

STUDENT PERCEPTION REGARDING LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *A major, permanent preoccupation of Universities is to increase the quality of the offered educational services. In this sense, a special attention is granted to the educational process as a whole: teaching, learning and assessment, its centring on the student's needs. With this paper we aimed at analysing the agricultural higher education student's perception of the assessment process role in stimulating learning and the educational process quality. Based on the opinions expressed by the questioned students, we identified the methods used in student acquisition assessment, the way in which they are applied, as well as the students' attitude towards the assessment process, highlighting the necessity to reconfigure learning assessment strategies, so that it facilitates the teaching-learning process.*

Keywords: *evaluation, assesement, higher education, learning process*

INTRODUCTION

In specialty literature, there are numerous researches regarding education quality in higher education which prove the necessity and importance of centering the education on the student and adopting didactic practices which should allow the student's active involvement in the learning process, leading to the personalization of learning in higher education (WANNER, 2015). Thus, more and more discussed topics are flexible teaching and learning and the flipped classroom (SHARPLES et al., 2014 quoted by WANNER, 2015) and, in this context, the need to change assessment practices, so that they are more flexible and personalised (KEAMY et al., 2007; TARAS, 2002, quoted by WANNER, 2015) as well as existent opportunities facilitated by the use of communication technology in providing online courses or in "blended" systems (WANNER, 2015).

ROMAN (2015) shows that learner centered learning in agricultural higher education contributes to the development of interhuman relationships, of cooperation and communication, increasing student learning motivation, their decision-taking capacity, the development of their transversal competencies as well as the promotion of problem solving. Learner-centred approaches in higher education are prominent within European policy agendas as well as in our country (TREMBLAY et al, 2012).

GHONJI, M. et al (2015) states, when analysing some factors which influence the quality of agricultural higher education, that pedagogic skills and abilities of teaching staff plays an important role, among these also assessment skills, reflecting the results of learner education development assessment.

SHEPHARD (2008) quoted by FAHAM et al (2016) presents that teaching and assessment in higher education is mostly focused on cognitive skills of knowledge and understanding rather than on the affective domain (values, attitudes and behaviours) and grasps the need to improve didactic, teaching and assessment strategies, for the integration of education for sustainable development in the higher education of agriculture and natural resources.

We find that an important role, regarding the design and the carrying out of assessment as a part of the didactic process in agricultural higher education, is played not only by knowledge, but also personal perception and the way in which teachers perceive the assessment process, and the way they use assessment results in didactic design.

The specific way in which teachers apply and use assessment during the entire didactic process influences the way in which students relate to the assessment process, particularly, and the learning process, generally. OPRE (2015), emphasizes that, the study of teachers' conceptions/beliefs about assessment can provide a means for understanding the relationship between those and student outcomes (KAGAN, 1992; MUIS & FOY, 2010; OPRE, 2010 in OPRE, 2015).

Assessment is one essential component of curriculum practice (effective curriculum operation and implementation), the student assessment method system playing an important role in the implementation of a learner centered education (FISSEHA, 2010).

BROWN (2005) and HARRIS (1997) quoted by KHONBI, Z.A et al (2013) consider that self-assessment methods effectively contribute to promoting independent study among students and to changing their learning perspective. GIJBELS, G. et al (2005) consider that student approaches to learning are sensitive to the learning context and suggest that students' perceptions of the method of assessment influences students' approaches to learning.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

With this paper we aimed at analysing the agricultural higher education students' perception of the assessment process role in stimulating learning and the educational process quality.

The present research wished to

- (a) identify the students' opinion on the role of assessment within the didactic process as a whole,
- (b) identify assessment methods used by teachers in formative and summative assessment of the students' knowledge,
- (c) identify the students' opinions regarding the way in which assessment methods are applied,
- (d) identify the students' attitude toward the assessment process in higher education in agriculture.

Participants. The sample in our study consisted of 96 undergraduates. The respondents were picked out from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd and 4th years from the Faculty of Agriculture, USAMVB Timișoara (32.29% male subjects and 67.71% female subjects). The average age was 21 years, the minimum age being 18 years old, and the maximum age 43 years old. The quantitative research was organized at the final of the first semester in the academic year 2016-2017. A questionnaire of opinion was applied to the student with the guarantee of answer confidentiality.

Measures. In order to highlight the way in which students perceive the role of assessment process in learning stimulation and learning process quality increase, we applied an investigation based on the questionnaire of opinion.

The questionnaire applied to students participating in this study contains 18 questions, of which 4 open questions, 3 questions with dual answer and 7 questions calibrated on a 5 level Likert scale (from very much to nothing at all), 2 questions calibrated on a 5 level Likert scale (from totally agree to totally disagree), 2 questions calibrated on a 4 level Likert scale (from very often to never).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data obtained after applying the questionnaire were processed statistically, the results for each item being separately analysed.

Thus, the obtained results outlined among the roles played by the assessment activity as part of the overall didactic process identified by the questioned students the knowledge assessment role (37.83% of the answers), increasing learning motivation (16.21%), establishing and consolidating knowledge (14.86%), regulating the learning activity (13.51%), ensuring feedback (10.81%), highlighting the learning process (8.10%), facilitating learning (5.40%), facilitating communication (4.05%), thorough knowledge acquiring (4.05%), ensuring the rhythm of learning (2.70%), establishing student hierarchy (2.70%), knowledge thoroughness (2.70%), knowing oneself (2.70%), showing teaching efficiency (2.70%), does not help with the learning process (1.35%).

We notice that, aside from the knowledge assessment role, students have perceived also the motivational one, as well as establishing and consolidating knowledge and the role played in learning activity regulation, taken into a smaller account its self-assessment role in learning facilitation. The regulation role of assessment referring to the teaching-learning process is also perceived by the students as manifested *very much* in didactic practice with a 23.95% and *much* with a 52.08%.

In the opinion of most students (88.54), teachers offer systematic feedback, which provides them with the necessary information for the organization of the learning process.

Regarding the fact of teacher involving students in the assessment and self-assessment process, 69.79% of the answers are affirmative, students considering that teachers are involving them a *lot* (65.67%) and *very much* (17.91%) and 16.41% of the students believe they are *less* involved. Mostly, students are involved in written evaluations (multiple choice tests) and oral ones, practical evaluation, self-evaluation.

With regard to the current, progress evaluations mostly applied by teachers for various disciplines in student knowledge assessment, students indicated as being used *very much* written (50.00%) and oral evaluation (31.25%), and a *lot* project and written evaluation (42.07%) and oral evaluation (38.56%). Among the assessment methods used *less* in current evaluation, students indicated the essay (31.25%), and *very little* practical evaluation and self-evaluation (18.75%) and the investigation *not at all* (36.45%).

Regarding the final, summative assessment methods mostly applied by teachers in various disciplines, student opinions indicated that summative evaluation is uses *very much* the written evaluation (61.45%), and a *lot* the essay (33.33%) and the oral evaluation (32.29%). Of the *less* used methods of summative assessment, students indicate the project (36.45%) and portofolio (23.95%) while the investigation is indicated as *not at all* used in summative evaluation (40.65%).

A question included in the questionnaire referred to the degree to which students consider that initial and formative evaluation are applied, the answers indicating that initial evaluation is *less* applied by teachers (48.95%) while formative evaluation is applied a *lot* (44.79%). Regarding the way in which this assessment is applied, the students indicated the following:

Table 1

Estimate to what degree do you agree with the following statements, in your current educational context!

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Assessment tasks refer to theoretical knowledge acquisition	28.12%	60.41%	11.45%	0%
Assessment tasks refer to specifically formed competencies, in real situations or problems	13.54%	47.91%	31.25%	7.29%
I plan my learning according to the feedback I receive systematically	15.62%	35.41%	38.54%	10.41%
The information I receive after the assessment are useful	40.62%	38.54%	16.66%	4.16%
Assessment tasks refer to transversal competencies	4.16%	50.00%	40.62%	5.20%
Current evaluation is carried out in student groups	19.79%	27.08%	36.45%	16.66%
Current evaluation is carried out individually	28.12%	36.45%	25.00%	10.41%
Evaluation is carried out objectively	20.83%	48.95%	21.87%	7.29%
Current evaluation is too stressful for me	11.45%	25.00%	47.91%	15.62%
Evaluation methods used by teachers are varied, diversified	23.95%	52.03%	15.62%	8.33%

38.54% of the students indicate that they *sometimes* use information obtained as a result of assessment in their learning planning, and 35.41% *often*; 40.62% of the students consider that the information received as a result of assessment is *always* useful and that the assessment tasks *often* refer to specific and transversal competencies (47.91%, respectively 50.00%).

Regarding assessment forms, 36.45% of the answers indicate that is *often* carried out individually and *sometimes* in groups, *often* (48.95%) objectively, that assessment methods are varied (52.03%), that they refer to theoretical knowledge acquisition (60.41%) and that they *sometimes* lead to a too stressful situation (47.91%).

In order to identify the students' opinion regarding the way in which they are evaluated, they were questioned whether they were informed about the assessment criteria and procedure for each study discipline, 50.00% of the answers indicating *total agreement* and 29.16% *partial agreement*, 14.58% *neither agreement nor disagreement* and 6.25% *partial disagreement*.

With regards to the importance of formative evaluation, from the student answers (69.79%) we can infer the fact that they do not consider formative evaluation less important than the final one and that the grades obtained in current evaluations reflect to a *very high* (17.70%) and a *high* degree the student's knowledge (44.79%), while 30.20% of the answers indicate the fact that students consider that grades reflect the student's knowledge to a *very small* degree.

In comparison with the final evaluation, in the students' opinion, the grades reflect student knowledge *very much* (19.79%) and a *lot* (43.75%), and 27.08% consider that the grades reflect student knowledge less.

Among the causes behind the inconsistency between obtained grades and student knowledge, they firstly indicate teacher partiality (20.40%), unclear evaluation criteria (32.65%), reproduction of knowledge and short term memory usage (12.24%), guessing the answers (10.20%), the momentary state of mind of the student (lapsus) (6.12%), I do not know (18.39%).

Regarding the correspondence between learning objectives and knowledge, capacities and attitudes assessed by the teacher, students consider *total agreement* (31.25%), *partial agreement* (42.70%) and 26.04% indicate *neither agreement nor disagreement*.

Among the changes considered necessary by the students in the current system assessing student knowledge, abilities and attitudes, the following were mentioned: accentuating the practical character of the assessment (in correlation with teaching) (24.69%), the increase in teacher strictness during evaluation (6.17%), the increase of the oral evaluation percentage (8.64%), more frequent current evaluations (6.17%), evaluation objectivity (6.17%), more time allotted for evaluation (8.64%), communication during evaluation, clearer grading criteria (1.23%), evaluation methods and oral evaluation (1.23%) and nothing (37.06%).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of our research proved that the students of the Faculty of Agriculture have a positive general perception of the assessment process, understanding the role of assessment in stimulating and improving the teaching-learning process. Student opinions indicate the necessity to improve evaluation strategies, by diversifying formative evaluation methods, the increase of the oral evaluation percentage for the formation of communication competencies, and especially the increase in practical character of teaching, respectively evaluation by examination of practical student acquisitions. Given the fact that the active involvement of students in didactic design and implementation for each discipline facilitates the development of metacognitive competencies and the transformation of students in active partners within the learning process, we believe it is necessary to better accentuate the role of assessment/self-assessment in the didactic process and to conjugate the teaching staff effort in continual psychopedagogical perfecting and the design of evaluative strategies which should lead to the effective operationalization and implementation of the curriculum in higher education in agriculture.

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