

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF RELEVANCE  
OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS AT NAIROBI  
EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

BY

JOYCE DAINESS MLENGA

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate  
School in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Divinity  
(Educational Studies)

JULY 2005

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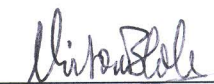
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**A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Divinity (Educational Studies)**

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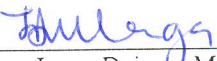
**July, 2005**

Student's Declaration

**STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENT  
TOOLS AT NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

I declare that this is my original work and has not been  
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate  
School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed)  \_\_\_\_\_  
Joyce Dainess Mlenga

July, 2005

## ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to investigate the perception of the relevance of selected assessment tools at Nairobi evangelical Graduate School of Theology by Masters' students. It was a descriptive study, which was done using the opinion of students as the basis of the investigation. The major focus of this research study was to investigate the students' perception of the relevance assessment tools used at NEGST, some factors responsible for students' perception, and what students considered to be the most relevant tool that lecturers should utilize to assess students' work.

The data collection involved the use of both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire. The Likert Scale of Summated Ratings also formed part of the instrument, which was used to validate some of the responses from the other questionnaire items. The instrument was distributed personally to 71 students. The research also sought to discover factors responsible for students' perception of relevance of assessment tools, therefore, the Chi-Square Test of Independence was the statistical instrument used to determine relationships.

The findings of this study revealed that research papers, examinations, and tests were the most commonly used assessment tools at NEGST; research papers and examinations having almost the same degree of frequency. Furthermore, it was discovered that generally, majority of students perceived research papers and tests as highly relevant tools of assessment, while examinations were said to be relevant to a small extent. The findings further revealed that students attest to the high relevance of research papers as an assessment tool, and wished that the tool could be used most frequently. The most important aspect of this study is that students value assessment so much so that the issue of relevance of the assessment tools is of interest to them. What came out clearly from the study was that it is not just any kind of assessment tool that may prove relevant to all course contents. Furthermore, it is not the frequency with which an assessment tool is used that matters, but the issue is relevance. Based on the findings of this research study, the researcher hopes that the NEGST faculty members would be mindful to employ assessment tools that would prove most relevant for the courses they teach.

To

My Loving Husband Moses  
and  
My Two Daughters Lughano and Mercy  
Who Are Going Through Various Forms of Assessment  
in Their School Life

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Purpose of Study.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Research Hypotheses .....	3
Definitions .....	4
Limitations.....	4
Significance of Study.....	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	6
Substantive Literature .....	6
Definition of Assessment.....	6
Approaches to Assessment.....	6
Purposes of Assessment.....	7
Forms of Assessment Tools .....	9
Relationship between Assessment Tools and Grades .....	11
Assessment Tools and Feedback.....	13
Relationship between Assessment Tools and Program of Study .....	13
Validity and Reliability of Assessment Tools.....	14
How Do Teachers and Students Understand Assessment and the Tools that are Employed in the Process? .....	15

Methodological Literature Review .....	19
The Chi-Square Test .....	21
Null Hypotheses.....	21
3. METHODOLOGY .....	22
Research Design.....	22
Entry .....	22
Population .....	23
Data Collection Strategy .....	23
The Instrument Design.....	23
Validation and Verification of Instrument .....	25
Pilot Testing .....	25
Data Analysis Strategies .....	26
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .....	27
Questionnaire Returns.....	27
The Most Commonly Used Tools at NEGST .....	27
Factors Responsible for Students' Perception of Relevance.....	29
Level of Academic Standing and Perception of Relevance .....	29
Program of Study and Perception of Relevance.....	32
Relationship between Assessment Tools Used in Various Groups of Courses and Perception of Relevance.....	35
Quality of Feedback and Perception of Relevance .....	37
Reasons for Rating the Assessment Tools .....	39
Research papers .....	39
Examinations.....	39
Tests.....	40
Reasons for Rating Quality of Feedback .....	40
Relationship between Perceived Academic Standing and Perceived Quality of Feedback .....	40
Accuracy of Assessment Tools .....	41



Students' Responses on the Likert Scale .....	41
Assessment Tools' Contribution to Academic Standing.....	43
Lecturers use Appropriate Tools for the Courses.....	43
Different Programs, Different Assessment Methods .....	44
The Nature of the Course Determines Type of Assessment Tools.....	44
Quality of Feedback.....	44
The Most Relevant Tool According to Students' Opinion.....	46
Overall Discussion .....	47
5. SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	49
Purpose of Study .....	49
Significance of Study .....	49
Research Design.....	50
Findings .....	50
Conclusions.....	52
Recommendations.....	53
Areas for Further Research .....	53
REFERENCE LIST .....	54
Appendices	
A. QUESTIONNAIRE.....	56
B. THE REPORTED MOST RELEVANT TOOLS FOR DIFFERENT COURSES.....	63

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Distribution of students by program.....	23
2. Returns of questionnaires .....	27
3. Returns of questionnaires by program.....	27
4. The Commonly used assessment tools .....	28
5. The commonly used assessment tools by programs of study.....	28
6. Perception of relevance of research papers as an assessment tool based on perceived academic standing .....	30
7. Perception of relevance of examinations as an assessment tool based on perceived academic standing .....	31
8. Perception of relevance of tests as an assessment tool based on perceived academic standing.....	31
9. Summary of students' perception of assessment tools based on academic standing .....	32
10. Perception of relevance of research papers as an assessment tool based on program of study.....	33
11. Perception of relevance of examinations as an assessment tool based on program of study.....	33
12. Perception of relevance of tests as an assessment tool based on program of study .....	34
13. Summary of students' perception of assessment tools based on program of study .....	34
14. The reported most relevant assessment tools for departmental courses .....	35
15. Perception of relevance of research papers as an assessment tool based on perceived quality of feedback .....	37
16. Perception of relevance of examinations an assessment tool based on perceived quality of feedback .....	38
17. Perception of relevance of tests as an assessment tool based on perceived quality of feedback .....	38

18. Summary of students' perception of assessment tools based on perceived quality of feedback.....	39
19. Relationship between Perceived Academic Standing and Perceived Quality of Feedback.....	40
20. Accuracy of academic standing in light of assessment tools used .....	41
21. Likert scale of summated ratings.....	42
22. The most relevant tool according to students' opinion.....	46
23. Why research papers are the most relevant tool .....	46

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Nearly every student has to undergo a kind of assessment in his or her school life. Teachers have come up with various assessment tools in order to establish the progress of learners. Teachers do this to check the attainment of educational goals that they put in place. Some forms of assessment that teachers use include tests, quizzes, examinations, papers, and projects.

Assessment of students' work is done across the board, that is, at primary, secondary, undergraduate as well as post-graduate levels. The assessment results reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the students. The results also help teachers to take note of areas that need improvement in their teaching approaches. Mention has to be made that attainment of right feedback from the students depends on the assessment tools used. Normally, assessment becomes valid only when the right assessment tools are used to measure both the teaching and the learning outcomes.

Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) is an evangelical post-graduate theological institution whose mission is to promote excellence in African Christianity. Its philosophy of training for ministry states that "it is committed to high standards of academic excellence in terms of the quality of teaching staff it attracts, the insistence on high standards of admission of students, quality instruction and on-going research" (NEGST Curriculum 2004, 3 – 4). One of the ways the achievement of academic excellence could be checked is through assessment of students' progress in their studies. Sections 5.2.1. and 5.2.2. of NEGST curriculum presented to the Kenya Commission for Higher Education (KCHE) on Student Assessment Policy states:

Students are assessed in their academic work from two perspectives, depending on the type of course. One perspective applies to most of the courses and comprehensive exams in which the 4.0 grade system is employed. The other applies to a limited number of courses in which a pass/fail system is employed. Section 5.2.2. Course Assessment: In all courses, continuous assessment is employed, involving a combination of assignments, short tests, papers, class presentations, and so forth, spread out throughout the term. In addition, an end of course examination is normally given on a comprehensive basis. This examination is scheduled for at least two hours per paper. An

equivalent assessment task other than a written examination may be given in lieu of the final examination in some cases. The cumulative weight of the continuous assessment scheme is usually 40%. Conversely, the end of course assessment normally carries 60%. (NEGST Curriculum 2004, 25 – 26)

The NEGST curriculum also provides the following guidelines for conducting assessment, whether continuous or otherwise:

1. Required tasks must be based upon the objectives specified for the course.
2. Tests, examinations and other forms of assessment must seek to test levels of critical thinking, as these target the higher order levels of the cognitive, affective and practical skills areas.
3. All forms of assessment should be based on clearly specified criteria made known to students ahead of time in writing in the course syllabus.
4. All forms of assessment should be followed by quantitative and qualitative feedback to students so that they can have personal sense of progress or otherwise (2004, 26).

Based on the requirements stipulated above, assessment of students' academic work is one of the ways of ensuring that excellence is attained at NEGST. The nature of the course always determines the type of assessment method that a teacher employs. Objectives of the course also determine the nature of assessment that a teacher utilizes.

### **Problem Statement**

Assessment of students' work is part of the teaching and learning process, and in fact, it is one of the teaching and learning tools. It has also been said that students will take their work seriously when they know that assessment will follow (Doyle 1986, 190). Lecturers use various assessment tools to assess the students' work in both continuous and end of course assessments. Some of the methods include projects, research papers, quizzes, short tests, examinations, oral presentations, student attendance, and participation in class. NEGST, like any other educational institution, takes assessment seriously. The issue of considerable discussion among students is the relevance of the assessment tools that NEGST utilizes to assess students' work. Therefore, the problem in this study was to find out how students perceived the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this survey study was to investigate student's perception of the relevance of the assessment tools used at NEGST. The study was undertaken to understand the views of the students with regard to the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST. The question that this study hoped to answer

was, "How do students perceive the relevance of each of the assessment tools used at NEGST?"

Furthermore, "What are the factors that influence their perception of each tool?"

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the focus of this study:

R.Q. 1. What assessment tools are commonly used at NEGST?

R.Q. 2. What are the factors, if any, which influence students' perception of the relevance of each assessment tool?

R.Q. 3. What do students consider as the most relevant tool of assessment that lecturers at NEGST should utilize?

### **Research Hypotheses**

H<sub>0</sub>: 1 Differences in the perceived level of students' academic standing will not significantly affect their perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

H<sub>0</sub>: 2 Differences in programs of study will not significantly affect the students' perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

H<sub>0</sub>: 3 Differences in assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another will not significantly affect the students' perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

H<sub>0</sub>: 4 Differences in the students' perceived quality of feedback they receive following assessment will not significantly affect their perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

### Definitions

The term **assessment** in this study has been used to mean the assessment of students' learning.

**NEGST** is an abbreviation for Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.

**Testing:** In education and psychology, testing is defined as "an attempt to measure a person's knowledge, intelligence, or other characteristics in a systematic way" (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, s.v. "testing.")

**Test and examination:** In this study the term **test** has been used to mean the measuring of student learning using a short test, administered at any logical breaks in the term. The term **examination** refers to a long test, or a comprehensive exam normally given at the end of a term as "final" examination.

### Limitations

The study was limited to the students' perceptions of the relevance of assessment tools that were used at NEGST at the time the study was conducted. The study was also limited to perceptions of students at NEGST and the results cannot be generalized to students in all postgraduate institutions. In addition, the researcher limited the study only to the continuing students of 2004/05 academic year. The researcher was aware that there could be other factors responsible for the students' perception of the assessment tools. Therefore, the perceptions of the students could be as a result of other factors that might not be covered in this study.

### Significance of Study

In every academic institution, students' assessment plays a very big role. If goals and objectives are to be achieved in the teaching and learning process, assessment of one kind or another has to take place. This is done to check progress of both teaching and learning effectiveness. The use of relevant assessment tools provides the right feedback to both the teachers and the learners. This study was intended to provide useful information to the faculty members that would guide them into making appropriate choices of assessment tools in order to promote teaching and learning.

In answering the question, "What is the literature saying about assessment in higher education?"

Jurkowitz has this to say:

There is a lot of it, for one thing. Yet, in another sense, there is not nearly enough of it, at least not for purposes of theological education. Most of the literature has been written by persons outside theological education and does not speak adequately to goals distinctive to theological education.

Far more has been established on how to assess knowledge and understanding than on how to assess skills and reflective practice (2003, 53).

This study was an attempt to provide a body of knowledge that would be valuable to all those who may want to further pursue the issue of assessment in other dimensions.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Substantive Literature Review

##### Definition of Assessment

Various educators have different definitions of assessment. Some define assessment in terms of quality of work or performance; others define it in terms of the achievement of curricular goals; and yet others define it in terms of results. For example, Farrant defines assessment as “the process by which the quality of an individual’s work or performance is judged” (1980, 146). This process could be done on a continuous basis, known as the “continuous assessment,” or once at the end of the term or school year. According to Wiggins and McTighe (1998, 4), assessment means the act of determining the extent to which the curricular goals are being and have been achieved. Assessment is a general term that is used to mean the deliberate use of many methods to gather evidence to indicate that students are meeting the standards. The evidence is gathered through various ways: observations and dialogues, traditional quizzes and tests, and performance tasks and projects, as well as students’ self-assessments gathered over time. Aleshire (2003, 7) defines assessment in terms of results and he writes, “Education leads to results, and assessment is the simple task of determining what kind and how much of those results have been attained”. In short, assessment is a fact-finding exercise in the teaching and learning process.

##### Approaches to Assessment

There are a number of approaches to assessment depending on the nature of the content being taught as well as the goals that a particular teacher wants to achieve, and what particular skills one wants to develop in the students. Susan Toohey, as quoted by Carolyn M. Jurkowitz, outlines five approaches to assessment.

1. The *traditional* or discipline-based approach. This approach believes that knowledge has an independent existence, waiting to be accessed by students. In this approach the purpose of assessment is to confirm the extent to which students have acquired knowledge considered important, and objective testing becomes the assessment method of choice.

2. The *performance-based* approach. In this approach, what students demonstrate that they can do forms the primary evidence of learning. Learning goals are expressed as observable competencies to be demonstrated. A major purpose for assessment is instructional intervention, and the performance of criterion-referenced tasks becomes the means of assessment.
3. The *personal relevance/experiential* approach. This approach encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and the primary purpose for assessment is for students to develop their own judgments. This is the kind of assessment that places high importance on self-evaluation and peer evaluation.
4. The *socially critical* approach. This one aims at developing students' critical consciousness. Students and teachers work together to construct knowledge within a specific cultural context. Assessment emphasizes group projects and self and peer-assessments, and is negotiated between teachers and students.
5. The *cognitive* approach. This approach holds that students personally construct knowledge; however, such knowledge is cultivated and mentored by "experts" in the field. In this view, assessment provides evidence of complex understanding and increased intellectual abilities. Problem-solving frequently characterizes assessment tasks, and students are required to take the context of the assessment situation into account (2003, 58).

#### Purposes of Assessment

A varied reading of literature reveals that assessment of students' learning is used for various reasons. Assessment is carried out to test how much is known about something supposedly learned, expose weaknesses in learning, to motivate students, and to discriminate between students of different ability. Assessment is meant to facilitate student learning, and is done for the purposes of describing and evaluating student progress, making decisions about the effectiveness of teaching methods or materials, and providing guidance and counseling for students (Anderson and Faust 1973, 126).

Apart from the functions mentioned above, assessment goes a long way into developing character in the students. Smith and Wood (2003, 24) believe that assessment could serve other purposes and this is what they have to say, "Testing and writing papers have not only to do with 'book' learning, but also with a number of character qualities: integrity, discipline, ability to focus and emotional stability." Assessment is generally a well-rounded exercise and that is why honesty is encouraged in all kinds of assessment.

The purposes of assessment are guided by one's perspective on learning. Methods of assessment develop from purposes of assessment and the uses to be made of assessment in the course of learning. Learning is improved when learning outcomes and means for assessing them are developed at the same time. Taken together, these activities give a direction to the teaching and learning process (Jurkowitz 2003, 83).

### **Assessment as Teaching and Learning Tool**

Cross (1989) states that “every assessment measure is also a teaching tool.” Normally, assessment is understood to be a learning tool, and very rarely a teaching tool. If teachers were asked to make a list of teaching methods, assessment would come last on some lists, and it would be absent on other lists. Even though educators believe that assessment is a teaching tool, very rarely are various assessment tools used for that purpose. Cross explains the reason why some assessment tools such as tests, may not be regarded as teaching tools:

Although there is clear evidence that students learn what they think they will be tested on, and almost everyone admits that tests are excellent motivators for learning, tests are rarely used to teach. They are most frequently used at the end of teaching to evaluate learning” (Cross 1989, 2).

Assessment as a learning tool is viewed in two ways. Firstly, it is viewed as assessment “of” learning which is intended to hold students accountable for learning. This involves learning the material for the sake of getting a passing grade. The disadvantage with this kind of assessment is that students live in perpetual fear of not making a good grade and might not benefit from the assessment. Secondly, it is viewed as assessment “for” learning which aims at motivating and promoting students abilities (Jurkowitz 2003, 74). Therefore, assessment that promotes learning should be encouraged.

Learning and its assessment should start with a set of clearly stated intended learning outcomes by which faculty describe what students should know, understand, and be able to do. Jurkowitz advises that faculty should choose methods of assessment on the following bases: 1) they are experiential, integrative, and judge performance; 2) they have clear outcomes, explicit public criteria, and provide for student self-assessment; 3) they include feedback and external perspectives as well as performance; 4) they are cumulative and expansive; 5) they are multiple in mode and context. Normally, learning and assessment in a particular discipline are guided by that discipline’s substance, structure, and language (2003, 63).

### **Assessment as a Classification Tool**

There are times when various assessment tools are used to classify students: the strong and the weak, the bright and the dull, intelligent and the unintelligent, the fit and the unfit, and the list goes on. As much as assessment is very crucial in the teaching and learning process, the exercise is at times performed by institutions in order to get rid of the weak students. “In schools, tests or examinations are viewed

primarily as devices to ‘weed out the unfit,’ rather than as a part of the teaching and learning process” (Lindgren and Suter 1985, 409).

Lindgren and Suter’s impression about assessment is also shared by other authors. Jamentz writes that one of the main criticisms directed against traditional assessments is that they are used to sort students and, on that basis, to deny unfit students educational opportunities (1994, 56). Sometimes assessment tools are used to discriminate incompetent students rather than to diagnose their needs. In this case, assessment becomes an end in itself.

### Forms of Assessment Tools

Apart from the usual method of the unseen, written final examination, there are other forms of assessment, though their use may be largely confined to particular subject areas or restricted to relatively few departments. This is so because all departments and all subjects are not alike. Mention has to be made that variability between courses, and departments in assessment practices is unavoidable but at the same time desirable. Various course contents require different assessment tools. Other assessment tools include quizzes, projects, research papers, oral presentations, written assignments, reading assignments, student attendance and contribution in class, group activities, and so on (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight 1998, 101).

A number of principles are known to be governing the various forms of assessment used, conventional or otherwise. Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight have summarized the principles of assessment in the following statement: “Assessment needs to be accurate, appropriate, relevant and valid; but it also should be clearly linked to what is being studied and well understood by all involved” (1998, 101). The following are the principles as quoted from Race 1995 a, 67-68 by Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (1998):

1. Purposes need to be clear.
2. Assessment needs to be an integral part of course design, not something to be bolted on afterwards.
3. Assessment methodology needs to be valid.
4. Assessment processes and instruments need to be reliable.
5. Assessment needs to be transparent to students.
6. Assessment needs to be a means of delivering feedback.
7. The overall assessment strategy needs to employ a wide range of techniques and processes.
8. The amount should be appropriate.
9. Assessment should be free of bias.

Research has revealed that specific learning outcomes have to be assessed in different ways also. For example, learning for understanding as an outcome is aimed at revealing the extent of students’

understanding. Therefore, an educator can assess understanding by using a variety of tools e.g. oral questions, observations, traditional tests, etc. Therefore, performance becomes the key indicator to understanding. Learning for knowledge of subject matter is another learning outcome and this one is the most familiar to educators at all levels. While traditional paper-and-pencil testing adequately assesses learning of certain types of knowledge, the learning of other types of knowledge requires alternative forms of assessment, such as demonstrations, projects, graphic representations, creation of physical models, verbal analysis, or the generation and testing of hypotheses, problem solving, system analysis, and oral or written defenses or claims or judgments. Learning for professional practice is yet another learning outcome. This outcome calls for an integration of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, values, and practices deemed critical to the profession, since professionals are expected to be generalists as well as specialists. In assessment of learning for professional practice, there is much support for self-assessment, peer-assessment, and the involvement of assessors from outside the classroom (Jurkowitz 2003, 67).

In addition to matching an assessment tool to the learning outcomes, it is also important to link learning goals and assessment. Ericksen writes “The intimate connection between goals and grades is frequently overlooked. It is inconsistent, for example, to proclaim you are teaching students how to think, to solve problems, and to discriminate values but then to test achievement in terms of the ability to memorize” (Ericksen 1984, 16).

### **Projects/Term papers**

Ericksen (1984) maintains that “to organize an integrated chain of thought, elaborate on findings, and communicate ideas to others is a strongest of achievement than is the recognition or recall of isolated bits of information. A well-planned assignment of term papers is an excellent test a teacher can give.” According to him, papers give students a great freedom to express their own thinking and this is a helpful exercise which stays on even after graduation. The term paper is a reflection of what the individual student has learned and it helps the student to keep this knowledge in the long-term memory. The words and the expressions in a term paper represent the type of the mental material that is likely to be part of the student’s thinking for some time to come. Ericksen asserts, “The kind of information organized in a term paper is a fairly accurate measure of what a student ‘got out of a course’ and what is packaged for carrying away. This

type of evaluating assignment does not compromise the conditions for learning and retention or the grading demands of a school” (Ericksen 1984, 120). McKeachie also concurs with Erickson and he gives two reasons why term papers are important: 1) to provide an opportunity for students to go beyond conventional course coverage and gain expertise in a limited area. This is an important way in which students learn to value knowledge and the reasoning process. 2) To give students an opportunity to explore problems of special importance to them. In this way teachers hope to gain increased motivation (1986, 127).

However, term papers are not without problems. One of the problems is that students have a negative attitude towards the grading of term papers. McKeachie writes, “One of the problems in using essay exams and in assigning term papers is that students feel that the grading represents some mysterious, unfathomable bias. The more that you can write helpful comments on the paper, the more the mystery is dispelled” (1986, 102). On the other hand, teachers also face difficulties when they assign term papers to students. Elsewhere, McKeachie reports that his experiences with term papers have not always been pleasing ones: “Students borrow one from a friend and submit it as their own; students find a book in the library that covers the needed material, copy it with varying degrees of paraphrasing and turn it in; and finally there are those who review relevant resources and, using powers of analysis and integration, develop a paper that reveals understanding and original thinking” (1986, 125).

An additional disadvantage to assigning term papers to students is that some times students are provided with a lot of knowledge but they do not faithfully use the knowledge and information they get from the learning process. This might be as a result of lack of knowledge on how to use the given information, or choosing to go the easy way by using short cuts to writing the required papers.

#### Relationship between Assessment Tools and Grades

In every class, one will find grade-oriented students as well as learning-oriented students. Grade-oriented students focus all their attention on the grade, which means that the purpose of their learning is to get the grade. These are students who are obsessed by grades. On the other hand, there are students who focus all their attention on learning, without caring much about the grade – getting a low grade is not an issue for them. These are the learning-oriented students. For them, the pursuit of school courses provides an opportunity to acquire knowledge and obtain personal enlightenment (Stark, Shaw, and Lowther 1989, 52).

There are times when teachers encourage students to focus their attention on grades. Rewarding students who have good grades without considering their competency could do this. Competency and good grades should go together. Geocaris and Ross (1999, 29-30) confess their failure as teachers in one of the schools in America in the following quote, "Although our instruction emphasized learning, our tests seemed to focus students' attention simply on a grade. The test had ceased to become a learning tool." The two authors go on to advise fellow teachers that "a test must involve all the learning styles and must emphasize competency rather than grades"

Students have a tendency of rating the importance of the courses based on the grade they receive on the final assessment. This also applies to their evaluation of a lecturer. If a student gets a good grade in a particular course, even when the quality of his work is poor, that lecturer will be rated highly. On the other hand, a lecturer who does not give a good grade is rated low, regardless of his good personality or even his good teaching styles. Students will report that courses were interesting/uninteresting or helpful/not helpful based on their performance in those courses. To the extent that one has been rewarded, or not rewarded what is due to him, one forms positive or negative conclusions that go hand in hand with one's identity as a good student or a bad student (Knox, Lindsay, and Kolb 1992, 316). Oladeji (2002, 11), while citing Cohen said, "Statistics have shown that there is an average correlation between high student ratings and high student achievement. That is, the instructors who received the highest ratings were those whose students achieved the most."

Grades are also believed to be the most important motivational tool that the teacher possesses. Anderson and Faust (1973, 254) report of McKeachie's review of research on teaching at the college and university level in the following quotation:

Whatever a student's motivation for being in college, grades are important to him. If he is genuinely interested in learning, grades represent an expert's appraisal of his success; if he is interested in getting into professional school, good grades will unlock the graduate school doors; if he wants to play football, grades are necessary to maintain eligibility. Most students are motivated to get passing grades, and thus grades are a powerful motivational tool for teachers.

Mention should also be made that high grades can motivate students while low grades kill the zeal of learning in some students, especially those who are grade-oriented.

### Assessment Tools and Feedback

Purposes of assessment of students' work are always in the mind of the assessor. There are times when assessment is done for no particular reason other than the fact that it is required by the institution. In such cases, no helpful feedback is given to students, except for the grade. Teachers do not take keen interest in helping those who might be struggling academically. Giving feedback to students is very important. Hartley (2003, 111-112) writes that "students need to perceive that the assessment feedback they receive is informative, timely, beneficial, effectual and comprehensive." In the literature on learning and assessment, feedback serves two purposes. First, providing feedback to students motivates those who are doing well and at the same time helps those who are struggling to improve on their learning. Second, getting feedback from students on regular basis enables the faculty to monitor learning and to discover areas where teachers can re-adjust instructional methods to improve student learning (Jurkowitz 2003, 65).

### Relationship between Assessment Tools and Program of Study

Different programs of study offer different kinds of content and as a result, the assessment tools used also differ. Apart from the content, the objectives of the teacher will also determine what kinds of assessment would be appropriate to assess the learning outcomes. Not all objectives can be measured by a test. If an examination emphasizes recall of facts, teaching will be factual and will involve memorization of facts. If an examination demands an understanding of materials, teaching will involve helping students to understand the material presented. If an examination is requiring them to think, the content should direct them that way (McKeachie 1986, 87). For example, there are certain subjects where no other assessment tool could be used apart from a test or an examination.

At NEGST, there are various programs of study and there is variability in the content offered. There are historical courses, biblical language courses, linguistics courses, courses that have to do with demonstration of skills such as teaching practicum, homiletics et cetera. The assessment tools that are utilized in the various courses may vary greatly depending on the course content as well as the objectives of each course.



### Validity and Reliability of Assessment Tools

Validity and reliability are two requirements for a good test whatever the field, validity being the most important. "Validity is defined as the degree to which a test measures what it is intended to measure. Validity is the effectiveness of a test for the purposes for which it is used" (Noll, Scannell, and Craig 1979, 90 – 91). Validity depends upon the purpose of the test. If the purpose of a test is to provide grades, then students who score high on the test should go on to earn good grades, and students who score low on the test should go on to earn poor grades. On the other hand, if the test is used to determine whether students have mastered instructional objectives, it will do just that (Anderson and Faust 1973, 140 – 141).

In their principles of assessment, Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (1998, 101) maintain that assessment methodology needs to be valid and assessment processes and instruments need to be reliable. They also add that the amount of assessment should be appropriate and free of bias. Bias is one of the greatest challenges that assessment methods face. "Clearly, assessment needs to be accurate, appropriate, relevant and valid; but it also should be clearly linked to what is being studied and well understood by all involved" (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight, 1998, 101). The most important thing to do is for the teacher to recognize that the use of tools is largely to be determined by appropriateness, whether the tool is useful in a particular situation.

Since examinations are widely used assessment tools, it is always assumed that they are the best test for every learner's performance. Some students suffer more than others from what Farrant (1980) calls "examination nerves". This is the situation where a learner goes through nervous tension, which might affect performance, and this might not be the true reflection of where the learner is academically. Consequently examinations are not necessarily the best test of every student's ability. Furthermore, the effectiveness of examinations is limited because they cannot measure all that a student learns. "This selective character of examinations means that any assessment of students must make full allowance for the unmeasured aspects of their education" (Farrant 1980, 147).

Teachers should not put all their faith in one kind of assessment as a measure of their students' learning. The reason for this is that one kind of assessment tests only a sample of a person's skill or knowledge, not everything about an individual. For example, a test score can tell only how well the person performed on one particular test on one particular day. Every test score is an estimate rather than a precise

measurement” (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Testing”). In order to be valid, assessments must match with desired learning outcomes.

### How Do Teachers and Students Understand Assessment and the Tools that are Employed in the Process?

Both assessment and assessment tools are sometimes misunderstood by teachers and students alike. The poor understanding of assessment tools will be discussed in the following areas: the goal of assessment, what the assessment tools measure (validity), the meaning of grades, and the need for assessment in theological colleges.

#### *The Goal/purpose of Assessment*

Negative perception of relevance of assessment tools may occur due to misunderstanding between students and faculty concerning the purpose of assessment tools. Maclellan reports a study that was done at one institution of higher education in United Kingdom. The results on a questionnaire about faculty and students’ perceptions of assessment showed that these two groups differed in their perceptions. The main method of assessment was the traditional academic essay and the faculty claimed to assess the full range of learning through that. The students on the other hand did not seem to have a full understanding of assessment and perceived assessment as a measure of achievement rather than an aid to learning (Maclellan, 2001, 52).

As much as assessment tools, such as tests, are both teaching and learning tools, students do not regard them as such. Ask students why tests are given and the majority of them respond, “so that the teacher can give us grades” (Anderson and Faust 1973, 126). Generally, students perceive assessment in relation to grades, and not in relation to learning. Although assigning of grades is one purpose of assessment, it needs not be the focus.

Sometimes students understand assessment as a strategy that teachers use to make school difficult enough so that the student is constantly afraid that he will not get a desirable grade. In addition, “Examination questions are tricky and surprises are part of the examination” (Anderson and Faust 1973, 259). The general assumption is that students will not work except for the threat of something unpleasant; either fear of embarrassment, or fear of failure. The assumption contradicts what Cross says, namely,

“testing is not threatening but discovering” (1989, 9). The situation is made worse by teachers who keep on reminding students about tests whenever they are teaching. Some teachers punctuate their lectures with statements like, “this particular point can form a good test question.” This is not to say that warning students of the test coming ahead is not proper, but teaching with a test in mind can rob the students of the peace they need to absorb the material and digest it.

Most students miss out on the goal of assessment because they focus their attention on the assessor and the outcomes in terms of grades. Noll, Scannell, and Craig have the following comment to make concerning testing and scores:

As generally used in education, the term testing has come to have a rather specific and somewhat limited connotation, and in some instances, a slightly unfavorable one. A tester is regarded by some persons (whether rightly or wrongly) as a technician who is more interested in the scores and statistics of the results of the tests than in what the results mean in relation to the children or adults who made the scores (1979, 24).

Students are likely to understand assessment as something done “to” them rather than something done “for” them. They do not really feel that the process is for their benefit as it is for their teachers.

### *What do Assessment Tools Measure?*

As students go through assessment of some kind, they should be allowed to know how helpful the assessment is to their learning. A deliberate explanation should be done by the teacher on why the learners are required to be assessed. There are times when students do not really understand what the teacher is trying to assess and as a result misinterpret the whole process. For example, when examinations are administered, some students think about them in their own way. Asibong (1983, 70) writes, “Most students are apprehensive about taking examinations, and tend to see them as battles of wits between themselves and the examiners, where the latter are out to mislead them with ‘trick’ questions or set impossibly difficult papers.” Asibong continues, “Examinations are intended to measure how efficiently you have studied a particular course. They also provide an incentive for you to consolidate the work done during the year; and the ultimate goal of passing the examination, when achieved, gives you the satisfaction of a job well done.”

Students rarely read the course objectives in their syllabi to figure out what the teacher is trying to achieve. The general impression is that the objectives in the syllabus are the teacher’s and not for student’s. Knowledge of objectives would really help the learners to know what the teacher is trying to test. In higher

levels of learning, teachers should encourage their students to take note of the objectives which will guide their study.

### *Meaning of Grades*

Students attach different meanings to grades that are given at the end of each assessment. Some regard good grades as a gateway to success and that they will help them move to the next level of education. It does not really matter whether they have benefited from the learning process, what matters is a good grade. Experience has shown that students will sometimes go a long way to bribe a teacher to give them a good grade even when their work is sub-standard. In some cases, students will not accept any grade lower than the highest grade in a particular course.

Students attach their own meanings to grades that are given by the teacher. McKeachie says that grades are basically a method of communication, and through the grade a teacher is actually trying to communicate something to the student. What teachers communicate by a grade depends upon the meaning of the grade to the person reading it— the effect that it has on that person. Every student will interpret the grade according to his performance (McKeachie 1986, 111). Depending on the grade, students might interpret the grade as a measure of how intelligent or how unintelligent they are. High grades mean very intelligent and low grades mean unintelligent.

### *Academic Assessment in Theological Schools*

Theological schools exist to train people for ministry. Their main purpose is to equip people with the necessary skills that will enable them to minister effectively. The issue of considerable debate is whether theological schools should put more emphasis on academics or on performance skills. Questions have been asked as to whether academic excellence is a requirement for a minister of the word of God. The researcher held informal interactions and observations with theological students at both undergraduate and graduate levels, and the general feeling is that assessment and grades should not be taken seriously since the students themselves are pastors and what they need are ministry skills. This tallies very well with “contract grading”

that McKeachie (1986) discusses in his book “Teaching Tips: A Guidebook for the Beginning College Teacher.”

McKeachie (1986, 113) writes that, in contract grading, students and teachers develop a written contract about what the student will do to achieve certain grade levels. The contracts specify papers to be written, books to be read, projects to be completed, and so on. However, McKeachie has problems with this system of grading because students often gain points, not for achievement, but rather for carrying out those activities. Rather than measuring learning, teachers assess whether the student has engaged in activities that are a means to learning. If contract grading is used, criteria for quality as well as quantity of achievement are needed. Assigning grades on the basis of the quantity of work done rather than the degree of competence achieved is always a problem in contract grading. In his argument for assessment in theological education, Aleshire says:

Frankly, I want theological schools to become more committed to, more intentional with, and more skillful about outcomes assessment. I do not think the Levites should get an exemption. I think their work is every bit as crucial as the work of any surgeon, any engineer, or any pilot. Because the work that graduates of ATS schools do is important work, it is our responsibility as theological educators to make sure they know what is necessary to do this work well (2003, 7)

Since theological education is a kind of education, it follows that assessment forms a big part of it. As indicated elsewhere in this study, education leads to results, and it is always necessary to evaluate those results to see how well the purposes have been achieved. However, great care must be taken in how those results are determined to ensure that much emphasis is not placed on assessment as such, but theological educators should endeavor to do more than just assess. Myers says, “If theological schools are to educate, train, form, and shape students in ways that go beyond an intellectual knowing of the religious tradition, then, assessment as the mere assignment of grades by faculty who ‘know’ (imposed on those who do not ‘know’) is not enough” (2003, 82).

NEGST as a theological institution takes assessment as an important aspect of training men and women for God’s service. Control for bias and validity of assessment are attempted through external moderation of NEGST exams in all departments. External moderation is done to promote excellence in assessment of the students’ work by “standardizing, through centralization, the exams; and by subjecting their scoring to vetting by external jurors drawn from private and public universities around us” (NEGST Self-evaluation Report 2002, 93). A proposed end of term examination or any form of assessment in lieu of

examination is forwarded to the external examiner who serves as a moderator. Where other forms of requirements apply in lieu of a formal end-of-term examination, teachers are required to submit schemes for assessment for pre-moderation purposes. Internal examiners are required to submit detailed marking scheme showing the required or expected answers or responses and points allocation to all parts of the answers or responses. This is done by mid-term. Examination regulations state that short tests and quizzes are administered at the discretion of the lecturer but the nature and frequency of such are determined in light of the course content (2002, 247). It is important to note that there are both pre-moderation and post-moderation of exams. In most cases, the external examiner's decision stands.

When it comes to exam moderation, the external examiner reports on the adequacy and appropriateness of the examination in light of the stated course objectives, the scope of work specified in the course syllabus and the marking scheme supplied. Amendments are therefore done as specified by the external examiner. There is a provision for resolving legitimate dispute. Exams scripts may be availed to students by the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (DVCAA) when a dispute occurs so that a student may check for any incidences of negligence in the moderation process. The issues are normally resolved after the normal process is followed (2002, 249). It is also important to note that NEGST regulations for assessment put more emphasis on giving both quantitative and qualitative feedback to students.

### **Methodological Literature Review**

In the literature, we find various methodologies that could be used in carrying out research. Since perception deals with opinions, this study was an opinion survey and it was descriptive in approach. Attitude and opinion have been seen as synonymous by many people because of the inter-relationship between the two. A wide reading from the literature reveals that attitude and opinion are closely associated with feelings and emotions, and are a large factor in determining people's reactions and behavior.

Since the terms, opinion and attitude are not synonymous, Best clearly explains the distinction between the two. Attitude has to do with how people feel, or what they believe. What people say are their beliefs or feelings are referred to as opinions. So the difference between the two is that an attitude is a feeling or belief not yet expressed, while an opinion is an expression of a particular belief or opinion either

through words or actions. Researchers must always depend upon what people say are their beliefs and feelings. Mention needs to be made that what people say (their opinion) might not always reflect the attitudes or beliefs that they have. It is for this reason that Best (1981, 179) says “it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe and measure attitude.”

Survey research design has gained popularity especially when it comes to carrying out research which has to do with people’s opinions. Creswell writes:

Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people in order to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. In this procedure, survey researchers collect quantitative, numeric data using questionnaires or interviews, and statistically analyze the data by describing trends about responses to questions and testing research questions or hypotheses. They also interpret the meaning of the data by relating results of the statistical test back to past research studies (2002, 396).

In a survey research design, a questionnaire is one of the commonly used tools in gathering data from the population. A questionnaire is a form comprising questions used in a survey design that participants in a study complete and return to the researcher. Questionnaires administered personally to groups of individuals are believed to have a number of advantages. The person administering the instrument has an opportunity to establish rapport, to explain the purpose of the study, and to explain the meaning of items that may not be clear. In addition to that the availability of a number of respondents in one place helps the researcher to save time and expenses and provides a high percentage of utilizable responses (Best 1981, 167).

A questionnaire may contain both closed and open forms of questions. Questions that call for short, check-marked responses are known as the closed ones. Closed-questions require a yes or no answer, a short response or a check on an item from a list of suggested responses, while those that call for a free response in the respondent’s own words are known as open forms. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999, 72-73) write about the advantages of using closed-ended and open-ended questions: “Closed-ended questions are easier to analyze since they are in an immediate usable form” and “open-ended questions can stimulate a person to think about his feelings or motives and to express what he considers to be most important.”

The Likert Method of Summated Ratings is one of the methods that is commonly used in studies that deal with opinions. Many researchers advocate for Likert method of measuring attitudes because it is less time-consuming. Noll, Scannell, and Craig explain how it works:

Each statement usually has five possible responses: strongly disagree, undecided, disagree, agree and strongly agree. The person taking the test reacts to every statement by marking one of the five responses. The responses have weights of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 for favorable statements, and 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for unfavorable ones. The subject's score is the sum of the weights of the responses checked. A high score indicates a highly favorable attitude, a low score the opposite. The Likert method eliminates the sorting by judges, and therefore it requires less time to prepare the scale . . . (1979, 362).

### The Chi-Square Test

Of the many nonparametric tests, two of the most frequently used are Chi-Square test and the Mann-Whitney Test. The Chi-Square test applies to discrete data, counted rather than measured values. It is a test of independence, the idea that one variable is not affected by, or related to, another variable. But it is not a measure of the degree of relationship. It is merely used to estimate the likelihood that some factor other than chance accounts for the apparent relationship. Because the null hypothesis states that there is no relationship (the variables are independent), the test merely evaluates the probability that the observed relationship results from chance (Best and Kahn 1989, 299-300).

In order to use the Chi-Square for statistical data there are definite conditions that must be met. Borg and Gall (1989, 562-564) have identified two conditions: 1) the data must be in form of frequency counts, 2) the categories into which frequencies fall are separate rather than continuous. Furthermore, the Chi-Square requires that variables in the population be independent of each other and there must be some logical or empirical basis for the way the data is categorized. The Chi-Square was used as the statistical method for this study because the data was in form of frequency counts and the categories of the frequencies were not continuous. Also, the variables identified were independent of each other.

### Null Hypothesis

Null hypothesis is the form of hypothesis which is usually used in education. The null hypothesis states that no difference exists, and the statistical tools test this hypothesis by determining the probability that whatever difference is found in the research subjects is a true difference that also is present in the population from which the research samples have been drawn (Borg and Gall 1989, 66-67). In essence, a null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference or relationship between the variables. In this study, the null hypothesis was used to determine relationships between variables. The rejection or acceptance of a null hypothesis was based on the alpha level of significance of .05.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were utilized in this study. Since this study dealt with people's attitudes and opinions, some methods and procedures needed to be established in order for the researcher to gather the required information. The purpose of the study was to investigate the students' perception of relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST. In order to achieve the objective of the study, the researcher designed a questionnaire based on the three research questions presented in chapter one.

#### **Research Design**

The researcher used a quantitative approach to the study in which a survey was utilized to collect the required information from the students. The survey described a limited population of students, those who were in their second and third years in the 2004/05 academic year. In other words, information was gathered from a predetermined population because familiarity with the assessment tools used at NEGST was the pre-requisite for the participants. According to Creswell, a survey design is helpful in that the researcher collects data at one point in time, and in addition, the design has the advantage of measuring current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices. Attitudes, beliefs and opinions are ways that individuals think about issues, whereas practices are their actual behaviors (Creswell 2002, 398). Collection of data was easily facilitated because the researcher was in the same context as the subjects.

#### **Entry**

In order to conduct this study, the researcher obtained written permission from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for Academic Affairs (DVCAA). A list of students (continuing students of 2004/05 academic year) who were the respondents in this study was obtained from the office of the registrar.

### Population

The population of this study comprised all students who had spent at least two terms at NEGST. All second year and third year students were participants in this study because these were familiar with the assessment tools used in the institution and were in a better position to evaluate them. No sampling was attempted because the population was manageable and within reach. The number of participants was 71 (refer to table 1 below).

Participants were from various Masters' programs such as Master of Arts and Master of Divinity in various emphases such as Translation, Biblical Studies, Missions, Christian education, Pastoral Studies, and Master of Theology. These were students who came to NEGST having attained Bachelors degrees in various fields, from various institutions such as universities, Bible colleges and theological schools. All these were being trained to serve God specifically in Africa and the church of God world- wide.

Table 1. Distribution of students by program

<b>Program of study</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Master of Arts (Biblical Studies)	4
Master of Arts (Christian Education)	8
Master of Arts (Missions)	7
Master of Arts (Translation Studies)	9
Master of Divinity (Biblical Studies)	9
Master of Divinity (Christian Education)	10
Master of Divinity (Missions)	13
Master of Divinity (Translation Studies)	1
Master of Divinity (Pastoral Studies)	2
Master of Divinity (General)	2
Master of Theology	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>

### Data Collection Strategy

Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires and return them to the researcher after completion. The items on the questionnaire were developed in response to the three research questions raised in chapter one.

### The Instrument Design

The survey instrument that was used in this study was the questionnaire, which comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions (Appendix A). The instrument was made up of factual questions

and Likert-like items based on a scale from “very large extent” to “very small extent,” and “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” In addition, there were some open-ended questions which required the students to give their free responses which represented their views about assessment tools utilized at NEGST.

The instrument was developed after examining the relevant literature to ascertain the possible factors that might influence students’ perception of the relevance of the assessment tools which include: programs of study, the students’ perceived academic standing, assessment tools employed in departmental groups of courses, and students’ perceived quality of feedback they receive from lecturers following assessment of any kind. Secondly, the researcher had preliminary conversations with students. The aim of the conversations was to obtain a rough idea of students’ views about the assessment tools that NEGST utilizes. Based upon the reviewed literature and interactions with students, seventeen questionnaire items were developed. There was at least one item on the questionnaire addressing each research question.

#### Part A

This section comprised both closed-ended and open ended questions (items 1–7) which required students to give their personal data and their views about assessment tools. Item 4 on the questionnaire was developed to answer the first research question which required the respondents to mention the commonly used assessment tools at NEGST, while item 6 sought to obtain students’ views concerning relevant assessment tools for some of the courses offered at NEGST. The courses were picked from the various departments available at NEGST as outlined in the Prospectus. Items 2 – 5 and 7 provided the possible factors for students’ perception of the relevance of the assessment tools. These and other free-response items on the questionnaire provided data for research question 2 which sought to ascertain the possible factors that influence the students’ perception of the assessment tools.

#### Part B

This part contained an opinionnaire drawn to gather information on some issues to do with assessment. The aim of the Likert items was to validate the findings from parts A and C of the instrument. The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the stated opinions. Items 8 – 15, therefore, were developed for that purpose.

### Part C

There were two questions in this section and they were open-ended to give the students more opportunity to give their free responses. The items were designed to provide answers to research question 3, which aimed at gathering students' opinions on what they considered to be the most relevant tool that lecturers at NEGST should utilize.

#### **Validation and Verification of Instrument**

Validity of a research instrument is very crucial in almost all kinds of research. A questionnaire is said to be valid only when it contains the right questions, phrased in a clear manner. In other words, validity is achieved when a measurement procedure truthfully represents that which it is intended to measure. The question is, "does it really measure what it is supposed to measure?" Additionally, verification of the effectiveness of the questionnaire by professionals in the area of research is essential. Best and Kahn write, "In order to verify content validity of the instrument, researchers need all the help they can get; suggestions from colleagues and experts in the field of inquiry which may reveal ambiguities that can be removed or items that do not contribute to a questionnaire's purpose" (1989, 193 – 194).

For validation of the instrument for this study, the questionnaire was given to five experts to verify whether the questions were relevant. Competency in academic research was the criterion for selecting the experts. The experts made helpful comments and suggestions which were incorporated in the questionnaire. A validity coefficient of 0.60 was used for qualifying or disqualifying an item on the questionnaire.

#### **Pilot Testing**

To further establish validity of the instrument, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted. Creswell states, "This testing is important to establish the content validity of an instrument and to improve questions, format and the scales" (Creswell 2003, 158). The questionnaire was pilot-tested at Nairobi International School of Theology (NIST) because the institution had a similar post-graduate program like the one at NEGST. The researcher made the necessary improvements on the questionnaire following the pilot test.

### Data Analysis Strategies

To measure the opinion of the students with regard to assessment tools used at NEGST, the questionnaire items that were used in this study were both closed-ended and open-ended. Two analyses of the data were used, both statistical as well as qualitative data. For the statistical data, the statistical method that was employed was the Chi-Square Test of Independence. Chi-square was used since data in this study was collected in the form of frequency counts. The data from the Likert items was analyzed using the Likert Scale of Summated Ratings. The responses of the respondents were tallied and summed up to show their opinions. For the five-point Likert-like items, the perception of relevance was considered high if the respondents checked “very large extent,” or “large extent,” and “strongly agree,” or “agree” and low if they checked “very small extent” or “small extent” and “strongly disagree,” or “disagree;” and neutral or no opinion if they checked “not sure.”

The open-ended items in parts A and C of the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively. Nachimias and Nachimias state that, “When study is exploratory or when there is little theory informing the researcher about the kind of responses to expect, inductive coding may be appropriate. In inductive coding, the researcher designs the coding scheme on the basis of a representative sample of responses to questions (particularly open-ended questions) . . .” (1996, 337). Data were organized according to individual responses, by grouping the answers together across the respondents. Responses that were mentioned frequently enough to merit their own categories were placed in categories and were interpreted.

For this study, null hypotheses were tested using the Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ ). This is a non-parametric test that can be used as a “test of independence, the idea that one variable is not affected by, or related to, another variable” (Best and Kahn 1989, 299). The Chi-Square formula that was used was

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where O = observed frequency, and E = expected frequency. In a 3 x 2 or more table, this formula was used to calculate values of each cell.

If the calculated Chi-Square did not equal or exceed the critical value necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance, the hypothesis was not rejected, if otherwise, it was rejected.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to find out the students' perception of relevance of the assessment tools at NEGST. This chapter reports the analysis, findings and interpretation of data collected from the students about their opinion on the assessment tools utilized at NEGST.

#### Questionnaire Returns

Table 2 below shows the rate of returns of the questionnaires distributed to students. Out of 71 questionnaires, 61 were completed and returned. This represents 85.92% (approximately 86%) response rate. The questionnaires had been given personally to students.

Table 2. Returns of questionnaires

No. sent out	No. returned	Percentage returned
71	61	86

The distribution of the returned questionnaires by program is reflected in table 3 below.

Table 3. Returns of questionnaires by program

Program of study	Number sent out	Number returned	Percentage of total
Master of Arts	27	22	31
Master of Divinity	38	35	49
Master of Theology	6	4	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>86</b>

#### The Most Commonly Used Tools at NEGST

The first research question of this study sought to find out which assessment tools were commonly used at NEGST. The question states:

R. Q. 1 What assessment tools are commonly used at NEGST?

No hypothesis was cast in response to this question. The relevant item to provide an answer to this question is item 4 of the questionnaire which states: In order of priority, what are the three most frequently used assessment tools by lecturers in your program of study? Each student was asked to mention three assessment tools. The findings are represented in table 4.

Table 4. The commonly used assessment tools

Assessment tool	Frequency	Percentage of observed frequency
Research Papers	58	32
Examinations	55	30
Tests	30	16
Oral Presentations	21	12
Projects	15	8
Quizzes	4	2
Total	183	100

N = 61

Table 4 shows that, out of 61 respondents, 58 (95%) indicated that research papers were the commonly used assessment tool at NEGST, 30 (49%) indicated that tests were used, 55 (90%) indicated that examinations were used, 21 (34%) indicated that oral presentations were used, 15 (25%) indicated that projects were utilized, and 4 (7%) of the respondents indicated that quizzes were utilized as assessment tools. Table 4 reveals that research papers, examinations and tests were the top three commonly used assessment tools by lecturers at NEGST.

Table 5. The commonly used assessment tools by programs of study

Program	No. of respondents in the program	Exam	Research papers	Projects	Quizzes	Tests	Oral presentations
Biblical Studies	7	6	7	2	1	4	-
Education	18	16	17	3	1	6	11
Missions	26	22	26	4	1	13	11
Pastoral Studies	2	2	2	1	-	1	-
Translation	7	7	6	5	-	5	-

As shown in table 5, in biblical studies program, students reported that the most commonly used assessment tools were examinations, research papers and tests. In educational studies, the students reported that the commonly used tools were examinations, research papers and oral presentations, while in mission

studies the commonly used tools were examinations, research papers and tests. In pastoral studies, exams and research papers were used alongside projects and tests. In translation studies, students reported that exams/tests, research papers alongside projects were utilized in their program.

### Discussion

Generally, research papers, examinations and tests were reported as the commonly used assessment tools at NEGST; research papers having the highest number of frequency, followed closely by examinations (see table 4). This means lecturers give a lot of papers for students to write as a mode of assessment. From the results of the commonly used assessment tools by programs in table 5, it was very clear that research papers cut across all the programs as the most commonly used tool, followed by examinations. Biblical studies and mission studies reported that tests were also used as an assessment tool, while education studies indicated that oral presentations were also common, and in translation studies, projects were also commonly used.

### **Factors Responsible for Students' Perception of Relevance**

The second research question sought to find out the factors which influence students' perception of each assessment tool. The question states:

R. Q. 2 What are the factors, if any, which influence students' perception of the relevance of each assessment tool?

Four null hypotheses were developed in response to this question. Factors that might influence perception of relevance of the assessment tools included programs of study, the students' perceived academic standing, assessment tools employed in departmental groups of courses, and students' perceived quality of feedback they receive from lecturers following assessment of any kind. These were examined using the chi-square Test of Independence.

### Level of Academic Standing and Perception of Relevance

The relationship between the level of academic standing and students' perception was analyzed based on the three commonly used assessment tools namely research papers, examinations and tests. It is



important to note there were three categories of respondents. Fifty-eight respondents were in the category of those who selected research papers as an assessment tool, in their questionnaires, 55 respondents of examinations, and 30 respondents of tests. For this reason the sample size varied from one assessment tool to another.

**H<sub>0</sub>: 1** Differences in the perceived level of students' academic standing will not significantly affect their perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

The independent variables in this hypothesis are:

- a) Students with "excellent" perceived academic standing
- b) Students with "very good" perceived academic standing
- c) Students with "good" perceived academic standing

Items 2 and 5 of the questionnaire provided data for exploring this hypothesis. In question 2, students were asked to rate their academic standing on a scale of excellent, very good, good, fair and poor. Mention should be made here that all the 61 respondents indicated that their perceived academic standing was not lower than good. In other words, the perceived academic standing ranged from excellent to good. Item 5 on the questionnaire sought to gather views as to what extent an assessment tool was relevant to the students. The results of the students' responses are tabulated in table 6 below.

### *Research Papers*

Table 6. Perception of relevance of research papers as an assessment tool based on perceived academic standing.

Perceived academic standing	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
Excellent	5 (4.83)	0 (0.09)	0 (0.09)	5
Very good	18 (18.34)	1 (0.33)	0 (0.33)	19
Good	33 (32.83)	0 (0.59)	1 (0.59)	34
<b>Column total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>58</b>

N = 58

$\chi^2 = 2.758$

df = 4

Level of significance = .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed (see table 6). It was found that the computed chi-square of 2.758 is below the critical value (9.488) necessary for the rejection of the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance on a 3 x 3 table with 4 degrees of freedom. Therefore the null hypothesis was not

rejected. The result implies that regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, students tend to see research work as a highly relevant tool for assessment.

### Examinations

Table 7. Perception of relevance of examinations as an assessment tool based on perceived academic standing.

Perceived academic standing	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
Excellent	1 (0.31)	0 (0.64)	0 (0.05)	1
Very good	5 (6.18)	15 (12.73)	0 (1.1)	20
Good	11 (10.51)	20 (21.64)	3 (1.85)	34
Column total	17	35	3	55

N = 55

$\chi^2 = 4.818$

df = 4

Level of significance = .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed see (see table 7). The chi-square value of 4.818 does not equal or exceed the critical value (9.488) necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result implies that regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, the students tend to see the low relevance of examinations as an assessment tool.

### Tests

Table 8. Perception of relevance of tests as an assessment tool based on perceived academic standing.

Perceived academic standing	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
Excellent	1 (1.7)	2 (1.1)	0 (0.2)	3
Very good	7 (6.2)	3 (4.03)	1 (0.73)	11
Good	9 (9.07)	6 (5.87)	1 (1.07)	16
Column total	17	11	2	30

N = 30

$\chi^2 = 1.692$

df = 4

Level of significance = .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed (see table 8). The chi-square value of 1.692 is far below the critical value (9.488) necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. The result means that regardless of their perceived academic standing, the students tend to see the high relevance of tests as an assessment tool.

Table 9. Summary of students' perception of assessment tools based on academic standing

Assessment tool	N	$\chi^2$	df	Remark
Research papers	58	2.758	4	NS
Examinations	55	4.818	4	NS
Tests	30	1.692	4	NS

NS = Not Significant

### *Discussion*

In summary, it can be concluded that students' academic standing did not influence their perception of relevance of the assessment tools. Regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, 96.55% of students tend to see research work as highly relevant tool for assessment, and only 1.72% sees it as of less relevance. Also, regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, the students tend to see the low relevance of examinations as an assessment tool, with 58.62% of them saying so. It is interesting to note that while the respondents tend to perceive the relevance of examinations as low, they do not perceive tests as such. That is, regardless of their perceived academic standing, the students (56.67%) tend to see the high relevance of tests as an assessment tool. Examinations and tests belong to the same category of assessment tools, and yet the difference of perception of relevance is very clear. It is possible that tests are highly relevant due to the types of courses that call for tests and hence the difference in the perception of relevance.

### Program of Study and Perception of Relevance

The relationship between the program of study and the students' perception of relevance of the assessment tools was analyzed based on the three commonly used assessment tools namely: research papers, examinations and tests. In other words, the perception of relevance of these three tools was measured in light of the respondents' program of study.

$H_0$ : 2 Differences in programs of study will not significantly affect the students' perception of relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

The independent variables in this hypothesis are the various programs in which the respondents are enrolled namely: Master of Arts (M. A.), Master of Divinity (M Div.), and Master of Theology (M. Th.).

Items 1 and 5 of the questionnaire provided data for exploring this hypothesis. In question 1, students were asked to indicate their program of study, while in question 5 students were asked to rate the assessment tools according to how relevant or irrelevant they were on a scale of "very large extent", "large

extent,” “not sure”, “small extent”, “very small extent”. The scale has been collapsed into two to avoid having a great number of empty cells. The results of the students’ responses are tabulated below.

### *Research papers*

Table 10. Perception of relevance of research papers as an assessment tool based on program of study.

Program of study	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
MA	21 (21.2)	0 (0.4)	1 (0.4)	22
M DIV	31 (30.9)	1 (0.55)	0 (0.55)	32
M TH	4 (3.9)	0 (0.07)	0 (0.07)	4
<b>Column total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>58</b>

N = 58       $\chi^2 = 2.363$       df = 4      Level of significance = .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed (see table 10). The chi-square value of 2.363 is far below the critical value (9.488) necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance on a 3 x 3 table with 4 df. Therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. What it means is that there is no statistically significant difference across all programs in the perception that research papers are a highly relevant form of assessment tool.

### *Examinations*

Table 11. Perception of relevance of examinations as an assessment tool based on program of study

Program of study	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
MA	5 (6.4)	16 (14.4)	1 (1.2)	22
M DIV	11 (9.3)	19 (20.9)	2 (1.7)	32
M TH	0 (0.3)	1 (0.7)	0 (0.1)	1
<b>Column total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>55</b>

N = 55       $\chi^2 = 1.582$       df = 4      Level of significance = .05

A chi-square test of independence was performed (see table 11). The obtained chi-square value of 1.582 is below the critical value (9.488) necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance. Students across all programs perceived examinations as the least relevant form of assessment.

This means that differences in programs did not really affect this perception of the irrelevance of examinations as a mode of assessment.

### Tests

Table 12. Perception of relevance of tests as an assessment tool based on program of study.

Program of study	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
MA	7 (7.2)	4 (4)	1 (0.8)	12
M DIV	11 (10.2)	5 (5.67)	1 (1.13)	17
M TH	0 (0.6)	1 (0.3)	0 (0.1)	1
<b>Column total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>30</b>

$$\chi^2 = 2.583$$

$$df = 4$$

$$\text{Level of significance} = .05$$

A chi-square test of independence was performed (see table 12). The chi-square value of 2.583 is far below the critical value (9.488) necessary to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance in a 3 x 3 table with 4 df. Therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. What it means is that students across all programs of study perceived tests as highly relevant.

Table 13. Summary of students' perception of assessment tools based on program of study

Assessment tool	N	$\chi^2$	df	Remark
Research papers	58	2.363	4	NS
Examinations	55	1.582	4	NS
Tests	30	2.583	4	NS

NS = Not Significant

### Discussion

In summary, it can be said that program of study did not reveal any statistically significant difference in the students' perception of relevance of the three assessment tools. Students across all programs perceived research papers as highly relevant. Regardless of the program of study, students perceived examinations as the least relevant form of assessment. Students across all programs of study perceived tests as highly relevant, even though they might be similar to examinations.

Relationship between Assessment Tools Used in Various Groups of  
Courses and Perception of Relevance

$H_0$ : 3 Differences in assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another will not significantly affect the students' perception of relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

In this hypothesis, the independent variables are the various assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another. Item 6 on the questionnaire provided data for exploring this hypothesis. Students were asked to tick one assessment tool which they found most relevant in relation to the course contents.

Represented in table 14 are the results of the responses to the question in which the students were asked to choose the most relevant tools for the various courses. Four courses were chosen per department except for theological and historical departments which had three courses each, because those were the courses the students had taken or were taking at the time the study was conducted. In table 14 is a summary by departments, but for a detailed account of the frequencies for individual courses, refer to appendix B.

Table 14. The reported most relevant assessment tools for departmental courses

Departmental courses	Most relevant assessment tools (Total frequency per department)					Row total
	Research papers	Tests	Projects	Exams	Oral presentation	
Biblical Courses	53 (45.69%)	36 (31.03%)	19 (16.38%)	8 (6.90%)	0	116
Education Courses	29 (52.73%)	1 (1.82%)	21 (38.18%)	4 (7.27%)	0	55
Historical Courses	68 (51.52%)	7 (5.30%)	16 (12.12%)	27 (20.45%)	14 (10.61%)	132
Mission Courses	91 (78.45%)	1 (0.86%)	18 (15.52%)	2 (1.72%)	4 (3.45%)	116
Pastoral Courses	29 (33.33%)	4 (4.60%)	16 (18.39%)	4 (4.60%)	34 (39.08%)	87
Theological Courses	52 (74.29%)	4 (5.71%)	8 (11.43%)	6 (8.57%)	0	70
Translation Courses	21 (28.38%)	9 (12.16%)	33 (44.59%)	10 (13.51%)	1 (1.35%)	74
Column total	343	62	131	61	53	650

N = 61

$\chi^2 = 310.503$

df = 24

level of significance = .05

It is important to note that the differences (or gaps) in the number of frequencies represented in table 14 above might not be the exact reflection of how many, out of 61 students found a particular tool relevant for a certain course. The reason for this is that the high or low numbers of frequencies in some cases are due to the number of students who might have taken the courses. For example, there were some courses which were taken by students from various departments (core courses), while some were taken by the fewer students from a particular department (departmental courses). Such being the case, percentages (of the respondents) were used to determine the extent to which a particular assessment tool was favored.

Table 14 shows that research papers were perceived as the most highly relevant tool in 5 out of 7 departments namely biblical, missions, historical, education, and theological. In pastoral department, the most highly relevant tool was said to be oral presentations while in translation department it was projects.

A chi-square test of independence was performed. A chi-square value of 310.503 obtained was far above the critical value (36.42) required to reject the null hypothesis on a 7 x 5 table with 24 df. Therefore the hypothesis was rejected. This means that differences in perception of relevance was statistically significant by departments. In other words, differences in assessment tools employed from one group of courses to another influenced the perception of relevance of the assessment tool. Except for research papers, students reported various assessment tools for the courses as most relevant.

### *Discussion*

From the results reflected in table 14, students reported that different departments used different assessment tools to measure students' performance even though research papers appear still to be the most frequently reported assessment tool utilized at NEGST. Quite a number of students chose projects as the most relevant assessment tool, second to research papers. It is possible that the students who chose projects may have research papers in mind due to the ambiguity between the two. But basically, papers are the most reported tools so far.

The results also revealed that there was the highest frequency of "short tests" reported in the Biblical Studies department. This is probably due to the nature of some courses e. g. Greek and Hebrew courses that call for short tests as a form of assessment.

### Quality of Feedback and Perception of Relevance

The relationship between perceived quality of feedback and the students' perception of assessment tools was analyzed based on the three commonly used assessment tools as reported by students, namely: research papers, examinations and tests.

**H<sub>0</sub>: 4** Differences in the students' perceived quality of feedback they receive following assessment will not significantly affect their perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

The independent variables in this hypothesis are: Students with perceived high quality of feedback, and students with perceived low quality of feedback.

Items 5 and 7 of the questionnaire provided data for exploring this hypothesis. In question 5, students were asked to rate the relevance of various assessment tools, while in question 7 they were asked to rate the quality of feedback on a scale of excellent, very good, good, fair and poor. The scale was collapsed into two to avoid having a great number of empty cells. The results of the students' responses are tabulated below.

#### *Research Papers*

Table 15. Perception of relevance of research papers as an assessment tool based on perceived quality of feedback.

Perceived quality of feedback	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
High quality	47 (47.28)	1 (0.86)	1 (0.86)	49
Low quality	8 (6.75)	0 (0.12)	0 (0.12)	7
Column total	55	1	1	57

$$\chi^2 = 0.519$$

$$df = 2$$

$$\text{Level of significance} = .05$$

A chi-square test was performed to test the hypothesis (see table 15). The result obtained (0.519) is far below the critical value of 5.99 necessary to reject the hypothesis at the .05 level of significance.

Therefore the hypothesis was not rejected. That means that regardless of the perceived quality of feedback students tend to see research papers as highly relevant form of assessment.



*Examinations*

Table 16. Perception of relevance of examinations as an assessment tool based on perceived quality of feedback

Perceived quality of feedback	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
High quality	16 (13.89)	28 (29.51)	2 (2.60)	46
Low quality	0 (2.11)	6 (4.49)	1 (0.40)	7
Column total	16	34	3	53

$\chi^2 = 4.054$

df = 2

Level of significance = .05

A chi-square value of 4.054 obtained (see table 16) is below the critical chi-square value (5.99) required to reject the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected. This implies that regardless of the perceived quality of feedback, the students tend to see the low relevance of examinations as an assessment tool.

*Tests*

Table 17. Perception of relevance of tests as an assessment tool based on perceived quality of feedback.

Perceived quality of feedback	Perception of relevance			Row total
	High	Low	Uncertain	
High quality	15 (15.24)	9 (8.96)	2 (1.79)	26
Low quality	2 (1.76)	1 (1.03)	0 (0.21)	3
Column total	17	10	2	29

$\chi^2 = 0.273$

df = 2

Level of significance = .05

A chi-square test was performed (see table 17). The result obtained (0.273) is far below the critical level of 5.99 necessary to reject the hypothesis at .05 level of significance. Therefore the hypothesis was not rejected. It implies that regardless of perceived quality of feedback, which students receive following any kind of assessment by their lecturers, they tend to see tests as highly relevant tool for assessment. In other words, differences in students' perception of quality of feedback did not affect the degree to which they felt tests were a relevant method of assessment.

Table 18. Summary of students' perception of assessment tools based on perceived quality of feedback.

Assessment tool	N	$\chi^2$	df	Remark
Research papers	57	0.519	2	NS
Examinations	53	4.054	2	NS
Tests	29	0.273	2	NS

NS = Not Significant

### **Discussion**

Regardless of their perception of the quality of feedback that students were getting from their lecturers, they still felt that research work and tests were highly relevant tools of assessment, while examinations were perceived to be of low relevance. Differences in students' perceived quality of feedback did not really affect their perception of relevance or irrelevance of the tools.

### **Reasons for Rating the Assessment Tools**

In order to find out the students' views as to what extent the assessment tools were relevant, students were asked to indicate on a scale "very large extent," "large extent," "not sure," "small extent," and "very small extent." In addition, the students were asked to state reasons for their rating. The following is a summary of the reasons they gave on each of the three assessment tools, namely: research papers, examinations, and tests.

#### **Research Papers**

Out of the several reasons that the students (53.33%) gave for rating the research papers highly, one was that research work provides an opportunity for them to interact with various authors, scholars and materials. The experience is thought to enrich the students' understanding and to develop their thinking skills. Only one respondent (2.22%) indicated that research papers were not relevant because sometimes papers are given by lecturers just to fulfill class requirements.

#### **Examinations**

Forty percent of the respondents indicated that examinations were very helpful in the retention of material. This is because students are required to revise all the materials before they write exams. Fifty five

percent of the respondents indicated that examinations limit interaction with the material because cramming becomes a priority.

### Tests

A high percentage (60.87%) of respondents which rated tests very highly stated that tests, like exams help students to revise their notes, a thing they would not do if a test was not given. Tests were thought to provide an opportunity for students to interact with class notes and to understand the material better. Those who considered tests to be of less relevance (28%) reported that sometimes students just read to pass the test but do not necessarily retain the information.

### Reasons for Rating Quality of Feedback

Students were asked to rate the quality of feedback that they got from lecturers following any kind of assessment on a scale “excellent,” “very good,” “good,” “fair,” and “poor.” Eighty percent of the students who rated quality of feedback highly said that the feedback was corrective and aimed at helping students to improve while those who rated it low (10%) stated that lecturers do not give enough feedback, and in addition, it takes a long time before one receives the feedback, which in most cases comes at the end of the term.

### Relationship between Perceived Academic Standing and Perceived Quality of Feedback.

Data were also analyzed to establish whether there was any relationship between the students’ perceived academic standing and their perceived quality of feedback. The results are represented in table 19.

Table 19. Relationship between perceived academic standing and perceived quality of feedback.

Perceived level of academic standing	Perceived quality of feedback		
	High	Low	Row total
Excellent	5 (4.42)	0 (0.58)	5
Very good	20 (18.55)	1 (2.45)	21
Good	28 (30.03)	6 (3.97)	34
Column total	53	7	60

$$\chi^2 = 2.802$$

$$df = 2$$

$$\text{Level of significance} = .05$$

When a chi-square test of independence was performed (see table 19), a value of 2.802 was obtained, which is below the critical chi-square value (5.99) required to reject the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. Therefore the result implies that regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, students generally tend to see the quality of feed back as high.

### Accuracy of Assessment Tools

Students were asked to indicate whether the lecturers used appropriate assessment tools to assess their academic standing. The question that students were asked states: In all honesty, how accurate would you say your academic standing at NEGST is in view of the tools used to determine it so far? The scale ranged from “very accurate,” “accurate,” “fairly accurate,” “possibly not accurate,” and “not accurate.” The results are represented in table 20 below. Contained in the parentheses are the numbers of respondents whose scores are tabulated in table 20. The numbers placed outside the parenthesis are the total value scores for a particular point on the scale. For example, “very accurate” has a value of 5 points attached to it. So 3 respondents checked “very accurate”, the total is therefore 3 x 5 which is 15.

Table 20. Accuracy of academic standing in light of assessment tools used

	Very accurate 5	Accurate 4	Fairly accurate 3	Possibly not accurate 2	Not accurate 1	Total score
Score	15 (3)	104 (26)	18 (6)	4 (2)	21 (21)	165

The results reveal that 3 (5.17%) perceived the assessment tools as very accurate, 26 (44.83%) perceived the tools as accurate, 6 (10.34%) as fairly accurate, 2 (3.45%) as possibly not accurate, and 21 (36.21%) as not accurate at all. Therefore, with 35 (60.34%) in the region of tools being accurate, and 23 (39.65%) in the region of not accurate, it can be concluded that students generally tend to perceive the tools to be accurate in determining their academic standing.

### Students' Responses on the Likert Scale

In order to validate some items on the questionnaire, students were asked to complete an opinionnaire on a 5-point scale with “strongly agree,” “agree,” “undecided,” “disagree” and “strongly

disagree.” Items 8-15 of the questionnaire provided data for this purpose. The scores were analyzed according to the values indicated below:

$61 \times 5 = 305$  most favorable responses

$61 \times 3 = 183$  neutral responses

$61 \times 1 = 61$  most unfavorable responses

Contained in parentheses are the numbers of respondents whose scores are tabulated in table 21.

The numbers placed outside the parenthesis are the value scores for a particular point on the scale. For example, “Strongly agree” has a value of 5 points attached to it. So for the first opinion, 13 respondents checked “strongly agree”, the total is therefore  $13 \times 5$  which is 65.

Table 21. Likert scale of summated ratings

Opinion	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1	Total score
8. Assessment tools contribute to academic standing	65 (13)	112 (28)	36 (12)	12 (6)	2 (2)	227
9. Lecturers use appropriate assessment tools for the courses I have taken so far	25 (5)	132 (33)	24 (8)	26 (13)	1 (1)	208
10. Different programs of study should use different methods of assessment	190 (56)	68 (17)	9 (3)	2 (1)	2 (2)	271
11. The nature of the course determines the type of assessment tools to be used	180 (36)	80 (20)	6 (2)	2 (1)	2 (2)	270
12. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is informative	35 (7)	124 (31)	33 (11)	20 (10)	1 (1)	213
13. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is timely	10 (2)	76 (19)	39 (13)	42 (21)	5 (5)	172
14. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is beneficial	45 (9)	112 (28)	36 (12)	16 (8)	3 (3)	212
15. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is comprehensive/complete	20 (4)	64 (16)	48 (16)	38 (19)	5 (5)	175

N = 61

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### Assessment Tools' Contribution to Academic Standing

Item number 8 on the questionnaire sought the views of the students as to whether the assessment tools used contributed to their level of academic standing. A score of 227 in table 21 above shows that the majority of students agree that the assessment tools used contributed to their perceived academic standing. This implies that according to students, the type of assessment tools employed have a bearing on their performance.

However, even though this might be the case, the students' perception of relevance of the three assessment tools namely research papers, examinations, and tests was not influenced in any way by their perceived academic standing. Regardless of their academic standing, students perceived research papers and tests as highly relevant tools of assessment, while examinations were perceived as of low relevance. This does not seem to confirm what the students said in their views concerning academic standing and perception of relevance of the assessment tools. It did not really show that there was a statistically significant relationship between the two.

### Lecturers Use Appropriate Tools for the Courses

Item number 9 on the questionnaire was aimed at gathering students' views as to whether the lecturers used appropriate tools for the courses taken so far. The item states: "Lecturers use appropriate assessment tools for the courses I have taken so far." A score of 208 was obtained, which means that favorable responses were given by students.

Students generally perceived the assessment tools as appropriate. Of the three selected assessment tools that were studied, students perceived research work and tests as highly relevant, while examinations were the least relevant assessment tool. There is a kind of consistency in the students' thinking that generally, the assessment tools were appropriate.

About the same number of students, (67.21%) who thought that tools contributed to academic standing, said the tools were appropriate ((63.33%). It is also interesting to note that (60.34%) indicated that the tools were accurate (see table 21).

### Different Programs, Different Assessment Methods

On whether different programs of study should use different assessment methods, the highest score of 271 was obtained (see table 21). The results provide enough evidence that students felt that programs are different and as such different assessment tools should be utilized. This validates the responses that students gave in table 14, where it was evident that different departmental groups of courses were assigned different assessment tools as relevant. It is important to note that programs of study and nature of courses are closely related.

### The Nature of the Course Determines Type of Assessment Tools

On whether different programs of study should use different methods of assessment, a high score of 270 was obtained, which shows that respondents were in favor of the statement. This confirms the responses they gave to item 6 on the questionnaire on what they thought were the most relevant tools for the listed groups of courses. There appears to be a kind of consistency in their responses even though research papers and projects had the highest number of frequencies (see appendix B). For example, in Biblical Studies, short tests, examinations and quizzes featured much in courses such as Hebrew and Greek, while in courses such as hermeneutics and exposition of biblical books, projects and research papers featured more. In pastoral courses, 82% of the respondents opted for oral presentations in Homiletics.

### Quality of Feedback

Items 12-15 sought to obtain views on how the students perceived the quality of feedback that they receive following any kind of assessment by their lecturers. The following statements were presented to them:

12. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is informative
13. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is timely
14. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is beneficial
15. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is comprehensive/complete

The students were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements.

### ***Feedback is Informative***

On whether feedback was informative or not, a score of 213 was obtained which shows that the majority of students reported receiving informative feedback following assessment. In response to item 7 on the questionnaire, it was discovered that generally, the perceived feedback was of high quality with 88.33% of the students saying so. Probably, this is one of the aspects that contributed to the high quality of feedback that students reported about.

### ***Feedback is Timely***

On whether the respondents received timely feedback or not, an unfavorable score of 172 was obtained. This is in agreement with one of the reasons that students gave for low rating of quality of feedback. They said it takes a long time before one gets the feedback from the lecturers. It can therefore be concluded that students get feedback that is informative but probably not timely. Although 88.33% of the students reported receiving high quality feedback, the timing of the feedback is generally of concern to students.

### ***Feedback is Beneficial***

On whether the feedback was beneficial or not, the majority of students reported that it was beneficial. A score of 212 was obtained (see table 21). Almost the same number of students who reported feedback was informative also reported that it was beneficial. If the feedback was informative then it must be beneficial though not comprehensive as reported by students (see discussion below).

### ***Feedback is Comprehensive***

On the quality of feedback in terms of its comprehensiveness, an unfavorable score of 175 was obtained (see table 21). It seems many respondents might not have understood the statement and decided to check "undecided." Though the students reported that the feedback was informative and was not comprehensive, it is surprising that students still reported that it was beneficial.



### The Most Relevant Tool According to Students' Opinion

The third research question was meant to investigate the students' most preferred assessment tool that should be utilized by lecturers at NEGST. The respondents were asked in part C of the questionnaire to mention one assessment tool that they considered relevant, which lecturers should use at NEGST. They were also asked to give a reason for choosing the tool. The results for items 16 and 17 on the questionnaire are tabulated in tables 22 and 23 below.

Table 22. The most relevant tool according to students' opinion

Serial no.	Suggested tool	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Research Work/Term papers	45	78.95
2.	Projects	8	14.04
3.	Exams/Tests	3	5.26
4.	Oral Presentation	1	1.75
<b>Total</b>		57	100

N = 57

The results show that (45) 78.95% of the students consider research papers/term papers as the relevant method of assessment that teachers should utilize at NEGST. Some of the major reasons for choosing this assessment tool are represented in table 23 below.

Table 23. Why research papers are the most relevant assessment tool

Serial no.	Reason	Frequency
1.	Helps students interact with scholars and many materials	13
2.	Helps students discover more and gain more	7
3.	Develops research skills in students	6
4.	Gives practical insights to the courses taken	5
5.	Gain more understanding of subject matter	4
6.	Leads to mastery of information	4
7.	Helps to focus on a particular area of interest.	2
8.	Provides opportunity for application	2

As table 23 shows, the reason that kept recurring was that research work exposes students to a lot of materials and they get to interact with many scholars.

### Discussion

From the obtained results, students seem to perceive research papers to be the most relevant tool for assessment, followed by projects. There is a high probability that those who indicated projects as an

assessment tool had research papers in mind due to ambiguity in the definition of the two. This means that generally, research papers are considered the most relevant tool of assessment, and incidentally, that is what the students get if the researcher is to go by what the students reported as the most commonly used assessment tool (table 4).

### **Overall Discussion**

The analysis reveals that research papers, examinations and tests were the commonly reported assessment tools at NEGST at the time of writing, research papers having the highest frequency of the three (58 out of 61 respondents), closely followed by examinations (55 out of 61 respondents). The majority of respondents (91.80%) said the relevance of research papers as an assessment tool was high, while 56.67% of them said the relevance of tests was high. On the other hand, respondents perceived examinations of low relevance with 55.74% of them giving it a low rating. This suggests that students wished exams were not used as frequently as reported.

Students agree that different courses have to adopt different assessment tools as appropriate and this was most evident in a department such as Biblical Studies where, apart from research work, short tests were reportedly employed most frequently, especially in biblical languages such as Hebrew and Greek. The study also revealed that in Historical Studies department, exams were reportedly employed most frequently, next to research papers, while in Pastoral Studies department; oral presentations were commonly used tools second to research papers, and, finally, in Translation Studies department, projects were reportedly employed most frequently, followed by research papers. Therefore, while research papers seemed to dominate in five of the seven departments (except Pastoral Studies and Translation Studies), there is enough evidence that students felt that different courses ought to adopt different assessment tools. These findings agree with what is contained in the literature that various course contents require different assessment tools (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight 1998, 101).

From the analyses, it was discovered that the students' academic standing, program of study, and perceived quality of feedback did not affect the students' perception of the three assessment tools. It did not really matter what the students' levels of academic standing were, their programs of study, or their

perceived quality of feedback, they still perceived the relevance of assessment tools equally. This led to the three hypotheses that dealt with these factors not being rejected. However, one hypothesis that dealt with assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another was rejected. It was discovered that there was a statistically significant difference in students' perception of the relevance of the assessment tools based on differences in the assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another.

The majority of students suggested research papers as the most relevant assessment tool to be used by lecturers at NEGST. About 78.95% of the respondents from various programs at NEGST suggested research papers as the most relevant assessment tool. This means that the respondents want research papers to be employed more frequently than any other tool except in those courses in which papers would not be appropriate. Some of the reasons students gave for choosing research papers support the general trend in the literature. For example, Ericksen (1984, 120) says that research papers give students freedom to express their own thinking and this is helpful exercise that stays on even after graduation. McKeachie also writes that research papers provide an opportunity for students to gain expertise in an area. As such, students learn to value knowledge and the reasoning process (1986, 127).

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This descriptive study was an attempt to investigate students' perception of the relevance of the assessment tools used at NEGST. The work began with the identification of the assessment tools that were commonly used at NEGST, and then explored the factors that might have influenced the students' perception of the relevance of the tools. Students were also given an opportunity to make suggestions as to which tool they considered most relevant to them and should be used by lecturers at NEGST.

#### Purpose of Study

In an attempt to investigate students' perception of relevance of assessment tools at NEGST, the following research questions guided the focus of this study:

R.Q. 1. What assessment tools are commonly used at NEGST?

R.Q. 2. What are the factors, if any, which influence students' perception of the relevance of each assessment tool?

R.Q. 3. What do students consider as the most relevant tools of assessment that lecturers at NEGST should utilize?

#### Significance of Study

In every academic institution, students' assessment plays a very big role. If goals and objectives are to be achieved in the teaching and learning process, assessment of one kind or another has to take place. This is done to check progress of both teaching and learning effectiveness. The use of relevant assessment tools provides the right feedback to both the teachers and the learners. This study was intended to provide valuable information for the faculty members that would guide them into making appropriate choices of assessment tools in order to promote teaching and learning.

### **Research Design**

For this research study, no sampling was attempted because the population was manageable and within reach. A questionnaire return-rate of 86% was obtained. The instrument that was used to collect the required information for this study was both the closed-ended and the open-ended questionnaire. The Likert Scale of Summated Ratings was also used to measure the students' opinion on certain issues to do with assessment at NEGST. The opinionnaire was meant to validate the responses that students gave to the other items on the questionnaire. The instrument was developed after examining the relevant literature to ascertain the possible factors that might influence students' perception of the relevance of the assessment tools of any kind. Secondly, the researcher had preliminary conversations with students. The aim of the conversations was to obtain a sketchy idea of students' views about the assessment tools that NEGST utilizes.

### **Findings**

The three research questions that the researcher attempted to answer were:

R.Q. 1. What assessment tools are commonly used at NEGST?

R.Q. 2. What are the factors, if any, which influence students' perception of the relevance of each assessment tool?

R.Q. 3. What do students consider as the most relevant tools of assessment that lecturers at NEGST should utilize?

R.Q. 1. What assessment tools are commonly used at NEGST?

In relation to research question 1, no hypothesis was cast, but it was discovered that the top three most commonly used assessment tools were research papers (95% of the respondents), examinations (90% of the respondents), and tests (49% of the respondents).

R.Q. 2. What are the factors, if any, which influence students' perception of the relevance of each assessment tool?

In relation to research question 2, four hypotheses were cast and tested.

H<sub>0</sub>: 1 Differences in the perceived level of students' academic standing will not significantly affect their perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

This hypothesis was not rejected because it was discovered that differences in the students' perceived level of academic standing did not affect their perception of relevance of the three assessment tools namely: research papers, examinations and tests. Regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, students perceived research papers and tests as highly relevant tools for assessment, and again, regardless of their perceived level of academic standing, students perceived examinations of low relevance as a form of assessment.

H<sub>0</sub>: 2 Differences in programs of study will not significantly affect the students' perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

This hypothesis was not rejected because students' programs of study did not affect the students' perception of the relevance of the three assessment tools. Students in one program of study did not perceive research papers and tests more relevant, or examinations less relevant than the other students in another program.

H<sub>0</sub>: 3 Differences in assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another will not significantly affect the students' perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

This null hypothesis was rejected because it was discovered that there were differences in perception of relevance based on the assessment tools that were employed from one departmental group of courses to another.

H<sub>0</sub>: 4 Differences in the students' perceived quality of feedback they receive following assessment will not significantly affect their perception of the relevance of assessment tools used at NEGST.

This null hypothesis was not rejected because the study revealed that students' perceived quality of feedback did not affect their perception of relevance of the three assessment tools. Regardless of their perceived quality of feedback, students tend to perceive research papers and tests as highly relevant tools for assessment, and again, regardless of their perceived quality of feedback, students tend to perceive examinations of low relevance as a form of assessment.

R.Q. 3. What do students consider as the most relevant tools of assessment that lecturers at NEGST should utilize?

No hypothesis was cast, but it was discovered that the most relevant tool, according to students' view, was research papers.

### **Conclusions**

From the study, it is apparent that students value assessment tools so much so that the issue of relevance (of the assessment tools) is of interest to them. It is not just any kind of assessment tool that may prove most relevant to all course contents. Again, it is not the frequency at which an assessment tool is used that matters, but the issue is relevance. This suggests that careful thought must be given to the choice of assessment tools to be used in order to ascertain the relevance of the tools.

Given the findings, the following conclusions can be made:

1. That lecturers across all programs at NEGST tend to use research papers, examinations and tests as forms of assessment, research papers being the most commonly used, followed closely by exams.
2. That students' perceived academic standing, program of study, and perceived quality of feedback they receive from their lecturers following assessment, did not influence the students' perception of the relevance or irrelevance of the selected assessment tools which are research papers, examinations, and tests.
3. That differences in assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another affect the perception of relevance of the studied assessment tools. There was a statistically significant difference in the perception of relevance of the assessment tools employed from one departmental group of courses to another.
4. Research papers and tests were perceived to be highly relevant forms of assessment by the students, while students' perception of relevance of examinations was low.
5. That the most preferred assessment tool by students, and the assessment tool that is considered by them to be relevant is research papers.

Based on the summary of findings above, it can be concluded that research papers and exams were reportedly the most commonly used assessment tools at NEGST, with almost the same degree of

frequency. Research papers turned out to be the reported most relevant tool to the students. Partly, it appears that students were getting what they considered to be the most relevant form of assessment.

Although examinations were reportedly used with almost the same degree of frequency with research papers, students wished examinations were not used as frequently as reported. Examinations were said to be relevant to a small extent.

### **Recommendations**

Since graduate students attest to the high relevance of research papers as a form of assessment, faculty members should continue to give students the same in order to assess their work. However, since different courses require different assessment tools as students indicated on the opinionnaire (see page 42), lecturers should be mindful of which assessment tool would be most relevant to the course that s/he is teaching. This is so because research papers might not assess everything there is to assess, given the diversity of courses offered at NEGST.

It is also important for faculty members to explain to their students why they are using the assessment tools that they are using. This might help the students to appreciate the method chosen, even though they might not agree with the lecturer. Giving papers for their own sake might not prove beneficial to the students as well as to the faculty members themselves.

### **Areas for Further Research**

Other related areas that may be researched include:

1. A study can be done to cover students' perception of relevance of assessment tools that have not been dealt with in this study.
2. Some factors that might influence perception of relevance of assessment tools have not been treated in this study. Factors such as age, gender etc., can be explored.
3. A study can be done among lecturers to find out their views about the relevance of assessment tools that they use.
4. A similar study can also be carried out among students in graduate theological schools other than NEGST.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear student,

The purpose of this study is to investigate **Students' Perception of Relevance of Assessment Tools Used at NEGST**. Your views will provide valuable information to faculty members as well as students. You may write your name at the top of the questionnaire but it is not required.

I kindly request you to complete the questionnaire either by ticking [√] or writing the responses that best represent your views in the spaces provided.

Sincerely,

**Joyce Mlenga.**

Part A

1. What is your program of study?

M.ABS [ ] MAMS [ ] MACE [ ] MATS [ ]  
MDIV [ ] CE [ ] TS [ ] MS [ ] BS [ ] PA [ ]  
MTH [ ]

2. In all honesty, how would you rate your academic standing at NEGST at this time? [please tick (√) one in the space provided]:

a) Excellent [ ] c) Good [ ] e) Poor [ ]  
b) Very good [ ] d) Fair [ ]

3. In all honesty, how accurate would you say your academic standing at NEGST is, in view of the tools used to determine it so far?

a) Very Accurate [ ] c) Fairly accurate [ ] Not accurate [ ]  
b) Accurate [ ] d) Possibly not accurate [ ]

4. In order of priority, what are the **three** most frequently used assessment tools by lecturers in your program of study? (Note: place 1 beside the most frequently used tool, 2 beside the next frequently used tool, and 3 beside the third-ranked tool).

Projects	[ ]	Research Papers	[ ]
Tests	[ ]	Examinations	[ ]
Oral Presentations	[ ]	Quizzes	[ ]
Other (please specify) _____ [ ]			

5. To what extent are the assessment tools chosen in **question 4 above** relevant to you in relation to your program of study? [Note: (a) is the tool you rated as 1, (b) is the tool you rated as 2, and (c) is the tool you rated as 3]. Put a tick [✓] in the appropriate space.

a) Tool number 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Very large extent	[ ]	Large extent	[ ]	Not sure	[ ]
Small extent	[ ]	Very small extent	[ ]		

Please give **one** reason for your rating: \_\_\_\_\_

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b) Tool number 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Very large extent	[ ]	Large extent	[ ]	Not sure	[ ]
Small extent	[ ]	Very small extent	[ ]		

Please give **one** reason for your rating: \_\_\_\_\_

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c) Tool number 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Very large extent [ ]      Large extent [ ]      Not sure [ ]

Small extent [ ]      Very small extent [ ]

Please give **one** reason for your rating: \_\_\_\_\_

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6. For each of the courses listed below, tick (✓) in the space provided **one assessment tool** that you have found most relevant in relation to the course contents. (Note: please respond only to the courses you have already taken or you are currently taking).



For each of the courses listed below, tick (✓) in the space provided **one assessment tool** that you have found most relevant in relation to the course contents. (Note: please respond only to the courses you have already taken or you are currently taking).

Course	Most relevant tool						
	Projects	Short tests	Research papers	Examinations	Oral presentations	Quizzes	Other (please write down the tool)
<b>Pastoral courses</b>							
Pastoral Care of the Family							
Homiletics							
Church Ministry and Mission							
Public Worship							
<b>Translation courses</b>							
Sociology of Language							
Phonology							
Translation							
Pragmatics							
<b>Theological courses</b>							
Apologetics							
Systematic Theology							
Bible and Moral Issues							
<b>Historical courses</b>							
Early Church History							
History of Reformation							

7. How would you rate the quality of feedback that you get from lecturers in your program of study following any kind of assessment? Put a tick [√] beside the appropriate response.

- a) Excellent [ ]
- b) Very good [ ]
- c) Good [ ]
- d) Fair [ ]
- e) Poor [ ]

Please give **one** reason for your rating: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Part B

Please rate the following opinions in terms of the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. Tick (√) in the appropriate box your response in the spaces provided below.

Opinions	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8. My academic standing is where it is now due to the assessment tools that lecturers utilize.					
9. Lecturers used appropriate assessment tools for the courses I have taken so far.					
10. Different programs of study should use different methods of assessment					
11. The nature of the course determines the type of assessment tool to be used					
12. <b>Quality of feedback:</b> Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is informative					
13. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is timely.					
14. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is beneficial					
15. Following assessment I usually receive feedback that is comprehensive/complete.					



Part C

16. Mention **only one assessment tool** that you consider as the most relevant which lecturers should use at NEGST.

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17. Why do you think the assessment tool mentioned in **question 16** above is the most relevant? Please give **one** reason.

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THE END

Thank you for faithfully answering all the questions.

APPENDIX B

The reported most relevant tools for different courses

Frequencies of the most relevant assessment tool						
Courses	Projects	Short tests	Exams	Quizzes	Research papers	Oral presentations
<b>Biblical courses</b>						
Greek	1	24	7	9	-	-
Hebrew	1	9	-	1	2	-
Hermeneutics	12	2	1	-	35	-
Exposition of Biblical Books	5	1	-	-	16	-
<b>Education courses</b>						
Educational Psychology	3	1	2	-	9	2
Curriculum Studies	5	-	-	-	7	3
Principles of teaching	10	-	-	-	5	7
Educational Administration	3	-	2	-	8	2
<b>Mission courses</b>						
Urban Ministries	7	-	-	-	17	2
Introduction to Missiology	6	-	1	-	31	2
Islam in Africa	3	-	-	-	21	-
Power Encounter	2	1	1	1	22	-
<b>Pastoral courses</b>						
Pastoral Care of the Family	6	1	-	-	12	3
Church Ministry and Mission	7	3	1	-	13	2
Homiletics	2	-	3	-	1	29
Public Worship	1	-	-	-	3	-
<b>Translation courses</b>						
Sociology of Language	15	5	5	-	15	-
Phonology	5	1	3	-	1	-
Translation	9	-	-	-	-	-
Pragmatics	4	3	2	-	2	-
<b>Theological courses</b>						
Apologetics	-	1	3	-	3	2
Systematic Theology	3	3	1	-	37	1
Bible and Moral Issues	5	-	2	-	12	-
<b>Historical courses</b>						
Early Church History	1	4	9	1	27	-
History of Reformation	5	2	13	-	20	-
African Church History	10	1	5	-	21	-

## VITA

### PERSONAL DATA

Name:	Joyce Dainess Mlenga
Date of Birth:	19 <sup>th</sup> June, 1969
Gender:	Female
Marital Status	Married
Number of Children	Two
Nationality	Malawian

### EDUCATIONAL BACK GROUND

NEGST	Master of Divinity in Educational Studies	2002-2005
African Bible College	Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies with a minor in Christian Education	1996-2000
Livingstonia Secondary School	Malawi School Certificate of Examination	1985-1989

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

NEGST	Part-time teacher, Christian Ministries Program	2003-2005
NEGST	Secretary – Student Council	2003-2004
Katoto Secondary School	Teacher	2001-2002
Mzuzu Govt. Secondary School	Teacher	2000-2001
African Bible College Radio	Part-time radio presenter	2001-2002
Malawi Housing Corporation	Assistant to the Personnel Manager	1990-1996