

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT – AN OBJECTIVE IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The quality of assessment in university education depends, to a considerable extent, on the professional training of teachers in the creation of a system of practical-applicative strategies in formative assessment, which is a valuable tool for adapting and adjusting the teaching-learning process. Recently, formative assessment research has gained considerable momentum. In the context of post-modern education, assessment is expanding its scope, moving beyond the end of the learning process and actively integrating into it. Thus, the student becomes an active participant in the learning and assessment process, taking on the role of an actor in his or her own learning. Based on learning, formative assessment plays an essential role in university education through authentic feedback between teachers and students. Formative assessment thus has two essential functions: on the one hand, it helps to correct the teaching process in order to reduce the difficulties encountered by students and, on the other hand, it allows the teaching-learning process to be adjusted.*

Key words: *assessment; formative assessment; students; university education.*

Introduction

The praxiological dictionary of pedagogy describes the concept of evaluation as "the complex action of collecting a set of relevant, valid and reliable information about the relevance and value of processes, performances, competences, educational or didactic behaviors and examining the degree of adequacy between this set of information and a set of criteria established in correspondence with the objectives pursued and set in advance. Evaluation implies the realization of evaluative processes, is carried out in accordance with specific evaluative strategies and by means of appropriate methods, techniques and tools"(Bocos, 2016, p. 127).

Assessment involves the analysis of behavior from qualitative and quantitative perspectives, by making value judgments about its desirability and compatibility with the set objectives. It provides the

necessary information for the adjustment and self-adjustment of the didactic process between stages, by applying appropriate measures adapted to the educational context (Ionescu, 2000).

This is the final stage in a series of pedagogical approaches, which includes the design and realization of objectives through specific activities, followed by the analysis of the results obtained. It is not a separate activity from the teaching-learning process, but an integral part of it (Herlo, 2020).

Based on different interpretations of the term valuation, two levels of meaning can be distinguished:

- a general interpretation, which reflects the broad meaning of the term used in the socio-human sciences, defines evaluation as a process of quantitative, qualitative or value assessment of a phenomenon, a person or a structure, carried out by reference or comparison with an ideal, a norm, a standard or a scale of values and, in general, with a reference system relevant to the object evaluated and the purpose pursued;
- a more specific interpretation, focused on pedagogical meanings, derives from the integration of assessment in the context of the educational process, of the activities carried out by teachers and students, defining the concept of school assessment. In this sense, evaluation is the totality of activities, approaches and methods used to collect information about the quality and quantity of knowledge and skills acquired by pupils or students, in order to assess the levels of performance achieved by them as a result of the teaching and learning process (Voiculescu, 2010).

Student assessment is carried out by the university teacher, who analyzes the acquisition of competences through the prism of quality standards, in accordance with the objectives of the entire educational process. On the basis of this analysis, decisions are taken to improve the process or to reinforce positive aspects. Student evaluation has a direct impact on the evaluation of the teaching staff, and the success achieved contributes significantly to the overall quality of university teaching (Clipa, 2008).

Student assessment is one of the most essential aspects of the university educational process, having a significant impact on the formation and development of the skills needed for a future career. It is essential that this assessment is carried out in a professional manner, taking into account the accumulated knowledge and experience in the field of examination and testing methodologies. In order to ensure fairness and quality of assessment, clear criteria, rules and consistently applied procedures must be established. Assessment not only provides students with valuable feedback, but also provides important information to

academic institutions about the quality of teaching and available educational resources (Cucoş, 2005).

Formative assessment is designed to provide immediate pedagogical support and consists of a series of regular interventions designed to check the effectiveness of teaching methods, inform students about their progress and support them in achieving the objectives set. It can be carried out at the beginning of the learning process, to enable the teacher to select activities tailored to the individual needs of the students, but also during the learning process, to identify additional activities to remedy difficulties encountered, thus becoming a diagnostic assessment. Criterion- based formative assessment, which can also be used in the process of student self-assessment, promotes students' active involvement in their own educational development (Tousignant, 1982). This is a continuous process of assessment, consisting of a series of checks carried out periodically, which aims to support the progress of each individual involved in the learning process. It aims to adjust the learning situation or rate of progress in order to introduce appropriate corrections or improvements. Based on an educational vision which rejects the idea of failure, formative assessment has as its main function to describe as accurately as possible the aptitudes of each individual (Scallon, 1988).

Formative assessment functions as a barometer for both teacher and student, being integrated throughout the learning process in small, successive steps. It provides a periodicity that is beneficial to professional training, as it serves to identify strengths and weaknesses in the educational process. By objectively analyzing the causes of success or failure at school, formative assessment facilitates on-the-fly adjustments to educational strategies. Its main aim is to optimize the educational process by interpreting feedback and comparing partial results with the final objectives set. The results of formative assessment are used by both the teacher and the student, each adapting their teaching and learning approaches according to their needs (Baciu, 2010).

In a narrow approach, formative assessment involves establishing and maintaining a meaningful interaction between assessors and the assessed, facilitating better mutual understanding between teachers and students. It also encourages students to develop a realistic self-awareness of their own performance and competences, promoting self-assessment as an effective practice. At the same time, formative assessment helps to reduce the anxiety and fear associated with the assessment process, making it a natural and constructive part of the instructional-educational process. As a deeply formative method, this approach implies a complex and in-depth assessment of students' competences, going beyond the simple observation of their performance and achievements (Herlo, 2020).

Formative assessment of students takes place throughout the academic year and is carried out through various methods, such as knowledge and skills tests, seminar reports, practical laboratory work and projects or applications specific to the field of specialization.

The frequency of this assessment varies depending on several factors, including:

- the number of hours allocated to subjects in the curriculum: subjects with more hours allow for more frequent assessments, while those with fewer hours may have less frequent assessments.
- subject difficulty: subjects perceived as more difficult require more frequent assessments to monitor progress and identify any difficulties.
- complexity of competences: simpler competences are easier to train and assess, perhaps requiring less frequent assessments, as opposed to more complex competences, which require constant monitoring.
- the level of readiness of the groups: better prepared groups may need less frequent assessments than those with significant gaps, where more intensive intervention is needed to support progress.

Thus, the frequency of formative assessments is flexible and needs to be adapted to the particularities of each subject, student group and targeted competences.

It is clear that assessment opportunities are not evenly distributed among teachers and the

pace of marking varies from teacher to teacher. However, it is essential to avoid long breaks between assessments. This is important, among other things, to prevent unpleasant surprises about the level of student performance. If there are long intervals between two assessments and students fail to keep up with the teaching, it becomes much more difficult to fill in or correct any gaps in learning. Adequate continuity and frequency of assessment helps to maintain progress and to quickly identify areas that need adjustment (Baciu, 2010).

One of the key objectives of formative assessment is to accept 'unequal treatment' between students, as emphasized by Allal, Linda, Bain, Daniel and Perrenoud, Philippe. Differentiation of learning and assessment methods becomes an imperative for teachers and practitioners alike. Through formative assessment, student autonomy is strengthened as assessment of individual progress and development is intrinsic, student-centered and largely self-directed.

The teacher plays the role of facilitator, with the task of helping the student to become aware of his or her own development and to develop the capacity for self-evaluation in a relevant and objective way. This

approach leads to the strengthening of self-awareness, one of the most valuable individual traits. More than "self-decision and self-activity," formative assessment aims at growing autonomy and contributes to the progressive development of the student's personality.

In conclusion, formative assessment is primarily characterized by its specific purposes. Its main objective is to monitor students' learning progress, identify gaps and difficulties encountered and adjust learning situations (improvement, adaptation, development) before the results become definitive and can no longer be influenced. From this perspective, initial assessments can be considered as part of formative assessment, as long as the information obtained is used to adjust future learning processes. Also, successive summative assessments can be integrated into the scope of formative assessment when the results of one stage of teaching and learning are used to adjust and improve subsequent stages. Thus, formative assessment becomes an essential tool for optimizing the educational process (Voiculescu, 2010).

Formative assessment can be summarized around five key terms: process, integration, adjustment, interaction and participation.

With reference to the first term, it can be clearly seen that formative assessment, by its continuous nature and objectives, emphasizes the learning process, not the final product (outcome). Of course, the products of learning, such as behaviors, observable performances or work of various kinds, are not neglected; however, they are considered relevant not in isolation, but as indicators of the quality of the processes leading to the achievement of these outcomes by the students.

In this context, Meyer G. refers to "discovering the invisible" as a specific responsibility of formative assessment. It is concerned with internal processes, which are not directly observable, thus involving reconstructing or modeling the mechanisms (reasoning, strategies, procedures) by which the learner arrives at a particular outcome or product (Meyer, 2000).

With regard to the other key terms, it is important to note that formative assessment stands out for its integration into the structure and dynamics of the teaching-learning process. According to Radu I., it is an inseparable component of this unitary process, being itself a continuous process (not just a series of distinct moments), which contributes, through its specific means, to supporting and optimizing teaching and learning (Radu, 2004).

The integrated nature of formative assessment is deeply intertwined with its regulatory function, which it fulfills within the educational process. Allal L. provides an interesting perspective on this function through an interactionist model of assessment (Allal, 1988).

Finally, it is essential to emphasize that a defining feature of formative assessment is the direct involvement of the student in the assessment

process. Also, the development and use of self- evaluation as an integral component of this type of assessment plays a crucial role, contributing to increasing responsibility and awareness of one's own learning path (Voiculescu, 2010)

Formative assessment accompanies educational activity throughout its duration, with the main objective of obtaining information about the discrepancy between the results obtained and the objectives set. It contributes to the improvement of student performance by making it possible to continually reconstruct the teaching-learning process, adjusting it in line with the objectives set.

Assessment is frequent, covering relatively short sequences, which shortens the interval between assessment and implementation of necessary changes. This ensures that the teaching process is fine-tuned. The tests are tailored to the density of the essential content and last approximately 20-30 minutes, supplemented by oral checks carried out in each activity. Formative assessment reduces, to the point of complete elimination, the survey character, giving students a clear picture of the results obtained. Continuous feedback provides both teacher and students with confirmation of progress and performance during the learning process.

The main purpose of formative assessment is to support the continuity of learning by identifying appropriate activities or difficulties to be overcome. The analytical approach gives students the opportunity to highlight diverse skills and develop their creativity. Formative assessment thus becomes an indispensable tool in the educational process, ensuring constant monitoring, constructive feedback and continuous adaptation of learning strategies.

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