



Flexible Assessment in Higher Education: A Comprehensive Review of Strategies and Implications

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Abstract

The article highlights the growing significance of flexible assessment in higher education as institutions adapt to the increasingly diverse needs of their student populations. The demand for customizable educational experiences, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, has made flexibility in assessment essential for sustaining and improving student engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes. This review explores various strategies for implementing flexible assessment, including flexible tasks, formats, weighting, deadlines, feedback, and deliberate planning. It also addresses the challenges, such as choice overload and increased instructor workload, that can arise when flexibility is not carefully implemented. Through a comprehensive review of existing and recent research, the article reiterates the proven benefits of flexible assessment while offering evidence-based recommendations for effective implementation. It calls for further research to develop assessment practices that can contribute to a more adaptable and equitable assessment environment for today's modern learners.

Keywords Assessment strategies · Flexible assessment · Higher education

The concept of “flexibility” in assessment has earned growing prominence in higher education as institutions strive to cater to the increasingly diverse student population from different backgrounds, age ranges, and experiences. Since the recent pandemic, this evolving student demographic has been pressurizing the system more than ever to meet their demands for flexibility and customizable educational experiences that best cater to their unique life circumstances and challenges (Lockee & Clark-Stallkamp, 2022; Bashir et al., 2021; Debes, 2021). Research has consistently confirmed incorporating flexibility in assessment has numerous benefits in terms of enhancing student engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes while reducing assessment-related stress and anxiety (Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al., 2018; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Didicher, 2016; Edwards, 2020; Hills & Peacock, 2022; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Pacharn et al., 2013; Pretorius et al., 2017; Rideout, 2018;

Wanner et al., 2024). However, if not implemented with proper planning and mechanisms, it faces the risk of not meeting the intended goals because of choice overload, procrastination, confusion among students; and increased workload for instructors (Cowan, 2024; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Didicher, 2016; El Galad et al., 2024; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Rideout, 2018; Wanner et al., 2024).

In light of this backdrop, this article discusses the significance of flexible assessment in today's higher education context and explores the recommended strategies and best practices for its effective design and implementation in courses. It also sheds light on the challenges associated with a flexible assessment approach and puts forward both evidence-based suggestions and needs for future research to create an empathetic and adapting assessment system suitable for an ever-changing educational landscape.

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Defining “Flexibility” in Assessment

Flexible assessment can be viewed as a learner-centered approach that allows the students to demonstrate their learning and skills in the best ways that fit their needs and contexts. An early definition of flexible assessment can be traced back to an Australian Government-published guide

for practical assessment (Kessels et al., 2024). The author of this guide stated that “assessment practices are flexible if they can accommodate the scope of knowledge and skills encompassed by the assessment criteria, the variations in the context in which assessment may be conducted, and the range of needs and personal situations of potential candidates” (Rumsey, 1994, p. 20). In simple terms, this definition explains flexible assessment as practices that can be customized to fit the unique needs and circumstances of the candidates and are adaptable to measure different types of knowledge and skills.

To clarify, “assessment” in this context refers to both formative and summative assessment approaches and processes. In general terms, formative assessment includes all activities carried out by teachers and students that can help generate feedback to guide and adapt the teaching and learning practices (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Summative assessment, on the other hand, focuses on evaluating students’ overall mastery of the material and readiness for progression, often contributing to final grades (Airasian, 2001). A flexible assessment approach integrates these traditional approaches with a focus on giving students varied degrees of choice in how they want to demonstrate their learning, creating opportunities for deeper engagement and ownership.

Therefore, for an assessment approach to be flexible, it needs to incorporate practices that involve offering various forms of choice to the students. This includes choices and flexibility in –

- assessment tasks or formats (Al-Sudani, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020; Cowan, 2024; El Galad et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2023; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; MacNaul et al., 2021; McCurdy, 2000; Mealy, 2019; O’Neill, 2022; Pretorius et al., 2017; Wanner et al., 2024),
- how each assessment task is weighted within the whole set of assignments (Arendt et al., 2016; Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al., 2018; Coulter et al., 2024; Cowan, 2024; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Edwards, 2020; El Galad et al., 2024; Garside et al., 2009; Hanewicz et al., 2017; Mealy, 2019; Pacharn et al., 2013; Rideout, 2018; Wanner et al., 2024),
- deadlines to submit the assignments (Al-Sudani, 2021; El Galad et al., 2024; Hills & Peacock, 2022; Wanner et al., 2024),
- the format of the feedback (Al-Sudani, 2021; Clack & Dommett, 2021; El Galad et al., 2024; Wanner et al., 2024), and
- other aspects like content, learning objectives, and grouping for assignments. (Al-Sudani, 2021; Casey & Wilson, 2005; Irwin & Hepplestone, 2011; Singelmann et al., 2020) etc.

Numerous empirical studies have linked flexible assessment with a strengthened sense of autonomy and ownership of learning, increased motivation and engagement, satisfaction, academic achievement, self-efficacy, and lowered stress and anxiety levels among students (Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al., 2018; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Didicher, 2016; Edwards, 2020; Hills & Peacock, 2022; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Pacharn et al., 2013; Pretorius et al., 2017; Rideout, 2018; Wanner et al., 2024). However, it is important to realize that offering more choices does not necessarily result in positive experiences or outcomes for learners.

A choice overload can arise when students are presented with more options than they can easily navigate, which may lead to confusion, stress, and difficulty in decision-making (Beymer & Thomson, 2015; Edwards, 2020; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Nunes et al., 2022; Rideout, 2018). Research on flexible assessment strongly emphasizes the importance of structured flexibility with clear guidelines which includes designing meaningful and manageable choices and ensuring that the students clearly understand the options, the impact of their choices, and how they can choose from options that best align with their strengths and needs (Cowan, 2024; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; O’Neill, 2022).

Significance of Flexible Assessment in Higher Education

The significance of flexible assessment in higher education stems from its current demand driven by the evolving landscape of learner demographics and the shift towards learner choice and empowerment, which was significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Imran et al., 2023; Naidu, 2022; Santiago et al., 2021). The increasingly diverse student population, which includes individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds, alternative pathways, and those balancing education with full-time jobs or family responsibilities demands that the education system including the assessment approach evolve with them to be more flexible, equitable, and adaptable (Barua & Lockee, 2024; Grawe, 2018; Johnson, 2018; Marshall et al., 2016; Valtonen et al., 2021).

Literature on flexible assessment strongly accentuates its importance and numerous advantages in the context of higher education and diverse student demographics. One of the most cited benefits of flexible assessment is the reduction of stress and anxiety among students (Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al., 2018; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Edwards, 2020; Hills & Peacock, 2022; Pretorius et al., 2017). Examining how the flexible weighting option responds to the learning needs of students in an online course, Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al. (2018) found that it significantly reduces students’ stress and strengthens their sense of ownership over learning. Similarly,

Edwards (2020) reported that students experienced reduced pressure and anxiety, and increased intrinsic motivation and engagement when allowed the flexibility to manage their assessment schedules and workloads. Edwards also observed that this flexibility led them to work harder on their assignments than they might have otherwise.

Similar observations were also shared by Jopp and Cohen (2022) where piloting a flexible assessment tasks scheme resulted in students reporting higher satisfaction scores compared to the assessment approach in previous semesters. Coyne and Woodruff (2022) underscored that flexibility when offered in a structured approach facilitates the feeling of empowerment and enhances students' assessment experiences by reducing confusion and stress. Student empowerment was highlighted as a major benefit of flexible assessment schemes by Rideout (2018), Wanner et al. (2024), and Hanewicz et al. (2017) stating that students appreciate the ability to exercise some degree of control over their assessment and feedback they receive, and it results in them taking responsibility for their learning and higher satisfaction about the overall experience and outcomes.

In terms of learning outcomes and academic achievement, research suggests that flexible assessment options and scheduling can help students scaffold their learning throughout the semester, encouraging higher-order skills and proactive learning behavior among them (Didicher, 2016; Pretorius et al., 2017). Arendt et al. (2016) also observed that a personalized assessment experience encouraged high achievement levels with many students doing beyond the grade requirements. Flexible deadlines can also help students manage their academic and personal responsibilities better which in turn improves the quality of their work (Hills & Peacock, 2022). It also benefits students without access to stable internet or a conducive environment to study (Nunes et al., 2022).

In summary, the significance of flexible assessment in higher education is evident through its proven positive impacts on students' well-being, mental health, empowerment, engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes. Allowing students some level of autonomy over the assessment of their learning can help foster a more effective and rewarding educational experience for students.

Strategies for Designing and Implementing Flexible Assessment

Incorporating flexibility in assessment and evaluation is crucial for fostering student-centered learning and assessment environments. The following is a discussion of several key flexible assessment evaluation strategies that apply to higher education settings.

Assessment Tasks, Modes, and Methods

Integrating a variety of assessment tasks and modes is a cardinal strategy of flexible assessment approaches. Research emphasizes allowing students to choose from a range of assessment tasks and modes or media of submission to best address the diverse needs and preferences of students (Barnett, 2014; Nunes et al., 2023). Literature highlights the effectiveness of implementing both formative and summative assessment strategies to facilitate the achievement of desired learning outcomes while maintaining a flexible approach. Formative assessment tasks, such as discussion boards, e-portfolios, projects, etc. can help monitor progress, whereas summative assessment tasks, such as online examinations, presentations, interviews, etc. can help measure final learning outcomes. Also, incorporating opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment is recommended to foster a comprehensive and reflective assessment environment (Hodges et al., 2020; Hallas, 2008; Huang et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2023; McCurdy, 2000).

Researchers investigating the impacts and outcomes of flexible assessment tasks and modes have explored and implemented varying degrees of flexibility ranging from offering limited options complementing the mandatory assignments to allowing learners to choose from a buffet of assignment tasks and modes, while also adjusting the weights of the tasks themselves. For example, Cowan (2024) examined the benefits and costs of flexible assessment by offering some pre-set assignments constituting 50% of the grades and offering 11 different task options to choose from to make up for the other half of the total grades. Similarly, Jopp and Cohen (2022) tried out offering a range of task options of the same relative weights to choose from for completing 3 out of 4 assignments whereas the last one was a mandatory quiz. Garside et al. (2009) allowed students to choose from undertaking an essay, an examination, and a presentation and found that all three of these methods attracted some or more students based on their individual preferences. All three of these studies reported higher student satisfaction and outcomes, enhanced motivation and engagement, and a significant reduction in stress among students.

Pretorius et al. (2017) took a slightly different approach where they offered two compulsory summative assessments and two optional tasks that focused on the process of learning. Students could choose to complete all four tasks or to concentrate only on the compulsory assessments. Despite carrying no weight, 66.4% of the 594 students completed the optional tasks feeling those tasks scaffolded their learning and encouraged higher-order thinking. Such an approach to utilizing assessment for skill development was also implemented by Al-Sudani (2021) on 207 students who participated in a flexible assessment scheme for a term. Students

were allowed to choose to write a report, develop a program, produce a video, design an animation, or create a poster presentation, using tools like PowerPoint, MS Teams, animation software, or statistical tools. The comprehensive feedback survey following this scheme revealed significant student satisfaction and perceived skill development. He also advocated for providing flexibility in choosing between individual study or group study, as well as the ability to choose their teammates for collaborative tasks, which has been supported by other researchers as well (Al-Sudani, 2021; Huang et al., 2020; Nunes et al., 2023).

Arendt et al. (2016) and Hanewicz et al. (2017) utilized a cafeteria-style assessment approach that allows students to select assignments that appeal to their learning interests from an extensive list of options targeting different skill sets. Both studies reported high completion rates, high quality of work, improved grades, and positive feedback from the students. Didicher (2016) conducted a study to compare students' perceptions of this cafeteria-style approach or buffet approach to the bento approach where students have identical tasks assigned with flexibility to their relative weights. On course evaluations, students were more likely to comment positively on the quality and quantity of learning in buffet courses than in bento ones or others taught with more teacher-centered assessment schemes.

These studies provide an abundance of evidence that incorporating flexibility in assessment tasks and modes has positive benefits in terms of achievements and well-being for students. To maintain these advantages, research emphasizes the consideration of some crucial facts while designing flexible assessment schemes. While allowing students to choose the type of assignment that suits them best is important (Wanner et al., 2024), aligning student and instructor preferences is key to its successful implementation (El Galad et al., 2024). Research also suggests utilizing assessment tasks that encourage reflective practices and encourage learners to reflect on their level of understanding and ability to apply learning in practical scenarios can also be a useful assessment tool for providing flexibility and observing their perceptions of the different strategies employed (Cassidy et al., 2016; Cornelius & Gordon, 2008). Authentic assessment is recognized as an effective flexible assessment strategy because it mimics real-world problems or situations. Learners can develop problem-solving skills through tasks such as designing posters, artifacts, reports, etc. that apply to real-world contexts and also prepare them for the workforce (Elkington, 2021; Hallas, 2008).

Flexible Weighting

Flexible weighting emerges as one of the most tested and implemented strategies within the available literature on flexible assessment strategies in the higher education

context. Flexible weighting is facilitated by allowing students to have varied degrees of control over how much each of their assessment tasks would contribute to the final grades. An abundance of empirical studies can be found that utilized various approaches to flexible weighting to investigate its impact on students' performance, satisfaction, motivation, engagement, empowerment, and overall assessment experiences.

Some of these approaches included allowing the student to – select one weighting scheme from multiple options provided by the instructor (Coulter et al., 2024; Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Didicher, 2016; Rideout, 2018); adjusting the relative contributions of different assessment tasks toward their contribution to the final grade either at the beginning of the semester or after completing them (Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al., 2018; Edwards, 2020; Pacharn et al., 2013; Wanner et al., 2024); choose assessment tasks from a range of options that can cover up to 50% of the total load (Cowan, 2024; Garside et al., 2009); choose to take smaller regular assessment tasks to reduce the weight from the final exam (Mealy, 2019); or experience a cafeteria-style grading system where students could select enough or more assessment tasks of their choice required to receive an A grade from a variety of assessments (Arendt et al., 2016; Hanewicz et al., 2017).

Flexible weighting in assessment has shown numerous benefits including increased engagement, motivation, performance, satisfaction, and grading among students. Edwards (2020) and Coyne and Woodruff (2022) highlighted that students appreciated having power over the weighting of the assessment tasks which contributed to feelings of empowerment, enhanced motivation and engagement, and reduced stress or anxiety over final grades. Brockerhoff-Macdonald et al. (2018) also reported that flexible weighting schemes alleviated anxiety among students and improved their academic performance, with 93% of students achieving better grades than in previous terms. Studies also highlighted that those students who opted to choose the flexible weighting route rather than the traditional route reported increased satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and commitment (Garside et al., 2009; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Rideout, 2018). These findings were further proven in studies on cafeteria-style grading systems, where a significant portion of the students completed more assignments than required as they could choose the tasks that they found interesting, engaging, and relevant to their needs (Arendt et al., 2016; Hanewicz et al., 2017).

Despite these benefits, flexible weightings can become counter-productive for the students if not properly planned and structured. Studies emphasize the importance of clear guidelines to help students properly assess their strengths and weaknesses before choosing the weighting schemes, otherwise, it may lead to poor choices and eventually a poor

grade (Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Wanner et al., 2024). Most, if not all of the studies reviewed had a default weighting scheme in place that students could select if they were not comfortable making the decisions themselves and some studies suggest allowing them to revert to the default weighting scheme or reallocate the relative weighting after receiving the individual grades in case their chosen scheme results in unsatisfactory final grade (Edwards, 2020; Pacharn et al., 2013).

Deadlines and Number of Attempts

Flexibility in assessment deadlines and the number of attempts have been underscored by researchers as an essential strategy to enhance student autonomy and reduce stress. Higher education students are expected to have multiple competing commitments related to education, other deadlines family, work, health, etc., and can significantly benefit from flexible deadlines, whereas strict deadlines often impede course completion and increase stress (Beer et al., 2023; Wanner & Palmer, 2015). From their investigation on flexible assessment and student empowerment, Wanner et al. (2024) recommended allowing opportunities to negotiate submission deadlines within a reasonable time frame to accommodate individual schedules. They also suggested allowing learners to resubmit their assignments based on the feedback they receive from instructors, which would promote a sense of ownership over learning.

Examining the impact of a flexible deadline policy and the use of proactive extensions by students, Hills and Peacock (2022) reported that students unanimously agreed on the usefulness of flexible deadlines as it enabled the submission of high-quality work, and better time and stress management in connection to other academic responsibilities. They also observed that students rarely used extensions for low-stake assignments, which suggests that flexible deadlines do not necessarily encourage procrastination. In a similar study, Nickels and Uddin (2003) observed that students spent more time on their work and learned more when they were allowed two extra days on assignments as needed.

Schroeder et al. (2019) integrated a late bank system into one of their online graduate courses where students could submit one of two assignments up to five days after the due date without penalty. From the after-submission surveys, they found that students who used the late banks reported positive experiences, and it also helped improve their attitudes toward the instructors. Studying preferences across dimensions of flexibility, El Galad et al. (2024) found that both students and instructors preferred setting deadlines collaboratively, favoring non-timed and take-home assignments. They perceived that this approach recognizes the diversity of student populations and increases accommodation and accessibility. Nunes et al. (2023) advocate for a

similar approach for students' cognitive well-being highlighting that all students, particularly those who do not have access to reliable internet or a quiet study space would significantly benefit from extended deadlines.

Regarding multiple attempts, allowing students to resubmit assignments based on the feedback they receive before they receive the final grade can be effective in promoting continuous improvement and mastery of content (Al-Sudani, 2021; Kessels et al., 2024). MacNaul et al. (2021) discuss that a common limitation of a flexible assessment scheme is that it requires a significant time commitment from the instructors to create and grade assignments. He recommended that an unlimited number of attempts to complete assignments and changing the grading system to complete or incomplete can be a solution to this issue.

Flexibility in Feedback

Studies on flexible assessment stress the significance of prompt and consistent feedback to support students in exercising their autonomy without hampering academic outcomes. Researchers also suggest considering students' choices in the format they would like to receive feedback for their work. Such a timely and individual feedback loop among instructors and peers sharing formative updates regarding learners' progress in formats preferred by the students can be crucial to an effective flexible assessment approach (Barnett, 2014; Hallas, 2008; Hill, 2006; Yukselturk & Yildirim, 2008).

Investigating the impact of flexible assessment on student empowerment, Wanner et al. (2024) allowed students to share their choice of feedback format (written, audio, video, or personal consultation). Their study revealed that students highly valued the opportunity to obtain personalized and more immediate feedback on their assignments and perceived it to be effective in improving their academic skills. Students expressed more interest in personal consultation or meetings with the instructors and written feedback within a week of submission.

This finding shows that learners can become motivated to become more engaged and take responsibility for their learning outcomes when granted control over the type of feedback they receive. Students' choice of such feedback formats may also indicate the depth of their learning approaches. Clack and Dommert (2021) discovered a correlation between the type of feedback students chose and their learning strategies in their study. They found that students performed better academically when they chose and expected detailed, written feedback on their assignments, and also demonstrated a deeper strategy for learning.

Considering these proven benefits of incorporating flexibility in feedback, the researchers and academics recommend providing regular, structured, and scaffolded feedback

across assessment methods and tools utilized (Elkington, 2021; O'Neill, 2022). A useful tactic in this case would be facilitating the solicitation of feedback from multiple sources and prompting students to follow up on the feedback they receive, rather than putting the whole responsibility on the instructor. Promoting self-reflection and peer feedback through in-person sessions or dialogue via multimedia platforms can enhance the opportunities to share and receive timely feedback and collaborative learning among students (Elkington, 2021).

Planning for Flexibility

Implementing flexible assessment requires a structured, adaptive, and careful planning approach to catering to diverse student needs while maintaining academic integrity, outcomes, and the well-being of both students and instructors. A major aspect of this planning process is deploying a student-centered assessment planning and implementation approach. Instructors should plan to share detailed information, guidance, and evaluation rubrics for all the assessment activities at the beginning of the course terms. Discussion regarding assessment formats and the possible implications for learners should be helpful for them to make informed decisions regarding the assessment plan they can co-construct with the instructors (AlOkaily, 2023; Irwin & Hepplestone, 2011; Rideout, 2018).

This statement is echoed by other researchers as well emphasizing the importance of guidelines, setting boundaries, and providing sufficient explanations of the flexible options to ensure that students are well-informed about their choices and can make proper decisions (Hanewicz et al., 2017; Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Wanner et al., 2024). Coyne and Woodruff (2022) advocate for structured flexibility like pre-defined options to minimize confusion, reduce stress, and enhance the overall experience and feeling of empowerment among students.

A significant component of flexible assessment plans is ensuring that the assessment tasks are properly aligned with the intended learning objectives of the course modules, rather than relying on incidental outcomes (Irwin & Hepplestone, 2011; Singelmann et al., 2020). This stance is further emphasized by Casey and Wilson (2005) who call for increased attention to considering institutional values and goals while drafting assessment criteria at the planning stage ensuring that both instructors and learners understand them clearly. However, it is also important to strike a balance between flexibility and the mandatory components of assessment that are crucial for safeguarding the achievement of learning outcomes (McCurdy, 2000).

Some researchers suggest utilizing personal assessment plans (Wanner et al., 2024) or learning contracts (McCurdy,

2000; Rideout, 2018) that are drafted and implemented in collaboration with individual learners at the beginning of each term. These plans or contracts would allow students to be more involved in the decision-making process regarding their assessment tasks, format, deadlines, weighting, and preferred feedback mechanisms. These would also serve the purposes of assessment guides and reminder mechanisms to help students remain committed to their assessment responsibilities.

Cowan (2024) highlights the need to consider the real context of individual teaching–learning environments while planning for flexibility, recommending greater flexibility for upper-year students with prior assignment experience, and starting with smaller courses where the grading responsibility is only on the instructor. He advises limiting choices by providing a standard set of effective assignments and establishing rules on changing initial assessment choices during the course if the students no longer feel comfortable about the impact on their grades. He also underscores that clear communication about the purpose and benefits of flexible assessments is essential to address student concerns and enhance their learning experience, which also resonated with Arendt et al. (2016) discussing how clear communication about grading methods played an essential role in the positive outcomes of the cafeteria-style assessment method.

While flexible assessment is the demand of time, a reality check is crucial when implementing it in the classroom. A small-scale or partial implementation can be an effective starting point to achieve a fully flexible assessment approach in the long term, without overwhelming the instructors with workload and students with too many choices. O'Neill (2022) suggests evaluating which modules are best suited for offering assessment choices, considering student diversity, prior learning, and special accommodations. Clarifying standards at the module's start with rubrics and examples and consistent support and feedback throughout the course, along with the collection and analysis of feedback from students and staff, can refine assessment choices for future iterations. Didicher (2016) calls attention to the risks of self-management, such as missed deadlines, and suggests that providing structured reminders and managing the overall workload are necessary to balance the benefits of flexible assessment. Elkington (2021) recommends designing a cumulative set of formative assessment tasks, each of which is a complete task on its own, and then synthesized into a summative account focused on a related theme or topic.

Challenges in Implementing Flexible Assessment

The design and implementation of flexible assessment in higher education hold immense significance in present times to help HEIs adapt to the evolving needs of an increasingly

heterogeneous student demographic. However, without proper planning and sufficient support, it can present several challenges that can impact both students and instructors. One of the most discussed issues is the possibility of choice overload, where students may feel confused or stressed having too many options in front of them (Jopp & Cohen, 2022; Rideout, 2018). Cowan (Cowan, 2024) stated that although students appreciate the ability to choose their assessment tasks and/or their relative tasks, some of them can find it challenging to navigate the choices and experience anxiety about missing assignments or miscalculating their workload. This stress often decreases as students become more familiar with the course expectations, but it suggests a crucial need for simplifying the choices and providing them with proper guidelines, regular feedback, and timely reminders.

Another significant challenge found in the literature is the increased workload for instructors to design, implement, and manage flexible assessment schemes. Instructors can face significant demands from meeting the requirements of incorporating flexibility in the assessment system, which require substantial effort and time commitments, which become even more arduous without sufficient technical support and cooperation (El Galad et al., 2024; O'Neill, 2022; Wanner et al., 2024). Although this workload may decrease in subsequent years once the framework and schedule are established and tasks are ready to reuse (Cowan, 2024), the need for careful planning, gradual introduction to changes, soft beginnings, and sufficient support from the institution's administration are essential to avoid any negative impact on instructors' mental health (El Galad et al., 2024; Hanewicz et al., 2017).

Flexible assessment can also influence procrastination, compromised work quality, and mistakes in judging own strengths and weaknesses among students, particularly for weaker and younger students (Didicher, 2016; El Galad et al., 2024). Without structured reminders, students may struggle with self-management, miss opportunities to receive formative feedback, and end up having too much on their plate at the end of the term (Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Pacharn et al., 2013). However, empirical evidence exists that flexibility does not necessarily result in procrastination or poor work quality when implemented in a structured way with adequate guidance (Coyne & Woodruff, 2022; Elkington, 2021; Hills & Peacock, 2022).

Other challenges in implementing flexible assessment can be technological and infrastructural limitations, connectivity issues, and budgetary constraints. These issues are exacerbated by students' diverse educational backgrounds, geographical locations, technological skills, and the unique requirements of different disciplines (El Galad et al., 2024; Matildo & Dagondon, 2022).

While this review has laid the groundwork for understanding and implementing flexible assessment strategies,

critical areas need further exploration. Future research should delve into how equity is impacted by flexibility and choice in assessments. Specifically, understanding students' perceptions of fairness in the variety of options and grading standards provided will be pivotal in effective implementation of flexible assessment schemes. Studies should also investigate methods for maintaining consistent academic standards across varied assessment formats and diverse student populations, ensuring that flexibility does not compromise rigor. Furthermore, future studies should explore the optimal degree of flexibility to offer without overwhelming learners and instructors, investigating constraints such as access, connectivity, institutional policies, legal regulations, and logistical barriers that hinder the design and implementation of flexible courses in higher education.

Conclusion

Incorporating flexibility into assessment strategies in higher education is not only a response to the evolving diversity of student demographics, but also a critical step toward advancing a more inclusive, equitable, and modern educational experience. The literature highlights the numerous benefits of flexible assessment strategies, including reduced stress, increased student motivation and engagement, and enhanced academic outcomes and achievements. However, these benefits can only be accomplished through careful planning, structured implementation, and continuous support for both students and instructors. Addressing the existing barriers or challenges to the implementation of flexible assessment like choice overload, instructors' workload, risk of procrastination and confusion among students, etc. would require more research, piloting, and knowledge-sharing within the higher education community. As higher education continues to progress, a holistic and successful integration of flexible assessment strategies will be pivotal in catering to a diverse and dynamic student population, ultimately contributing to their academic success and personal and professional growth.

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