

THE IMPACT OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES ON STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Alternative assessment strategies are action strategies alternative to the traditional ones, through which students are driven to knowledge from a modern perspective. Students are helped to develop their competencies, to express their feelings and emotions, to become responsible in relation to the provision or setting up a response to proposed themes or to proposed examination to identify criteria for self-assessment and assessment, to self-regulate.*

Through evaluations by alternative assessment students are activated to provide their own answers, to be original, to be innovative in thinking, action and facts, to participate in activities organized and carried out in an alternative manner, that provides an alternative vision of what will be taught and evaluated (Potolea, 2005).

Herman says that when we are talking about the assessment as „an alternative to the conventional, means multiple choice test" then will be brought into question several terms: alternative assessment, authentic assessment and assessment based on performance. These terms are used as „synonymous" to „variants of performances assessment" for students where they are asked „to generate responses, rather than give an answer" (Herman, 1992, p. 3-7).

The present study is a part of a more extended research, this being an exploratory session, performed in order to analyse: students' preference for alternative assessment strategies, alternative assessment methods, traditional assessment strategies, traditional assessment methods; the opportunities for the practical application of the skills and knowledge learned through assessments using alternative methods and strategies or traditional methods and strategies.

We have discover that students prefer as alternative assessment strategies the following: portfolios and projects, and they prefer as traditional methods the following: written work and quizzes. We also discovered that the project is the alternative assessments strategy which gives to students the opportunities for using the application in the practice of the skills and knowledge learned.

Keywords: *alternative assessment strategies, students preferences for alternative assessment strategies, continuous/formative assessment, students.*

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Through alternative assessment strategies students are encouraged to provide their own responses to the issues being assessed, rather than selecting from a specific list of options (characteristic of traditional evaluation strategies). Alternative assessment strategies are the set of alternative assessment methods, alternative assessment procedures and techniques, alternative means of assessment in education and alternative forms of organization of the assessment activities.

Through alternative assessment strategies we understand an action strategy, alternative to traditional, through which students are led to knowledge from a modern perspective, are helped to develop their skills. Students are led to express their feelings and emotions, to become responsible to offering or to creating a response to a proposed theme or subject or to a proposed examination, to identify self-assessment and inter-evaluation criteria, and self-regulation.

Alternative assessment is a classification form of student performances that allows a full approach of their assessment. Through alternative assessments students are encouraged to provide their own responses, to be original, to be innovative in thinking, action and facts, to participate in organized and conducted activities in an alternative way, that provide an alternative view of what will be taught and evaluated. (Potolea, 2005)

Herman says that when we talk about evaluation as "a conventional alternative to multiple choice testing", several terms will be brought into question: alternative assessment, authentic assessment and assessment based performance. These terms are used as "synonyms" to "variants of performance assessments" where students are asked to "generate answers rather than choose an answer" (Herman, 1992, pp. 3-7).

We will refer to alternative assessment strategies as modern assessment strategies, used as an alternative to traditional assessment strategies. Through alternative assessment strategies students will be activated throughout the teaching-learning and evaluation process so they will be innovative, original, they will receive and they will provide constant and continuous feedback, they will receive a qualitative feedback through which they can self-regulate.

2. GOALS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Goals. The research is aimed to investigate the impact of the alternative assessment strategies for assessing growth motivation for learning in students.

2.2. Hypotheses. I started from the hypotheses that if teachers from university use more alternative assessment strategies then students' academic results will be improved. Another hypotheses that I propose for this study is that in university education there are used mostly traditional or classical strategies for assessment contrasting with the use of alternative assessment strategies. Also I supposed that teachers from universities just declare that they use more alternative assessment strategies in academic evaluation of students than they actually do.

2.3. Sample. In the present research there were included 162 subjects, students from University of Transilvania from Brasov from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Primary and Pre-school Pedagogy Education specializations (PIPP) and students from teacher training module from specializations Psychology and Mathematics-Informatics.

2.4. Instruments used. The ISEÎS questionnaire was used. It is a questionnaire built for students for identifying assessment strategies used predominantly in university education. The questionnaire for identifying assessment strategies used predominantly in higher education- ISEÎS was developed to identify, from the students' perspective, the evaluation strategies used predominantly in university education.

The questionnaire include 28 closed-ended items, measured using a five-step Likert scale: 1- never, 2- very rare, 3- sometimes, 4-often, 5- always.

Through this questionnaire I wanted to identify the assessment strategies used predominantly in higher education through three scales: traditional methods, alternative methods and feedback.

In this article I will present the results obtained by using the traditional methods scale and the alternative methods scale, through which I aimed to identify: 1. students' preference for the two types of methods, comparative 2. opportunities for the use of that two types of strategies and methods (used in real practice). In order to identify the internal consistency of the ISEÎS questionnaire (the questionnaire for identifying assessment strategies used predominantly in university education - addressed to students) the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient is .77 which shows that the full scale of ISEÎS has a good level of fidelity.

3. RESULTS

The analysis of the data collected following the application of the ISEIS questionnaire goes to the following directions:

- on the analysis of the students' preference for the traditional assessment strategies, the traditional assessment methods, the alternative assessment strategies, the alternative assessment methods;

- on the analysis of the opportunities (real opportunities used in real practice) for use and application in practice of the developed skills and the acquired knowledge through the assessment through traditional strategies and alternative strategies.

3.1. Analysis of the students' preference for the traditional assessment strategies, the traditional assessment methods, the alternative assessment strategies, the alternative assessment methods

Traditional assessment methods that have achieved the highest scores on different stages of student preference are: written work - "sometimes" - 42.6%; quizzes - "often" - 40.1%; oral evaluation - "very rarely" - 38.9%. So we can say that students prefer very rarely to be evaluated through oral assessments, sometimes to be evaluated through written works and often to be evaluated through quizzes. These data could be interpreted as follows: oral assessments are not preferred by shy students; written works are preferred only occasionally because they "consume" a lot of thinking and students must be able to remember certain information, to do a systematisation of the information, to transfer information; the quiz is often preferred as a traditional assessment method because it is easy for them to make item choices in these tests even when they do not control the subject matter under evaluation.

The alternative assessment methods that have obtained the highest scores on different stages of student preference are: portfolio - "often" - 28.4% and "sometimes" - 29%; investigation - very rarely - 26.5%; the project - "sometimes" - 33.3% and "often" - 34.6%; reflexive diary - "very rarely" - 26.5%; self-evaluation - "sometimes" 34% and "often" - 29.6%. The investigation and reflexive diary are rarely preferred as alternative assessment methods because they are very little used by teachers and so they are very little known by students.

The portfolio, project and self-evaluation are often preferred by students, but also often with high scores because they bring changes in the way we assessed students through new tasks.

These new tasks are creative, innovative because they have a motivating role, because they are supposed to be used as different and unusual teaching resources, because there are different organizational forms used throughout the evaluations, thanks to the feedback received from the professor - constantly, continuously and qualitatively. Students need authentic, dynamic, innovative, creative tasks, transfer tasks that open up multiple perspectives on education and lead to an increase in motivation for learning.

The quizzes, projects and portfolios are the preferred traditional and alternative assessment methods because these methods offers two different types of results: quantitative, by notes and qualitative, through constant appreciation and feedback. They are also preferred because each student has his or her personal preferences and they can identify with one of the assessment methods (table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of student preference for traditional and alternative assessment methods

Stages/ Methods	Written paper	Quiz	Portfolio	Project	Self- evaluation
Often	29,6%	40,1%	28,4%	34,6%	29,6%
Always	14,8%	29,6	24,7 %	13%	5,6%

3.2. Analysis of the opportunities (real opportunities used in real practice) for use and application in practice of the developed skills and of the acquired knowledge through the assessment through traditional strategies and alternative strategies

Analysing the data obtained on the evaluation methods that the students have placed in the "always" category we found that: the written paper and the quiz (traditional evaluation methods) and the portfolio and the project (alternative methods of evaluation) are the types of evaluation

methods which are always preferred by students and which they always consider as able to offer them opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge acquired in practice (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of "always" frequencies for student preference for certain alternative assessment methods and opportunities offered by certain alternative assessment methods

	Stages	Written paper	Quiz	Portfolio	Project
Preference for...	„Always”	14,8 %	29,6	24,7 %	13%
Opportunities for practice application	„Always”	18,5 %	17,9%	21 %	23,5%

These results were obtained because each student has an unique learning style, each student is motivated or demotivated by certain types of assessment, types of learning, each student can "give" more as practical skills, applied skills, in different assessment situations, in different learning activities, in solving algorithmic tasks or innovative tasks, etc.

Table 3. Analysis of the opportunities to use and apply in practice (practical and real) for the skills developed and for the knowledge gained from the assessment by traditional and alternative methods

Stages/Methods	Written paper	Oral assessment	Grid test	Portfolio	Investigation	Project	Reflexive diary	Self-evaluation
Often	34%	37,7%	32,1%	37,7%	30,9%	45,1%	19,1%	27,2%
Always	18,5 %	11,7%	17,9%	21 %	16,7%	23,5%	6,2%	22,8%

Students consider that projects and portfolios are the two most important assessment methods that offer opportunities for the application in practice of the formed competences and for the acquired knowledge. In the real practice these two assessment methods are actually used by teachers in their courses and seminars.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This was only a small part of a bigger research on the impact of the alternative assessment strategies for motivating student learning. Through this part of research we hope to open university teachers' eyes on the necessity of using many different strategies and methods for teaching and for assessing the students, combining traditional strategies with alternative strategies for better results.

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