

STIMULATING LEARNING MOTIVATION OF EARLY EDUCATION AND PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Student's learning motivation is a topic that has been addressed by many experts in the field. Also, efficient methods to increase and stimulate learning motivation among students are still a very actual topic. Through the studies on this subject we have identified some research articles that approach the relationship between assessment in higher education and increased motivation for learning among students. Some researches investigate the relationship between alternative methods of assessment and the way the active involvement of students stimulate both teaching and evaluation, and more, are leading to an increased motivation for learning. Prior to an experimental research on this subject- stimulating Early Education and Primary School student's learning motivation through alternative assessment methods in higher education, we chose to use qualitative meta-analysis method to identify efficient alternative methods of assessment. We focused on the most often methods used in universities that have a positive impact on increasing student motivation for learning. We also reviewed articles that study: new ways to stimulate students 'motivation for learning, the relationship between alternative methods of assessment and students' academic achievement, the relationship between students' learning motivation and the feedback offered in evaluation, the role of formative / continue assessments and final assessments on increasing motivation for learning. The results of the qualitative meta-analysis method shows that students have a positive perceptions on alternative assessment methods, but the most significant impact of alternative assessment methods is the increase in paperwork and demands on their time. We found that a portfolio used like an alternative assessment methods for students can facilitate the development of self-assessment, has an impact on the approach learning, academic achievement, delivers high quality information to students about their learning, encourages motivation learning.

KEYWORDS: alternative assessment methods, stimulating learning motivation, assessment portfolio, constant and continuous feedback, continuous/ formative assessment, students.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Prior to an experimental research on this subject - stimulating early education and primary school students' learning motivation through alternative assessment methods in higher education, we chose to use the qualitative meta-

analysis method to identify efficient alternative methods of assessment. We focused on the methods most often used in universities, methods which had a positive impact on increasing student motivation for learning.

We also reviewed articles that study new ways to stimulate students' motivation for learning, the relationship between alternative methods of assessment and students' academic achievement, the relationship between students' learning motivation and the feedback offered in evaluation, the role of formative/continuous assessments and final assessments on increasing motivation for learning.

The identification of the articles which provide information about our topic were looking for just in the title, abstract and keywords to reduce the huge number of articles about students' learning motivation through alternative assessment methods in higher education.

There were accessed 5 online databases (Science Direct, SpringerLink, ProQuest, Oxford Journals and Cambridge Journals) to identify specialized articles aimed at students' learning motivation through alternative assessment methods in higher education and those who study new ways to stimulate students' motivation for learning.

The articles studied showed that students have a positive perception on alternative assessment methods. We also found that the portfolio used as an alternative assessment method for students can facilitate the development of self-assessment; it has a great impact on the learning approach, on the academic achievement. It also delivers high quality information to students about their learning and raises their learning motivation. We searched texts that were published in the last five years (2009-2013) in English or in French.

2. ELIGIBILITY OF ARTICLES

2.1. The objective of the research

All the studies were selected aiming at the main elements related to motivation for learning and alternative assessment methods that stimulate the learning for students'.

2.2. Sample

We have read all the articles that aimed at student's learning motivation, even adult students'. Age subjects of research and studies reviewed were not important for present research. We have studied both young and adult students' learning motivation to reveal how alternative assessment methods work in higher education and how they can stimulate student s' motivation for learning. We searched for articles related to the topic of stimulating learning motivation thru alternative assessment methods in higher education.

2.3. Design of analyzed research

We selected experimental studies and theoretical articles. The results are presented in the table number 1.

Table 1. Number of articles identified

| Database | Students' learning motivation | Alternative assessment methods | Continuous/formative assessment | Constant and continuous feedback |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Science Direct | 104 | 156 | 130 | 105 |
| Springerlink | 123 | 73 | 92 | 83 |
| ProQuest | 56 | 85 | 111 | 16 |
| Oxford Journals | 22 | 17 | 9 | 5 |
| Cambridge Journals | 35 | 24 | 10 | 8 |

3. THE RELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' LEARNING MOTIVATION AND ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

3.1. The concept of motivation

The concept of motivation can be explained as a series of "factors that trigger, maintain or stop certain behaviour" [1]. There have been major changes in people due to changes in society. These changes have led to changes in people's behaviour or their development in terms of psychological motivation levels.

Motivation can be defined as "a desire or motive that someone has to behave in a particular way and the encouragement to increase the efforts to do such behaviour" [2]. Motivation is always related to the goal to be achieved. Motivation is the factor that encourages students to make every effort to achieve the greatest success and avoid failure. Motivation is a form of encouragement that makes consistent behaviour clear in order to achieve a goal.

According to observations made by Ticu Constantin [3] "the first motivational component (state of engagement or motivational involvement) is only the first part of the motivation, the second part - the ability to maintain motivation and involvement, to persevere in achieving the goals being equally important". The same author talks about motivational persistence which refers to the ability to be persistent and consistent when adopting a motivational behaviour. We can differentiate the qualitative aspect of motivation from the quantitative aspect of motivation. The qualitative aspect of motivation refers to the orientation or direction of the "motivational commitment" and the quantitative aspect of motivation refers to "the force or power of motivation of a person" [3]. Motivation is a form of encouragement for the aspiration to improve oneself in attaining a goal or success.

3.2. Students' learning motivation

Motivation is essential in all aspects of education, especially for carrying out the learning process. Motivation is the main factor that plays an important role in determining student achievement and the main factor that could influence students to self-encourage themselves and to aspire to perform learning activities. The learning process could be done with difficulty without motivation, because it requires effort and diligence to ensure that students can achieve their goals. Learning motivation is essential for maintaining students' academic performance in realizing the desired success based on good strategy and diligence in learning [2].

Motivation in learning has to be of the greatest concern for every student. Motivation is what makes students strive hard to pursue their academic excellence. There are also very active the interest for the knowledge, the intellectual satisfaction, the cognitive style, and asserting their opinions. Through the term “motivation for learning” in school we aim at the effect of a student seeking the successful participation in the proposed activities in the educational process. Learning driven by intrinsic motivation is very effective because it gives students very high satisfaction, although it requires more mental effort.

The students' aspiration level refers to the outcomes they would like to achieve. The educational motivation theories are focused on learning goals and performance goals. Having a certain level of aspiration, the student tries to reach the performance goals which he has set. Learning goals will be achieved by the student's expectation level, through the level of results he feels able to obtain or hopes to obtain.

School motivation for learning is influenced by several factors, including the support given by the teacher. Teacher's role is recognized and identified by students as one of the most relevant factors for their school involvement. Therefore, the importance of teachers in fostering students' motivation and engagement in higher education is a topic of great interest in education research. A good relationship between the student and the teacher is a predictor of students' motivation with quite durable results. “The perceived support from the teacher is a strong predictor of academic motivation, self-efficacy expectations, and the intrinsic value assigned by the student to school tasks” [4].

Another important issue is that the motivation for learning is facilitated by the teacher in the way the student is guided in activities aimed at changing behaviours. Teachers' effort to motivate students is successful if the teacher-student relationship is one of collaboration, being able to share the same feelings, goals, expectations. So, motivational interventions which comply with students' goals, emotions and beliefs can produce long-term positive effects.

Learning motivation can be driven by several factors: starting from the student's native curiosity; emphasis on understanding the own processing of information on personal affirmation; emphasis on the formative aspects of the teaching (skills); authentic learning situations in the real world or simulated; promoting scientific spirit in individual and collaborative knowledge; promoting quality assessment in learning, training, progress; appeal to a variety of support materials for information; promoting democratic management in the classroom.

3.3. Alternative methods of assessment

Alternative assessment refers to assessment methods that provide an alternative to the traditional paper-and-pencil tests and allow students to demonstrate their understanding and personal meaning of what they have learnt in class [5]. Alternative assessment methods encourage higher-order creativity and critical thinking, where students have more control of their learning.

We found some rationales to use alternative assessment methods in higher education. Students do not learn in the same way, therefore they cannot be assessed only in a uniform manner. Traditional assessment only examines students' knowledge, but alternative assessment methods can emphasize "real-life" skills such as problem-solving skills and decision making skills to prepare students as a work force in the real world [5]. Alternative assessment allows teachers to monitor the effectiveness of their lessons on student understanding and to modify the mode of instruction whenever necessary.

We also identified some of the alternative assessment methods with a great impact on stimulating student's learning motivation: fieldwork, lab work, posters, presentations, article review, concept mapping, role-playing, projects, portfolios.

The fieldwork or lab work is a type of "authentic assessment where teachers should decide to sample to avoid overwhelming the volume to be checked" [5]. The posters are an efficient way of seeing how students understand complex content and relationships between components. This task is best done in groups because students can learn by perusing each other's posters. The presentation is an activity that encourages students to become better at oral communication. They can be authentic and it can also invite to peer assessment, which is a way of giving teachers supplementary evidence for grading. Article reviews encourage critical, analytical and evaluative thinking. Concept maps ask the students to identify the main points in an argument, view, claim, concept or system; it is an efficient way of "portraying how students understand conceptual relationship" [5]. The role-play makes students take on the part of certain characters in a specific situation. This task can be a good way of identifying students' understanding of different perspectives. The projects are aimed at authentic and complex tasks. Students may have to use several

concepts and skills to complete the task. Portfolios allow students to establish their own claims to achievement, using what they see as the best evidence to hand in.

Because the teacher is an important agent of change in education, if he accepts or has positive perceptions on alternative assessment, he will surely support the assessment and make sure the alternative assessment methods succeeded in reality [5].

In higher education, teachers generally apply traditional assessment and evaluation tools; in the assessment and measurement processes for the lessons, they especially make frequent use of the multiple choice test, open ended, short answer, and gap-filling tests. Teachers generally prefer project and performance assignments among alternative assessment and evaluation tools. Teachers sometimes use portfolios, concept maps, self-evaluation forms, interviews and observation grids. Teachers do not adequately use some of the alternative assessment and evaluation tools (structured grid, word association, group and peer evaluation) [6].

The comparison of traditional and alternative tools reveals that the teachers use both traditional and alternative tools; however, they generally prefer traditional tools.

4. THE ROLE OF CONSTANT AND CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK USED IN ASSESSMENT

Among other motivational driving forces for student's learning we could emphasize teacher's constant and continuous feedback. With the help of this feedback offered in evaluation students can develop self-assessment and academic achievement. They also receive high quality information from their teacher about their learning and they are encouraged towards motivation learning [7].

Teacher's providing a constant and continuous feedback in student's evaluation through verbal and written assessments leads to an increase in quantitatively and qualitatively motivation, to mobilize the student that will have a positive effect on learning effort, on oriented learning attention and on attitudes towards learning.

If the teacher gives an immediate feedback on the assessment or provides constant and continuous feedback then motivation to learn will rise considerably. The fact that the teacher consistently and continuously provides his students information about their level of performance will influence self-perception and motivation for learning. But both learning motivation and self-perception depend on how students interpret that offered feedback, on how they will use it in carrying out subsequent school tasks and how the teacher can give students feedback with a high motivational value.

Students may find that learning experience are positive and useful, contributing not only to better understanding of the subject knowledge, but they also can bring improvement in generic skills such as critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving skills, team work and language and communication skills [8].

5. STIMULATE MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING AND ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

Constructivist evaluation approaches aim at the learning progress of each individual student and it's realized in action, through observation, analysis, own interpretations, projects, portfolios, problem-solving, case studies, experimentation, discussion and cooperation. Assessment strategies emphasize the qualitative aspect, meaning assessing student attitudes over the process by which it came to the results, acquired skills by students during the educational process. Therefore one can use methods of reflection, essays, themed portfolio construction, independent study with multimedia applications. The constructivist manner of evaluation intends "performance assessment in mental processing in understanding the evidence of progress and performance with qualitative assessment criteria for each of the capabilities, competences" [9]. The teacher assesses "views, arguments, interpretations, personal designs, formative progress, stimulation, guidance, differentiation" [9] of student learning activity so that it can provide constructive feedback. Students should be able to ask questions, assumptions, alternatives, to make comparisons, to argue the ideas presented, to practice communication, to critically analyse, to propose, formulate scales of evaluation / self-evaluation.

Alternative assessment methods in higher education can stimulate the active involvement of students both in teaching and in the evaluation. Using alternative methods both in the final assessment and the formative/continuous assessment give the student the opportunity to regulate his learning activity, and therefore motivate him once again in this activity. By being offered constant and continuous feedback in assessments, students are stimulated on the creative potential, innovation, originality, so their level of motivation for learning increases.

Teachers use traditional and alternative tools for assessment, but they generally prefer traditional tools. Teachers have positive perceptions on alternative assessment methods because alternative assessment methods can help them cultivate their students' critical and creative thinking skills [5].

Students have a positive perception on alternative assessment methods, but the most significant impact of alternative assessment methods is the increase in demands on their time. We found that the portfolio used as an alternative assessment methods for students can facilitate the development of

self-assessment, it allows students to establish their own goals in achievement, has an impact on the approach of learning, academic achievement, delivers high quality information to students about their learning, helps them use the information that they consider the best evidence for their performance, encourages motivation for learning.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained through the qualitative meta-analysis method show that alternative assessment methods are the best methods to enhance students' potential. Alternative assessment also provides information on achievement of particular levels of skills, understanding and knowledge as oppose to achievement of certain marks or scores provided by traditional paper-and-pencil test.

Alternative assessment methods have a positive impact on increasing student motivation for learning thru positive experience that contributed to better understanding of subject knowledge, improvement in generic skills as critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving skills, team work and language and communication skills.

The results of our research show that students exposed to an assessment with alternative methods have a significantly higher motivation for learning than those who were evaluated through traditional methods. Motivation in learning has to be the greatest concern for every student. Learning motivation is important in the life of undergraduates for furthering their studies at university and for academic excellence.

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