

## How do university teachers assess their students? Understand assessment from their own viewpoint

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### Abstract

Recent tendencies regarding assessment in higher education such as the ones proposed by Boud (2010), Carless, Joughin and Mok (2006), Falchikov (2005) or Nicol (2010) highlight the need to implement alternative assessment practices to enhance students learning that take into account aspects like: develop authentic assessment tasks, provide quality feedback and feedforward to students and promote student's active participation in the assessment process. A survey research method was carried out with the aim to provide the opinion of university teachers regarding their assessment activity, with regards to the importance, competence and use of thirty-one assessment tasks previously selected. The sample comprised 427 university teachers from 18 Spanish universities; most of them had over ten years of teaching experience. The results show that teachers gave higher scores to those assessment tasks related to 'assessment planning and design' and 'monitoring of student's learning'. On the contrary, the most innovative practices such as the items related to promoting the 'participation of students in assessment' received the lowest scores of the questionnaire -Primarily regarding the ability to put those assessment tasks into practice and the extent to which they already use some of them in their classes-. In general, university teachers considered most of the tasks as very important, the competence and the use of those assessment tasks are, however, lower. Therefore, we can conclude that university teachers see the importance of another type of assessment rather than the traditional. Higher education institutions must take part and promote policies that enhance alternative assessment practices. To do so, it is essential that university teachers feel confident and capable enough to introduce them.

### Introduction

With the implementation of the Bologna process, all the universities have adapted their institutional policies, a special emphasis has been granted to student's learning. It must be taken into account that assessment has a great impact on what students learn and how they do it (Boud, 2006). Some universities have, therefore, focused their attention on assessment, and some institutional assessment policies started to emerge. It is not, though, the mainstream.

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The contribution presented here provides the opinion of university teachers regarding their assessment activity, with regards to the importance, competence and use of thirty-one assessment tasks previously selected. This study is part of a wider research project Re-Evalúa project 'Re-engineering of e-

assessment, technologies and development of teachers and students' competences' which aims to empirically test the impact of the e-learning oriented assessment in the development of both university teacher and student competences.

## **Methodology**

This research followed a quantitative design. A questionnaire was developed to analyze the perception of university teacher's regarding assessment. The questionnaire had been previously refined through a Panel of Experts and a Pilot Study.

This research instrument comprised two sections: the first part enclosed personal and professional information and the second one referred to assessment tasks. It offered a list of 31 assessment tasks (randomly organized) and three criteria to value: (1) Importance, defined as the interest and relevance that each task has for university teachers; (2) Competence, defined as the extent to which university teachers consider themselves prepared to put the tasks into practice (3) and Use, understood as the extent to which those tasks are put into practice. Responders were asked to rate the assessment tasks (hereinafter referred to as items) in each criteria with a 1 (none/never) to 6 (completely/always) ordinal scale.

The assessment tasks of the questionnaire were later grouped/clustered in four categories: (1) evaluation and assessment planning and design; (2) monitoring of student's learning; (3) participation of student in the assessment process; (4) improvement and adjustment of the assessment practices.

The questionnaire was finally applied as an online survey to Spanish university teachers.

Finally, the online questionnaire yielded 427 responses from 18 Spanish universities. Responders represented a range of disciplinary fields, where the five fields of knowledge were represented: arts and humanities (15.2%), sciences (13.1%), health sciences (15.2%), social sciences (44.3%) and engineering and architecture (12.2%). There was almost the same amount of men (49.4%) than women (50.6%). Regarding the length of experience, most of the responders (67%) had over ten years of teaching experience.

## **Results and conclusions**

The main results of this study are focused on three aspects:

- The importance that university teachers award to the assessment tasks
- The extent to which they consider themselves prepared to put them into practice
- The extent to which they already put them into practice

The mean results obtained by each of the four clusters and criteria are shown in figure 1. In general, it can be said that the assessment tasks related with "Assessment planning and Design" are the ones receiving the highest marks, while those regarding "Students participation in the assessment process" are the least valued by the teachers polled.

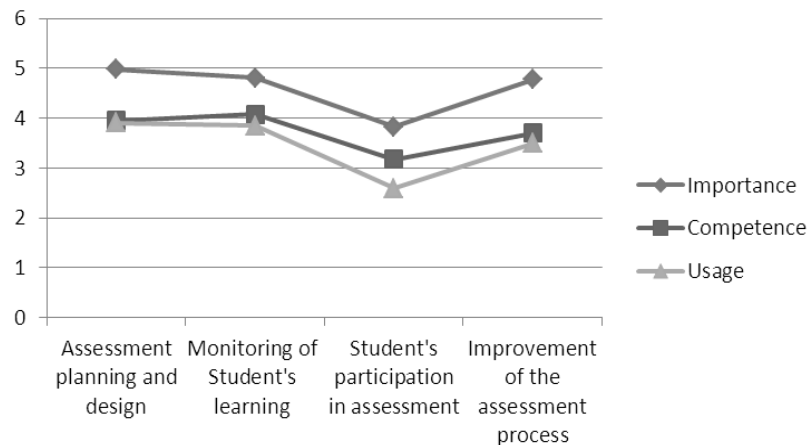


Figure 1. General mean per cluster and criteria

Regarding the importance, responders gave the highest scores to the items related to 'assessment planning and design' (Mean result 4.9). The least valued were those related with 'Students participation in the assessment process' (Mean result 3.8).

Generally, university teachers consider they are relatively well prepared to put the assessment tasks into practice. With the exception of the tasks regarding 'students participation in the assessment process' (Mean result 3.1), with which, 39% of the responders did not feel comfortable with.

Even though teachers consider most of the tasks as highly important and they consider themselves quite prepared to put most of them into practice, the extent to which they already use some of them is slightly lower (Mean result of the four clusters 3.4). University teachers expressed that they usually plan and design the assessment that is going to be done in their subject (Mean result 3.9). They often monitor students learning and try to improve the assessment process (Mean result 3.8), however they rarely promote students participation in assessment (Mean result 2.5).

## Conclusion

We can conclude that, even though much has been done regarding assessment in higher education, much work needs to be done in order to implement more alternative assessment practices. Mainly, regarding student's role in their assessment process.

University teachers polled see the importance of another type of assessment rather than the traditional. Higher education institutions must take part and promote policies that enhance alternative assessment practices. To do so, it is important that university teachers feel competent to introduce them. As stated in Eurydice (2009) education and training of teachers continues to be crucial in improving the quality of teaching and learning

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**Answer to the question: ¿How does your contribution relate to the conference theme “Linking Multiple perspectives on Assessment?”**

Our contribution is very much related with the conference theme “Linking Multiple perspectives on Assessment”. The paper presents an insight on university teacher’s assessment activities. The study aimed to know the opinion of university teachers about different items related with alternative assessment practices such as the Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) framework (Carless et al, 2006).

A perspective on assessment has been presented. As stated above, the conference theme tries to link together multiple perspectives on assessment, in our opinion one of them is the perspective of university teachers, which are, the agents that assess and that provide feedback and feedforward to their students.

In our contribution we have linked the LOA perspective or framework with the opinion of 427 University teachers regarding the importance, competence and use of different activities and assessment tasks. We have analysed the data and found that an institutional policy is needed in higher education institutions to promote assessment policies that enhance students learning. For that to happen, training courses are needed to prepare and give more confidence to university teachers about different ways of organizing their curricula and how to implement active and participative assessment strategies.