

Perceptions of Different Assessments Formats by Students from Master's Programmes at Karolinska Institutet

Pawel Kozielowicz

Molecular Pharmacology of GPCRs, Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

INTRODUCTION & AIM

Assessment is often considered the most powerful driver of student learning behavior, shaping what students focus on and how they study (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

In biomedical and health-science education, where factual precision and analytical reasoning are essential, traditional written examinations have long dominated assessment practices. Yet, such methods can privilege memorization and isolated recall over integrated conceptual understanding (Sambell et al., 2013).

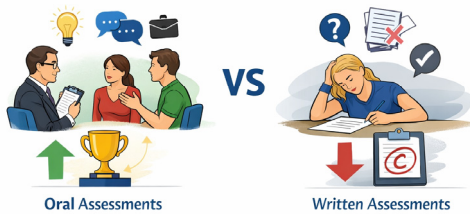
In response, educators have reintroduced oral and interactive assessments – such as *viva voce* examinations, presentations, and discussions - to encourage synthesis, critical thinking, and communication. Evidence suggests that these formats promote deeper learning and better retention (Huxham et al., 2010). Within this framework, oral assessments - often accompanied by immediate dialogue - can enhance feedback literacy and self-regulated learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

However, oral assessments also raise concerns about anxiety, fairness, and linguistic inequity, particularly in international classrooms (Joughin, 2010). Thus, effective design must balance challenge and support.

Karolinska Institutet hosts eight own global/international master's programmes emphasizing research-led and collaborative pedagogy. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds bring varied expectations regarding assessment fairness and format.

This study explores how these students perceive oral and written assessments within Karolinska Institutet master's programmes in Translational Physiology and Pharmacology, Global Health, and Bioentrepreneurship, contributing to ongoing discourse on assessment reform in biomedical higher education.

I hypothesised that oral assessments would be rated more positively than written assessments.



METHODS

Convergent mixed-methods design

N = 33 students across three programmes

11 Likert-scale questions (1–5) and 5 open-ended questions:

Survey sections:

1. Background and previous experience
2. Conceptual understanding and deeper learning
3. Engagement and motivation
4. Career preparedness and skill development

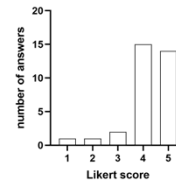
Analysis: Themes + Descriptive medians + Mann–Whitney subgroup analyses

Thematic analysis: six core themes



RESULTS & DISCUSSION

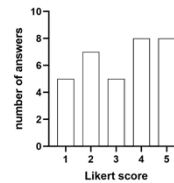
Written summative assessments help me consolidate factual knowledge



Open-ended answers:

- "In oral exams you need to explain your reasoning, which makes you realise what you actually understand."
- "It was great to explain the methods aloud - it showed what I really knew."

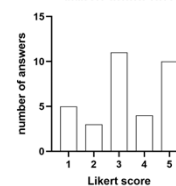
I find oral summative assessments more stressful than written ones



Open-ended answers:

- "The pressure that I need to be able to answer immediately."
- "You feel on the spot during oral assessments."

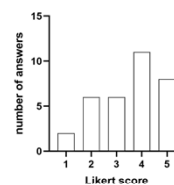
I feel more motivated to prepare for oral summative assessments than for written ones



Open-ended answers:

- "For oral presentations, my motivation is that I need to explain it clearly in front of others."
- "Knowing I will present makes me prepare more thoroughly."

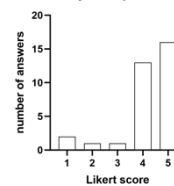
I engage more actively when assessments are formative rather than summative



Open-ended answers:

- "Reflection from classmates and professor"
- "Feedback helped me see what to improve before the final assessment."

I feel that oral formative assessments better reflect the communication demands of my future profession



Open-ended answers:

- "Presentations felt closest to real professional situations."
- "This is what we will actually need to do in our careers."



Significant for:

- "I feel that oral formative assessments better reflect the communication demands of my future profession."
- $U = 66.5 \mid p = 0.008$

CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ Oral and written assessments serve complementary functions
- ✓ Formative assessment acts as engagement catalyst
- ✓ Emotional dimensions modulate experience
- ✓ Balanced examinations supports cognitive and professional growth

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