004). For instance,

according to Watkins, Dahlin, and Ekholm (2005), teachers' attitudes toward teaching concerning what must be learned, affects their conceptual understandings of assessment, the materials they choose to assess, and the way they assess their students learning outcomes. Indeed, teachers hold disparate conceptions toward assessment principles. Harris and Brown (2009) recognized seven contradictory conceptions which teachers revealed in response to assessment practices: "compliance, external reporting, reporting to parents, extrinsically motivating students, organizing group instruction, teacher use for individualizing learning, and joint teacher-student use for individualizing learning" (p. 365). Likewise, Delandshere and Jones (1999) pinpointed their pertinent findings based on the following dimensions: intention and function of assessment, teachers' understanding of curriculum and their self-efficacy, and their conceit about teaching, learning, and learners. In a different categorization, Brown (2008) proposed that teachers' perceptions of the purpose of assessment captured four inter-correlated major factors: improvement, school accountability, student accountability, and irrelevance. Employing this paradigm, Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2012) investigated a group of Iranian teachers and reported student accountability as their dominant perspective toward assessment, which was in sharp contrast to the studies carried out earlier in New Zealand (Brown, 2011) and Queensland (Brown, Lake, & Matters, 2011) where teachers endorsed *improvement* as the fundamental aim of assessment approach. Pishghdam, Adamson, Shayesteh, and Kan (2013) added the element of teacher burnout and verified its probable association with the four mentioned conceptions, and concluded that those teachers with negative attitude toward assessment were more susceptible to different dimensions of burnout.

Students' Conceptions of Assessment

If students are to be active participants of any educational system, then it is of paramount importance to delve into their conceptions and elemental beliefs (Pishghadam, Fatemi, Askarzade Torghabeh, & Navari, 2011). In an attempt, Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) concluded that there exists a meaningful association between students' conceptions of assessment and their academic achievement. Ramsden (1992) advocates that assessment shapes students' perception of learning. Further, students are required to find out the essence of assessment process in order to be effective learners (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002). Students' assessment-related attitudes and experiences impact their approach to learning the extent to which they make use of the feedback in their future study (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Recently it has been sugggested that to make assessment more lucid to both students and teachers, specifying the assessment framework and providing them with written information such as assessment criteria and grades are all key elements (Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003).

Nevertheless, students' interpretations of criteria differ extensively, often mediated by miscellaneous factors. For exemple, Gibbs and Simpson (2004) pointed out that students' learning is regulated by expectations formed through assessment tasks, which can also be inspired by the schools' belief policies in terms of the nature of learning and further major pedagogical trends. Students' perceptions of assessment(s) can chiefly stem from their past experiences and previous assessments, students commonly hold a negative perspective toward assessment due to some probable consequences on their lives (Harris, Harnett, & Brown, 2009) such as frequency of assessments and teachers' subjective decisions (Moni, van Kraayenoord, & Baker, 2002), and students' negative perceptions of the role of assessment in decision making could exhibit a lack of trust which leads to a noticeable decline in both students' educational

performance and implementation of the germane feedback in future activities (Fletcher et al., 2012). Nevertheless, students, like teachers, enjoy distinctive interpretations of assessment principles. Based on Brown's (2008) taxonomy, students have four robust conceptions of the purposes of assessment: improvement, external attribution, affect, and irrelevance. From this perspective, Brown, Peterson, and Irving (2009) claimed that unlike external factors that correlate negatively with grades, endorsement of improvement purposes give rise to higher scores in mathematics.

Parents' Involvement and Conceptions of Assessment

For decades, parents have been given an absolute role as consumers in education (Holden, Hughes, & Desforged, 1993). Their involvement in their children's education has been extensively accepted as desirable and even mandatory for effective schooling (Comer & Haynes, 1991). Developing collaborative relationships between parents and schools has been found critical in pedagogical attainments contributing to improved educational and social outcomes for the students (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Simon, 2001). For instance, Iverson, Brownlee, and Walberg (1981) reported a meaningful relationship between parents' number of contacts with the school and their child's enhanced reading ability. From a different perspective, Englund, Luckner, Whaley, and Egeland (2004) highlighted the influence of mothers' instructions on young children's learning achievements.

The concept of parents' involvement appears to be a complex construct relying on the premise that parents may display a wide variety of behaviors in responding to their children's schooling and education (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). While earlier research on parent involvement was based upon a unidimensional approach investigating the exclusive association between parents' behaviors and their children's outcome (Stevenson & Baker, 1987), more recent studies identified the multidimensional nature of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995; Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). In particular, parent involvement may take several forms. Building upon Epstein's (1995) ecological framework, there are six types of involvement varying from proximal to distal: (1) parenting: establishing a supportive home environment; (2) communicating: diverse ways of home and school communication; (3) volunteering: asking parents for help; (4) learning at home: parents helping their children with their homework; (5) decision making: engaging parents in school decisions; and (6) collaborating with community: improving schools, teachers, and parents collaborations.

Some researchers have considered parents' expectations and aspirations for their children's academic attainments as a sort of involvement (e.g., Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997). Given that parents' expectations and aspirations may severely anticipate childrens' educational success and behavior (Halle et al., 1997), parental conceptions may presumably contribute to similar results as well. As an extension to this issue, the study presented here has attempted to contribute an additional dimension of involvement that we called *parents' conceptual involvement*. This term bolsters Epstein's (1995) parenting, which deals primarily with providing an accommodative home environment. On the whole, all these modes of involvements picture this very belief to the children that school is an important context (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007).

From amongst diverse pedagogical activities implemented at schools, assessments seem to be of paramount importance since they provide evidence about the value of teaching and learning and identically direct or alter students' educational outcomes. Within the current

assessment situations, parents may adopt diverse roles including the receivers of grades and reports and participants in parent-teacher associations. Meanwhile, assessment, an integral part of the education pathway, is high stakes for everyone involved, thus necessitating parents as companions of students and teachers to carry better understandings and expectations concerning its intentions and procedures (Fletcher, 2012). Although teachers' and students' beliefs about assessment-related matters have been investigated before, little is known about the belief system of parents as behind-the-curtain active members. Besides, schools and educational policy makers are eager to know what parents truly want in terms of assessment. A preliminary review of the literature revealed that seemingly no study has thus far probed parents' distinct conceptions toward assessment. Therefore, further investigation is needed to demonstrate how parents conceive of assessment and if any type of external factors including their age, gender, or degree may likely effect idiosyncratic interpretation of assessment.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted on a subset of 180 Iranian parents (30 males and 150 females) within the age range of 29 to 60 (M=41.2, SD=7.2). The parents were chosen from among three local schools of Mashhad, a city in Northeast Iran. Subsequent to convenience sampling, the parents were selected based on their willingness to participate. Ethics were obtained and approved prior to commencing the study and collecting data. Participants were initially informed that their identities would not be revealed and their responses would be kept confidential and used for the purpose of research only. Parents had a wide variety of majors such as medicine, engineering, arts, humanities, and sciences, and held different educational degrees including diploma (N=71), associate degree (AD) (N=21), bachelor of science/arts (BS/BA; N=54), master of science/arts (MS/MA; N=24), and doctor of philosophy (PhD; N=8). Given this asymmetrical distribution, the data were aggregated into diploma (N=71), under graduate (N=75), and postgraduate (N=32) status to be used for inferential analysis. These parents had children studying at elementary, high school, or university levels.

Instrument

To measure parents' conceptions of the nature and structure of assessment, Brown's (2008) Students' Conceptions of Assessment (SCoA) inventory was translated and modified to fit the external factor categories. The underlying reason we utilized the SCoA and not the TCoA (Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment) was that, technically and semantically, SCoA items were more pertinent to be further modified for the parents. Moreover, the rationale behind this modification was to be able to compare Iranian parents' assessment-oriented views with those of teachers' and students', evaluated earlier by the authors.

Afterwards, two experts in educational assessment were asked to substantiate the validity of the modified scale. The measure was then entitled Parents' Conceptions of Assessment (PCoA; see appendix) and was piloted with a couple of parents for quality and comprehensiveness. Finally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to substantiate its construct validity. The inventory consisted of 33 self-reported items in which parents indicated the degree to which they agreed with each statement about the purpose of assessment. In keeping with the original

version of the measure, responses were indicated with a six-point, positively-packed rating scale (i.e., strongly disagree=1, mostly disagree=2, slightly agree=3, moderately agree=4, mostly agree=5, and strongly agree=6; Brown, 2004).

In accordance with the SCoA inventory, PCoA engendered scores for four purposes of assessment, since it has been shown that conceptions of assessment were multi-dimensional (Weekers, Brown, & Veldkamp, 2009). All the PCoA factors (i.e., improvement, affect, irrelevance, and external attribution) have two first-order factors (affect: enjoy and class; irrelevance: irrelevant and bad; improvement: student and teacher; and external: school and future). The overall reliability estimate obtained for the current study was .82 varying from .77 to .84 for each single construct. Each major construct of PCoA was defined as:

- Assessment leads to improved learning and teaching (improvement);
- Assessment is correlated with external factors outside their own control encompassing school quality and student futures (external);
- Assessment owns positive social and emotional impacts on learners (affect); and
- Assessment is bad, unfair, and ignored, and meddles with students' learning (irrelevance).

Data Analysis

In this study a number of parents were asked to fill out the PCoA. Subsequently, the gathered data were entered into and analyzed with SPSS 20 and AMOS 18. It must be mentioned that parents were supervised carefully at the time of completing the scale, therefore no missing data were reported. The internal reliability of the scale was calculated using the Alpha Cronbach method. Employing SEM, confirmatory factor analysis was employed to identify if the four-factor model of the SCoA could be retrieved from the responses of the sample parents. Once the satisfactory measurement model was established, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to investigate the role of the external factors including gender, major, and degree in parents' various conceptions of assessment. Post hoc Tukey tests were run to locate the exact areas of differences.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The required data were gathered through the PCoA. Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of the parents' conceptions along with their correlations.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of PCoA and Factor Inter-Correlations

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	1	2	3	4
Irrelevance	3.5	6.696	180				
Affect	4.1	8.130	180	-.46			
Improvement	4.72	8.239	180	-.21	.65		
External Attribution	3.7	5.817	180	-.27	.63	.71	.87

Table 2

Multivariate Tests for the Significance of the Differences among Means Variables

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.983	2482.140	4.00	176.00	.00
	Wilks' Lambda	.017	2482.140	4.00	176.00	.00
	Hotelling's Trace	56.412	2482.140	4.00	176.00	.00
	Roy's Largest Root	56.412	2482.140	4.00	176.00	.00

As the table suggests, Improvement and Irrelevance, respectively, carry the highest and lowest mean values among the other constructs, which actually reveal the extent to which each construct has been endorsed by participants. That is to say, Improvement as a general purpose was the most strongly endorsed construct; yet, Irrelevance received the weakest endorsement. In addition, the obtained standard deviation (SD) estimates imply that while External Attribution is the most homogenous construct, the widest heterogeneity is observed within Improvement. Concerning factor inter-correlations, there is a logically cogent pattern between Irrelevance and the three factors. Negative association implies that the more assessment is an indicator of these three purposes, the less it is assumed irrelevant. Furthermore, the highest correlation is observed between External Attribution and Improvement, indicating that parents consider no conflict between the conceit of improvement and evaluating schools or predicting students' future. Likewise, Affect presents a considerable degree of relationship with Improvement and External Attribution.

In order to determine if the differences among the mean values are significant, multivariate tests (Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, Roy's Largest Root) were applied to the data. The results manifested that the differences among means were statistically significant (Table 2).

SEM Parameter Estimates

Fulfilling the primary aim of the study, SEM was run to see if the four-factor, inter-correlated model of the PCoA could be recovered from the responses of the sample parents. The following model was specified for the analysis of the current study (Fig. 1). In order to examine the adequacy of the model goodness of fit indices were extracted (Table 3).

Goodness of fit indices used in this study were: χ^2/df (Chi-square divided by the degrees of freedom), AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index), IFI (Incremental Fit Index), TLI (the Tucker-Lewis Index), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), and RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation). An acceptable model was indicated by $\chi^2/df < 3$, AGFI > .90, IFI > .90, TLI >. 90, CFI > .90, and RMSEA < .08. In all, we adjusted the error loadings to 1 so that the evaluation of the model indicated a good fit to the data.

Table 3

Goodness of Fit Indices

Fit Index	***x²/df***	**AGFI**	**IFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**
Acceptable Range	< 3.00			>.90		< 0.08
	2.12	0.92	0.93	0.90	0.91	0.04

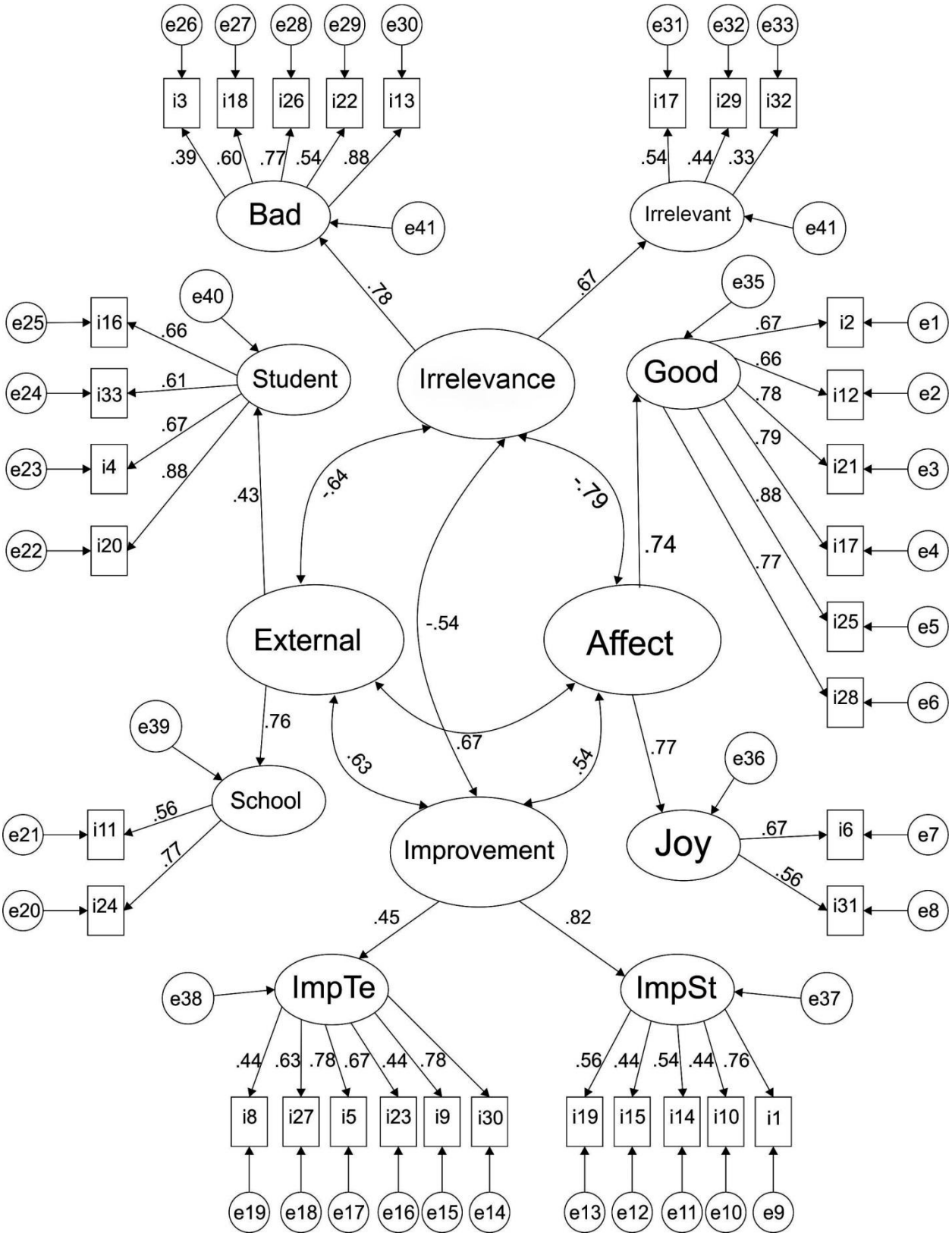

Figure 1. PCoA Measurement Model and Correlation of the Four Factors.

Table 4

Results of Multivariate Tests on the Role of Degree in the Four Parents' Conceptions of Assessment

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Degree	Irrelevance	1086.95	5	217.39	5.45	.00	.13
	Affect	2682.61	5	536.52	10.20	.00	.22
	External	665.34	5	133.06	4.29	.10	.09
	Improvement	1100.49	5	220.09	3.46	.19	.09
Gender	Irrelevance	33.23	2	16.11	.44	.53	.03
	Affect	24.62	2	11.77	.36	.24	.01
	External	19.90	2	10.23	.31	.45	.01
	Improvement	30.11	2	15.67	.25	.45	.01
Major	Irrelevance	140.15	4	35.33	1.45	.43	.02
	Affect	146.21	4	37.12	1.40	.45	.02
	External	139.34	4	36.03	1.59	.45	.02
	Improvement	270.59	4	47.29	2.78	.36	.06

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the PCoA. Within the SEM model, the path numbers show the standardized estimates of the model parameters (correlation coefficients). Moreover, the numbers shown above rectangles (observed variables), and circles (latent variables) indicate the variation explained by the path leading to it. Inspecting the interwoven relationships, it is concluded that the model represents well the responses of our sample parents.

MANOVA

The second intention of this study was to explore if there were any significant differences among parents' different assessment-related conceptual beliefs with respect to external factors including gender, major, and degree.

A close investigation of the likely role of the aforementioned independent variables displayed that gender and major did not make any significant distinctions among the four inter-correlated parental beliefs in terms of assessment. Hence, the influence of degree was analyzed in greater details (Table 4).

As the table exhibits, except for Irrelevance ($F = 5.45$, $p < .05$) and Affect ($F = 10.20$, $p < .05$), no significant difference is seen among other constructs of assessment. The table also reveals that degree accounts for 13% of the variance in Irrelevance (Partial Eta Squared = .13) and 22% of the variance in Affect (Partial Eta Squared = .22).

Since the MANOVA demonstrated a significant difference among the four conceptions of assessment post hoc Tukey tests were carried out to see where exactly the differences lie. Tables 5 and 6 summarize the results of the influence of degree on Irrelevance and Affect, respectively.

Table 5

Results of Post Hoc Tukey Test for Irrelevance

Degree	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Diploma	71	15.77		
AD/BA/BS	75		16.15	
MA/MS/PhD	34			23.19
Sig.		.981	.108	.976

Table 6

Results of Post Hoc Tukey Test for Affect

Degree	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
MA/MS/PhD	34	21.43		
AD/BA/BS	75		27.12	
Diploma	71			34.11
Sig.		.981	.108	.976

As seen in Table 5, parents holding MA/MS/PhD degrees (M=23.19) more than their counterparts with AD/BA/BS (M=16.15) or diplomas (M=15.77) deem Irrelevance as an indicator of assessment.

MA/MS/PhD > AD/BA/BS > Diploma

Quite different, Table 6 exhibits that parents holding diplomas (M=34.11) more than their counterparts with AD/BA/BS degrees (M=27.12) or MA/MS/PhD degrees (M=21.43) believe that assessment carries positive social and emotional impact on their children.

Diploma > AD/BA/BS > MA/MS/PhD

Discussion and Conclusion

Parents' involvement activities that are effectively planned and well implemented continuously support and encourage their children's academic achievement. Meanwhile their vital partnership with teachers and school staff is of paramount importance. An undeniable aspect of this process is the identification of core beliefs held by those involved, especially parents. Parents should be aware of how powerful they are and how influential their beliefs might be on children's perspectives of assessment. Among miscellaneous educational procedures, assessment deserves adequate attention since multiple pedagogical decisions are made upon it.

Table 7

Teachers', Students', and Parents' Dominant Conceptions of Assessment

Participants	Dominant Conception of Assessment
Teachers	Student Accountability
Students	Improvement
Parents	Improvement

Bearing this in mind, we aimed to evaluate parents' views toward assessment by drawing linkage between four underlying conceits of assessment set forth by Brown (2008) with reference to external factors encompassing parents' gender, major, and degree. Ultimately, it was intended to compare and contrast the obtained results with teachers' and students' assessment-oriented beliefs discovered previously within the Iranian context.

Administering PCoA inventory to 180 parents, its multi-dimensional, hierarchical structure was recovered with acceptable levels of fit. Afterwards, it was deduced that our sample parents chiefly conceive of assessment as a process of improvement. That is to say, parents generally believe that assessment leads to improved teaching and learning. In this regard, their conceptual involvement as well as their physical involvement may help expedite this didactic procedure. This finding is consistent with the body of research literature showing that parents' meaningful involvement contributes to students' academic achievement and success (Calfee, 1997; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Warren & Young, 2002). It is likely to infer that, students in general and Iranian students in particular typically tend to study only if some sort of assessment is ahead. Therefore, parents' dominant view of assessment is justifiable this way, since it pushes their children to study more and make further progress. This may also be the reason that parents' expect teachers to perform assessment activities regularly (Brown et al., 2009).

While we have little argument with the general premise stated above, we feel the need to know if parents, teachers, and students, as cooperating members of a joint partnership, have similar views toward assessment. In doing so, we reviewed previous studies (i.e., Pishghadam et al., 2013; Pishghadam, Adamson et al., 2013; Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2012) carried out within the educational context of Iran. Table 7 summarizes the outcomes.

Even if parents and students are on the same wavelength viewing assessment as an improvement tool, teachers often consider this educational practice as a responsibility and burden on the students' shoulders. Assessment does not seem to be as noteworthy to teachers as it is to students and their parents. A possible line of explanation could be that, according to Pishghadam, Adamson et al. (2013) and Clouse (1983), due to constant environmental pressures and restrictions, teachers may lose their necessary interest and motivation, and eventually experience some degree of burnout. Thus, teachers can shut their eyes to the most rudimentary intention of assessment (i.e., improvement) and perceive it negatively as a lackluster and time-consuming practice. Teaching is not improved because assesments serves as a mere tool for students and their parents to get informed of student accomplishments or failures (Guthrie, 2002). Based on findings by Fletcher et al. (2012), an absence of clear school policies and lack of transparency in terms of assessment practices can put an end to such concepts of assessment.

Concerning the second aim of the study, it was found that amongst the presupposed independent variables (gender, major, and degree), only parents' educational degree played a substantial role in their assessment-related conceptions of irrelevance and affect. Factors such

as level of education impact parents' amount of involvement in different ways (Shumow, Lyutykh, & Schmidt, 2011) as well as their lay perceptions accordingly. Based on the Tukey tests, the following conclusions were drawn. First, parents holding MA/MS/PhD degrees regard assessment as more irrelevant than those with AD/BA/BS or diploma degrees. This indicates that the more educated the parents are, the more they neglect assessment and look at it as bad, inaccurate, and unfair. One probable reason may be that parents with higher levels of education have gone through similar academic steps and have deduced that improvements occur regardless of carrying out diverse modes of assessment activities. Parents may come to believe that assessment has negative influences on their children's life and is a major source of stress and frustration (Shepard, 2000) because they view it as an irrelevant educational technique to learning procedures. In an identical attempt, Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2012) examined the influence of teachers' academic degrees on the four conceptions of assessment. In accordance with parents' views, teachers also revealed that the more educated they become, the more they deem assessment as irrelevant. Sharing this common view, it is esteemed that passing through PhD courses and experiencing assessment procedures, which are somewhat different in essence from the ones performed earlier in lower educational levels, teachers and parents get to deal with a fresh and rather subjective nature of this behavior and then change their view to a more negative outlook.

From a different perspective, the second conclusion entails that parents holding a diploma conceive of assessment as an indicator of affect to a greater extent when compared to those with AD/BA/BS or MA/MS/PhD degrees. This suggests that parents with lower levels of education may think that assessments carry positive social and emotional impacts on their children. Parents may actually suppose that assessments encourage a sense of cooperation and joy among children and their classmates. This idea derives from the assumption that less educated parents simply look at assessment in a more positive and conventional manner and promotes social and pedagogical opportunities (Warren & Young, 2002).

Taken together, three implications may be drawn from the outcomes of this study. First and foremost, school staff are required to incorporate parents' strengths and get more acquainted with their core belief systems, specifically the ones related to assessment practices, since their conceptions may likely be analogous to their children's and can depict their incontrovertible influence on their children's social and educational life. Second, schools' assessment policies should be brought to light or even modified to alter highly-educated parents' unfavorable insights to more favorable ones. Moreover, creating and sustaining seamless links between home and school contexts and involving parents in various school-based activities can aid to encourage them to trust the school and administrative protocols and cast positive shades on parents' pessimism about assessment. Third, educators should make efforts to understand rationales for discrepancies in parents' conceptions and consider ways to explain the promising functions of this educational attitude to them.

Last but not least, this study provides some initial insights on parents' conceptions of assessment. However, there is still much work to be done on understanding the complex set of supportive relations and belief systems of those involved in children's assessment. It is also necessary to explore parents' understandings of assessment within and across different cultures. It must be reminded that studies of this kind are not without limitations. Due to our unrepresentative and restricted sampling, caution must be exercised before the results are generalized to other contexts. This study did not have an equal number of male and female participants and mainly mothers (as the representative of each family) took part in the

evaluation process. Furthermore, our findings are built upon a self-reported measure that may be slightly biased considering that participants may not yield accurate responses to conceal their actual self.

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Appendix

Parents' Conceptions of Assessment Inventory (PCoA)

1. I pay attention to my child's assessment results in order to focus on what s/he could do better next time.
2. Assessment encourages students to work together and help each other.
3. Assessment is unfair to students.
4. Assessment results show how intelligent my child is.
5. Assessment helps teachers track my child's progress.
6. Assessment is an engaging and enjoyable experience for my child.
7. I ignore assessment information.
8. Assessment is a way to determine how much my child has learned from teaching.
9. Assessment is checking off my child's progress against achievement objectives or standards.
10. I make use of the feedback my child gets to improve his/her learning.
11. Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing.
12. Assessment motivates my child and his/her classmates to help each other.
13. Assessment interferes with my child's learning.
14. I look at what my child got wrong or did poorly on to guide what s/he should learn next.
15. I use assessments to take responsibility for my child's next learning steps.
16. Assessment results predict my child's future performance.
17. The class becomes more supportive when my child and his/her classmates are assessed.
18. Teachers are over-assessing.
19. I use assessments to identify what my child needs to study next.
20. Assessment is important for my child's future career or job.
21. When they do assessments, there is a good atmosphere in my child's class.
22. Assessment results are not very accurate.
23. My child's teachers use assessment to help him/her improve.
24. Assessment measures the worth or quality of schools.
25. Assessment makes my child's class cooperate more with each other.
26. Assessment is value-less.
27. Teachers use my child's assessment results to see what s/he needs to teach him/her next.
28. When my child is assessed, his/her class becomes more motivated to learn.
29. I ignore or throw away my child's assessment results.
30. Assessment shows whether my child can analyze and think critically about a topic.

31. I find my child really enjoying learning when s/he is assessed.
32. Assessment has little impact on my child's learning.
33. Assessment tells me how much my child has learned.