

Philosophical Integration and the Role of Lecturers in Guiding Alternative Assessments for General Studies Courses

Nurshuhada Mohamed, Farah Syazrah Mohd Ghazalli, Nur
Syahirah Mohamad Nasir, Farah Roslan

Senior Lecturer at Faculty of Fundamental Studies and Advanced Learning, UniSZA

Email: shuhadamohamed@unisza.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i12/24293> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i12/24293

Published Date: 24 December 2024

Abstract

This article examines the integration of alternative assessments, such as role-plays and debates, in general studies courses like *Philosophy and Current Issues* and the critical role of lecturers in facilitating these assessments. General studies aim to cultivate critical thinking and ethical reasoning, but the implementation of innovative assessment strategies remains a challenge. The study addresses the problem of aligning assessment methods with philosophical learning outcomes, emphasizing the need for structured lecturer guidance and clear evaluation criteria to ensure student success. A quantitative survey method was employed, gathering responses from 122 students enrolled in FIS courses. The data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Findings reveal that 82% of students benefited from consistent lecturer guidance, 71.3% reported improved philosophical understanding through role-plays, and 79.5% found rubrics integral to clarifying task requirements. These results highlight the interconnected roles of alternative assessments, lecturer scaffolding, and structured feedback in enhancing learning outcomes. The study concludes that effective philosophical education requires active learning strategies supported by lecturer facilitation and transparent assessment tools. Future research should explore the integration of digital tools and AI-driven feedback systems to further support alternative assessments in philosophical education. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how these approaches influence long-term critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills.

Keywords: Alternative Assessments, Philosophical Education, Lecturer Guidance, Role-Play, Rubrics

Introduction

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (Higher Education) emphasizes fostering holistic,

entrepreneurial, and balanced graduates. Central to this mission, General Studies is a qualification that all Malaysian and international undergraduate students of public and private education institutions in Malaysia must complete and pass before being awarded an undergraduate or honours degree. One of the general studies courses such as Philosophy and Current Issues aim to instill critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and philosophical reflection among students. These courses require innovative teaching methodologies and alternative assessments to achieve their objectives effectively.

Alternative assessments, including role-plays and debates, challenge students to apply philosophical theories to real-world scenarios. Such assessments are not only practical but also reflective, requiring a scaffolded learning approach supported by lecturers. The lecturer's role extends beyond mere instruction to that of a facilitator, mentor, and evaluator, ensuring that students can navigate the intricacies of philosophical concepts and their practical applications.

This study explores the interplay between alternative assessments and lecturer involvement in MPU courses. By integrating quantitative survey data and pedagogical theories, this paper seeks to identify effective strategies to optimize student engagement and learning outcomes. Key questions addressed include:

- How do alternative assessments enhance philosophical understanding in general studies courses?
- What role do lecturers play in scaffolding student success during these assessments?
- How does access to structured resources, such as rubrics and AI tools, contribute to learning efficacy?

The findings provide a roadmap for lecturers and administrators to design and implement more effective alternative assessment frameworks, ensuring alignment with both educational goals and student needs.

Literature Review

i. Philosophical Understanding through Role-Play and Debates

Engaging students with alternative assessments, such as role-plays or debates, helps them apply philosophical concepts in practical scenarios. These methods not only deepen understanding but also encourage students to reflect on their values and ethical stances (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Role-play and debates are powerful pedagogical tools that immerse students in active, experiential learning. By simulating real-life situations or adopting theoretical perspectives, students engage directly with philosophical concepts, translating abstract ideas into tangible experiences. Role-play, for example, might involve students taking on roles as proponents of specific philosophical theories, such as a utilitarian debating a deontologist on the morality of an action. This method encourages deeper comprehension by requiring students to analyze, synthesize, and apply philosophical arguments rather than passively memorizing them (McCarthy & Taylor, 2022). The act of role-playing itself fosters empathy and an ability to see philosophical dilemmas from diverse perspectives, which are critical for internalizing complex theories like relativism or existentialism (Baleni, 2015).

Debates, on the other hand, challenge students to defend and critique philosophical positions in a dynamic, real-time environment. This process promotes critical thinking, as students must construct coherent arguments while addressing counterarguments. According

to Lim and Selvaratnam (2023), structured debates not only improve the retention of philosophical ideas but also enhance students' ability to articulate their positions persuasively. For example, a debate on whether individual freedom should be prioritized over societal good forces students to evaluate concepts such as Rousseau's social contract theory or Mill's principle of liberty. These debates compel students to evaluate evidence critically, a key skill in philosophical inquiry, while exposing them to a spectrum of perspectives that enrich their understanding.

Moreover, these methods help students connect philosophy to real-world applications, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Role-playing scenarios such as ethical dilemmas in business or environmental decision-making enable students to understand how philosophical theories underpin everyday decision-making processes. Research indicates that students involved in such exercises report a 40% improvement in their ability to relate theoretical frameworks to practical contexts (McCarthy & Taylor, 2022). By simulating scenarios requiring ethical reasoning, students grasp the relevance of abstract philosophical ideas to societal challenges, such as climate change or corporate governance, cultivating both intellectual and moral development.

Lastly, role-play and debates support reflective learning, a critical component of philosophical education. After participating in these activities, students often engage in guided reflection to evaluate their performance and understanding, solidifying their grasp of philosophical concepts. Black and Wiliam (2018) highlight that such metacognitive exercises improve students' ability to self-assess their understanding and growth. For instance, reflecting on a debate about justice may prompt students to reconsider their biases or deepen their commitment to certain ethical principles. This reflective component, combined with the active engagement of role-plays and debates, ensures that students achieve a holistic and enduring comprehension of philosophical thought.

ii. The Importance of Lecturer Guidance in Alternative Assessments

Lecturer involvement is crucial in guiding students through the complexities of philosophical assignments. Structured consultations, both face-to-face and digital, ensure that students receive continuous feedback and can refine their understanding of the subject matter (Yusof & Zakaria, 2021). Through structured consultations whether in person or via digital platforms like email and messaging apps lecturers act as mentors who clarify ambiguous instructions, offer constructive feedback, and address individual student concerns. This ongoing interaction not only strengthens students' grasp of the subject matter but also boosts their confidence in articulating their ideas.

Yusof and Zakaria (2021), emphasize that regular consultations enhance students' academic performance and deepen their engagement with course material, a finding supported by survey data showing that 85.2% of students value lecturers' availability for task-related discussions. The personalized nature of these consultations ensures that diverse student needs are met, allowing them to refine their philosophical arguments and excel in alternative assessments like debates and role-plays.

The role of the lecturer in alternative assessments extends beyond task clarification to fostering an environment of intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. Lecturers guide

students in linking theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, such as ethical decision-making in real-world contexts. By providing rubrics, modelling effective argumentation, and suggesting resources, lecturers set clear expectations while encouraging independent exploration. The data also shows that 82% of students attribute their improved understanding to structured lecturer guidance during consultations, underscoring the pivotal role of continuous mentorship. In this relationship, lecturers not only facilitate the assessment process but also nurture a growth mindset, helping students develop essential skills like reflection, analysis, and ethical reasoning, which are integral to both academic and personal growth. Structured consultations and student performance play a vital role in ensuring that students remain on track during the assessment process. A study examining the impact of continuous lecturer-student consultations in MPU courses found that students who regularly sought feedback were more likely to perform better in both written and oral assessments (Gikandi et al., 2021).

iii. The Role of Rubrics in Philosophical Assessments

In alternative assessments involving philosophical debates or role-plays, rubrics provide students with clear criteria for success. Detailed rubrics that include critical thinking and reflective components enable students to focus their efforts on both the theoretical and practical application of concepts (Raja & Sinha, 2020). Rubrics play a focal role in philosophical assessments by offering structured and transparent criteria that guide students in achieving academic excellence. In alternative assessments such as debates and role-plays, where outcomes are subjective and multi-dimensional, rubrics help standardize evaluation by clearly defining expectations across components like argumentation, critical thinking, and reflective insight.

Raja and Sinha (2020), emphasize that rubrics serve as a communication tool between lecturers and students, reducing ambiguity and fostering a shared understanding of assessment objectives. For instance, a rubric for a debate on ethical theories might include categories like the coherence of arguments, the depth of philosophical understanding, and the ability to rebut opposing viewpoints, ensuring that students are aware of what constitutes high-quality work.

Furthermore, rubrics enhance the learning process by encouraging students to engage in self-assessment and reflection. By breaking down complex tasks into measurable criteria, rubrics empower students to evaluate their progress and identify areas for improvement. Raja and Sinha (2020), argue that this metacognitive aspect of rubric use is particularly valuable in philosophical education, where the emphasis is on cultivating critical and independent thought. For example, a rubric with a reflection component might ask students to analyze their reasoning process or explore how their philosophical stance evolved during a role-play. This approach not only deepens students' understanding of the subject but also promotes intellectual maturity and self-directed learning, key goals in philosophical pedagogy.

Additionally, rubrics contribute to equity and consistency in assessment, ensuring that all students are evaluated against the same criteria. In courses like Philosophy and Current Issues where diverse interpretations of philosophical texts are encouraged, rubrics help balance subjectivity by providing a clear framework for grading. Raja and Sinha (2020) note that detailed rubrics help lecturers maintain fairness, especially when assessing creative and

interpretive tasks like debates. This consistency is crucial for fostering trust between students and lecturers, as students are more likely to perceive the grading process as fair and objective. By providing detailed feedback through rubric-based evaluations, lecturers can also address individual student needs, reinforcing the instructional value of assessments. Thus, rubrics not only enhance the quality of philosophical assessments but also play an integral role in shaping meaningful learning experiences.

The three elements role-play and debates, lecturer guidance, and rubrics are interconnected pillars that collectively enhance philosophical learning in MPU courses. Role-play and debates actively engage students in applying philosophical theories to practical scenarios, fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning. These methods immerse students in real-world dilemmas, making abstract concepts tangible and relevant. However, their success depends heavily on lecturer guidance, which provides the necessary scaffolding for students to navigate the complexities of philosophical inquiry. Through structured consultations, lecturers clarify expectations, address challenges, and guide students in refining their arguments and reflective insights.

Rubrics bridge these two components by serving as a transparent framework that aligns student efforts with learning objectives. They ensure consistency in evaluating creative tasks like debates and role-plays while offering students clear criteria for success. By integrating reflective elements into rubrics, lecturers encourage students to self-assess and engage in deeper philosophical exploration, reinforcing the impact of role-plays and debates. Together, these three components create a cohesive learning environment where students are guided to think critically, reflectively, and systematically in their approach to philosophy.

Methodologies

This article employs a quantitative survey method to explore the relationship between alternative assessments and lecturer guidance in MPU courses, particularly in Philosophy and Current Issues course. The method is chosen to capture data on student experiences, perceptions, and outcomes related to role-plays, debates, and lecturer facilitation in philosophical learning. The study's sample consists of 122 students enrolled in FIS courses at a Malaysian higher education institution. These respondents were selected to represent a diverse cross-section of students, ensuring that the findings are generalizable within the context of general studies courses. The demographic details, though not specified in the document, reflect typical participants of general studies courses, as they focus on introductory-level philosophical learning.

The research uses a google form questionnaire technique to collect data. The questionnaire comprises structured questions addressing various aspects of lecturer guidance, role-plays, debates, and student engagement. Respondents provided their answers on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and open-ended questions allowed for qualitative input, especially on AI tool usage and assessment preferences.

The data analysis involves descriptive statistical methods to summarize student responses, with results presented as frequencies and percentages. For instance, data on the effectiveness of lecturer consultations revealed that 85.2% of students found lecturers

consistently approachable, while 79.5% emphasized the importance of rubrics in clarifying expectations. This descriptive analysis helps identify patterns and trends that inform the conclusions about the effectiveness of the methodologies used in alternative assessments.

The conceptual framework integrates constructivist learning theory with the principles of scaffolding and reflective learning. Constructivism posits that students build knowledge through active engagement, such as participating in role-plays and debates (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Scaffolding, facilitated by lecturers, ensures that students receive tailored guidance, while rubrics provide a structured path for reflection and self-assessment (Raja & Sinha, 2020). This framework emphasizes the interplay between student agency, lecturer support, and assessment tools, forming the basis for analyzing the effectiveness of these educational strategies.

Findings and Discussion

i. Alternative Assessments in Philosophical Engagement

Alternative assessments, such as role-play and debates, are transformative tools in philosophical engagement, providing students with active, experiential learning opportunities to embody and critically examine complex concepts. Role-play immerses students in the practical application of philosophical theories by assigning them roles that simulate real-world dilemmas or ethical scenarios. Survey data shows that 71.3% of students found role-play activities enhanced their ability to reflect and apply philosophical concepts. These findings align with McCarthy and Taylor (2022), who reported a 40% improvement in students' comprehension and application of theoretical ideas when engaged in role-play. This approach encourages deeper cognitive engagement, as students must internalize theories like deontology or utilitarianism to represent them effectively, fostering both intellectual growth and empathy.

Debates, as another form of alternative assessment, complement role-play by challenging students to construct and defend arguments while responding to opposing perspectives. The survey data indicates that 65.6% of students could link philosophical concepts to real-world issues through debate activities, emphasizing its efficacy in critical thinking development. Lim and Selvaratnam (2023) underscore that debates expose students to diverse viewpoints, enhancing their analytical abilities and improving knowledge retention.

For instance, debating the ethical implications of technological advancements not only familiarizes students with philosophical frameworks but also equips them with skills to address contemporary challenges, bridging theoretical knowledge with practical relevance. The interactive nature of debates fosters dialogic learning, where students refine their reasoning through constructive feedback and collaborative engagement.

The significance of these findings lies in their alignment with broader pedagogical frameworks that emphasize active learning and reflective practice. Kolb's experiential learning theory supports the use of role-play and debates, highlighting how concrete experiences and reflective observation deepen understanding and facilitate knowledge transfer (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, Black and Wiliam (2018), argue that alternative assessments are critical for formative evaluation, allowing students to identify and address gaps in their understanding. These methods are particularly suited to philosophical education,

where abstract concepts often require contextualization to be fully grasped. By enabling students to embody theories and engage in rigorous discourse, role-play and debates advance the dual goals of academic excellence and personal ethical development, making them invaluable in the context of MPU courses.

ii. Statistical Insights into Lecturer and Student Roles

Survey data from 122 students underscore the pivotal role of lecturer guidance in fostering student success in alternative assessments. Notably, 82% of respondents reported that lecturers consistently provided task-related guidance during consultations, whether face-to-face or via digital platforms. This aligns with Raja and Sinha's (2020) emphasis on scaffolding as a crucial pedagogical strategy. Lecturers act as facilitators, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications, particularly in complex philosophical topics. This consistent guidance ensures that students are not only clear about assignment expectations but also equipped to engage critically with the subject matter. Such findings highlight the indispensability of lecturer involvement in cultivating a supportive learning environment, enabling students to navigate philosophical inquiry with confidence and clarity.

Accessibility to resources also emerged as a critical factor, with 81.1% of students affirming their reliance on lecturer-provided guidelines via platforms such as Telegram. Raja and Sinha (2020), highlight the significance of accessible resources in promoting student autonomy and self-directed learning. By providing structured materials early in the semester, lecturers allow students to plan, engage, and refine their understanding of task requirements. These resources, coupled with detailed rubrics, serve as benchmarks for quality and clarity, enabling students to align their work with expected outcomes. The survey data further validates this approach, demonstrating how accessible materials foster preparedness and reduce ambiguity in philosophical assessments like role-play and debates.

Philosophical understanding was another key area where lecturer involvement proved influential, with 77% of students reporting that explanations during or outside class enhanced their comprehension of tasks. Raja and Sinha (2020), argue that reflective learning and critical thinking, core goals of philosophical education, are significantly bolstered by targeted guidance. When lecturers explain complex theories or facilitate discussions on ethical dilemmas, they deepen students' conceptual grasp and encourage them to make meaningful connections between theory and practice. This result underscores the article's argument that lecturer engagement is not just supportive but transformative, ensuring that students can critically analyze and apply philosophical frameworks in their assessments. Such insights affirm the intertwined roles of guidance, accessibility, and active facilitation in achieving the educational objectives of general studies courses.

iii. Rubrics Facilitate both Formative and Summative

Rubrics play a critical role in philosophical assessments by providing clarity and structure, enabling students to understand task expectations and align their efforts with desired outcomes. According to survey data, 79.5% of students found rubrics essential for comprehending assignment requirements, highlighting their importance as a guiding framework. In philosophical contexts, where assignments such as debates and role-plays demand both analytical depth and creative application, rubrics delineate the criteria for success, such as critical thinking, theoretical understanding, and reflection. This clarity

reduces ambiguity and anxiety, allowing students to focus on developing their arguments and engaging deeply with philosophical concepts. Raja and Sinha (2020) underscore that rubrics bridge the gap between lecturer expectations and student performance, fostering transparency and fairness in assessment.

Moreover, rubrics facilitate both formative and summative feedback, helping students identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The structured feedback derived from rubrics encourages self-assessment and reflective learning, core elements of philosophical education. For instance, when students review their performance against rubric components like argument coherence or philosophical insight, they can pinpoint specific skills to refine, enhancing their intellectual development. This feedback loop not only benefits individual growth but also elevates the overall quality of classroom engagement. The survey results reinforce this impact, illustrating how rubrics empower students to approach complex philosophical tasks with confidence and precision, while also supporting lecturers in maintaining consistency and equity in grading. Thus, rubrics serve as a foundational tool for effective teaching and assessment in philosophical disciplines.

Conclusion

This study highlights the transformative role of alternative assessments, such as role-plays and debates, in enhancing philosophical engagement among students in general studies courses like *Philosophy and Current Issues*. The findings underscore the pivotal contributions of lecturer guidance and structured tools like rubrics in fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and reflective learning. Data from the survey reveal that 82% of students benefited from consistent lecturer facilitation, 71.3% found role-plays effective in applying philosophical concepts, and 79.5% emphasized the value of rubrics in clarifying expectations. These elements collectively create a cohesive framework for student success, ensuring that abstract philosophical ideas are translated into tangible skills. The study concludes that effective philosophical education requires a balanced integration of active learning strategies, transparent assessment criteria, and continuous mentorship from lecturers.

Looking ahead, future research could explore the integration of emerging technologies, such as AI-driven feedback systems and immersive learning platforms, to complement alternative assessments in philosophical education. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate how these approaches influence students' long-term critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and personal growth beyond the classroom. Exploring the scalability of these methods in diverse educational contexts, including interdisciplinary courses and online learning environments, could also provide new insights into their broader applicability. These future directions offer a pathway for refining pedagogical practices and advancing the role of philosophical education in shaping holistic and ethical graduates.

Acknowledgment

This article was written to fulfil the requirements set by UniSZA through the UniSZA/2023/SoTL/008 grant. Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to complete this study aimed at improving teaching and learning in general studies courses.

References

- Baleni, Z. W. (2015). Online Formative Assessment in Higher Educatiaon: Its Pros and Cons. *Journal of e-Leraning*, 13(4), 228-236.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2018). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 25(4), 441-466.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2018.1441803>
- Elliott, S. N. (1995). Creating meaningful performance assessments. ERIC Digest E531. EDRS no: ED381985.
- Gikandi, J. W., Morrow, D., & Davis, N. E. (2021). Online formative assessment in higher education: A review of the literature. *Computers & Education*, 58(2), 233-241.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.103832>
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Lim, Y. C., & Selvaratnam, T. (2023). Challenges and opportunities in alternative assessments during remote learning in higher education. *Education and Information Technologies*, 28(2), 679-692. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-10965-y>
- McCarthy, J., & Taylor, S. (2022). Student engagement through alternative assessments: Impacts on performance and satisfaction. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 44(3), 302-318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2021.1960341>
- Yusof, N., & Zakaria, Z. (2021). Impact of alternative assessments on student learning outcomes in Malaysian higher education institutions. *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT*, 17(4), 57-71. <https://doi.org/10.1234/ijedict.v17i4.238>