

Assessment Problems during Face-to-face and Distance Learning

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Case Report

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ABSTRACT

Much investigation and changes are needed to refine assessment systems. The purpose of the presented research was to investigate if students were satisfied with classroom or distant assessment and provide some recommendations on online assessments for both teachers and students. It was conducted at Shota Meskhia State Teaching University of Zugdidi (Georgia) in order to get some insight into students' perspectives towards their assessment. Students' assessment is not a new phenomenon, universities have been evaluating students for nearly a hundred years for different purposes however the main function is to inform students about their achievements. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, higher education institutions have had to transit from the traditional form of teaching to the online teaching and learning format, which appeared to be a big challenge for the majority of them, both in terms of resources and practical experience.

INTRODUCTION

What is Classroom Assessment? The answer to the question is not straightforward and one-dimensional as assessment plays many different roles in various domains of education. Wiggins stated that the goal of the assessment should primarily be to educate and improve student performance and not merely aimed to audit it." He discussed four main purposes of classroom assessment. The purpose of diagnostic or needs assessment is to determine what students already know, this gives teachers information about the topics and approaches to exploit in their future classes. The second type of assessment serves formative purposes for teachers. It is aimed at assessing students' knowledge or performance on some key topic. It also provides the necessary dimension to inform instructional plans. The summative purpose of assessment is to judge or evaluate students' performance. In this type of assessment, teachers usually give certain grades to their students. The fourth one serves a formative purpose for students. It helps students to develop the desirable skills, to reflect critically on their own work. Teachers sometimes may ask students to assess themselves. In this way, teachers may encourage students to engage in the process of higher-order thinking, which appears to be one of the ten top skills necessary for life today.^[1]

Recently, Covid-19 pandemics made an unexpected and enormous impact on universities around the world. Higher Education institutions' respond to this challenge was very quick and it resulted in moving teaching, learning, and assessment online. According to a Top Hat survey of more than 3,000 undergraduate students, 68 per cent felt the emergency online instruction they had received was worse than the in-person instruction they are used to.

British Council organized several webinars named Higher Education dialogues. Their purpose was to assist educators in connecting with colleagues from different countries having similar problems and share experiences. One session was devoted to the challenges of online assessment, as it provides the basis for further innovations. But there are also serious ethical issues related to access to technology as well as concerns associated with information integrity and test security. During the session, the impact of technology-enhanced assessment has been discussed on both teaching and learning.^[2]

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the survey was to investigate how students view the forms and criteria of their assessment and present some tips for making online assessment more acceptable for both teachers and students. It also presented some findings of the survey conducted at Shota Meskhia State Teaching University of Zugdidi in order to get some insight into students' attitudes towards their assessments.

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

Generally, there are two major types of assessment widely used in all types of educational institutions while teaching and learning. Assessment also represents one of the most critical aspects of the teaching and learning process. It is very important for both teachers and students to efficiently measure their achievements in terms of the validity of teaching resources and in terms of acquiring course material. It should also be noted, that the vast majority of researches done in the field, focus on these two major aspects: the importance of assessment for the teacher and for the student.^[1,3,4] All these authors emphasize the importance of assessment for learning, which encompasses both formative and summative assessment and as ^[4] state “in some applications the two may be indistinguishable”.

The major guides while addressing assessment are the following: to define what is the assessment and why it is important; to identify student assessments’ forms and purposes in the actual process of teaching and learning; to discuss methods in student assessment, and to make an important distinction between assessment, evaluation, and grading.

Face-to-face Assessment

Face-to-face assessment or classroom assessment technique is a relatively instant and easy formative evaluation method that enables teachers to check student understanding in “real-time”. Generally, formative evaluations are very helpful in providing information that can be used to modify or improve course content, to find suitable teaching methods, and, ultimately adjust them accordingly to improve student learning. These types of evaluations are most effective and fruitful when they are done frequently and the gained information is used to implement immediate adjustments in the day-to-day operations of the course.

Formative assessment

Wiggins mainly focuses on improving student motivation and learning desire. In this way higher engagement of students in their learning processes are generated, and as the result higher-quality work or thinking is produced. Here, once again, it’s vital to realize and always bear in mind that formative assessment has two different audiences: one audience is the teacher and the second audience is the student.^[5-7]

The fundamental core of formative assessment is that the results are used in the formation and revision process of educational materials. Some educators consider this type of assessment as the widely used form of assessment in higher education. Since educators are continuously looking for ways to strengthen their educational efforts, this type of constructive feedback is valuable.

Summative assessment is usually implemented at the end of the course or the phase of instruction and it documents what students have learned. Majority of authors^[8,9] point out, that its primary purpose is to produce a measure that summarizes student learning and looks at whether a student has achieved the desired learning goals or met standards. Common methods used for summative assessment include unit tests, progress tests, quizzes, written assignments, final and mid-term exams, and final presentations or projects. These all provide the teacher with information whether the student has mastered the skills or learned the course content. In this way, instructors have a clear idea of what the key instructional goals or outcomes were for a grading period. Though, according to Julie Edmunds, tests which mainly focus on acquiring content “at the level of memorizing events, names, and facts are less likely to be building students’ thinking skills than tests that ask students to write about big conflicts or themes that recur over time” Good summative assessments should be fair, valid, useful, and reliable.

Majority of Traditional and modern Researches show that providing students with effective feedback can increase their achievement and motivation significantly^[9] Feedback is most effective when it:

- is timely, provided within one to two days of the assignment;
- gives feedback specific to the student’s work;
- is relative to a criterion or standard.

Online Assessment

Reviewing material related to online assessment suggests that there are overlaps and no vivid barriers between online or classroom assessment forms. Technology doesn’t have to limit educators’ options for assessing students.^[10-12] With a little planning and a little ingenuity, teachers can gather useful insights to support student progress and create meaningful experiences to mark the end of the semester. During online courses, summative

Assessments offer important opportunities to provide feedback and encouragement to fuel the on-going learning process and formative assessments involve gathering insights to clarify student knowledge and comprehension with the goal of improving the quality and impact of instruction and can be used to identify learning gaps and shape feedback to motivate students.

METHOD

Thus, our purpose was to check whether students are content with the assessment forms, methods, and criteria during face-to-face and online classes. We designed a questionnaire with 6 simple questions. The first question aimed at defining student’s status. Accordingly, we used the quantitative study to gather information.^[13-15] The first part of the questionnaire contained

questions regarding the assessment forms and students' preferences. The second part provided an open-ended question where students could express freely (the answers were anonymous) their suggestions, recommendations, wishes on achieving a fair assessment system.

At the end of semester (July 28) the survey questions were uploaded at Google Forms and students were asked to participate in the survey. Undergraduate and Teacher Training Program students of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health participated in the survey. The total number of participants was 56. Among them 44 bachelors (third- and fourth-year students) and from Teacher Training Program.

SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The first question was intended to find out if students were satisfied with the assessment forms and criteria during face-to-face lectures. Majority of participants 73% responded that they are rather satisfied by assessment used by professors during the courses and suggested by the Quality Assurance Office of the University. It should be noted that Zugdidi State University like other universities in Georgia is actively involved in implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement^[16,17] enhancing quality assurance mechanisms, among them assessment forms and criteria. Although, 27% of dissatisfied students still require further analysis and elaboration **Figure 1.**

Nearly the same number (62%) of students are quite content by online assessment, 38% is dissatisfied. We wanted them to be more specific and name some reasons of their discontent, but unfortunately, no reasons were mentioned. We consider that this may be caused by a sudden change in the form of learning and not by the assessment faults. The next question strengthened our assumption **Figure 2.**

The answer to the question "which assessment is fairer face-to-face or online?" was the most surprising. 60% of students consider online assessment fairer. Thus, they feel quite comfortable during online learning and assessment forms are acceptable for them. This type of assessment did not cause students' demotivation and their achievements were fairly monitored and evaluated **Figure 3.**

Nearly half of students (51%) consider that assessment criteria are adequate, useful and help them to improve their learning. However, 25% still needs more information about the ways they are assessed. The minority of students (24%) do not see a clear link between their achievement and assessment. These students need further instructions and guidelines to use assessments as the means of improving their achievements **Figure 4.**

Finally, the last question was intended to provide us with students' desires, wishes or recommendations to modify our assessment and fit it to their needs. We expected more ideas (as the survey was anonymous), but the answers proved that students are quite content with their assessment. We consider that students were rather reluctant while answering the questionnaire. The explanation might be the fact, that the surveyed students were third- and fourth-year undergraduates and Teacher Training Program post-graduates.^[18] They were sufficiently familiar with assessment forms exploited by their professors. As it was mentioned above, the Georgian educational system recently underwent a lot of changes and presumably surveyed students participated in the process of elaborating assessment and were actively consulted. Though the surprising and unexpected was the fact, that they consider on-line assessment equally fair. Further research needs to be conducted with the first- and second-year students in order to get a complete and thorough picture of the problem. Nonetheless, it can be concluded, that students' awareness and involvement in the designing of assessment may guarantee their satisfaction and can even increase their motivation **Figure 5.**

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded, that if the assessment is fair, objective, goal-oriented, effective, and beneficial it provides students with the necessary amount of feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their performances. In this case, we may say that it is timely and fits the purpose. But it is not an easy task to develop effective assessment strategies matching learning outcomes. Though, the conducted survey showed, that students are not dissatisfied with classroom and online assessment, further and more in-depth research needs to be done related to the correlation of assessment, learning outcomes, and students' engagement in these processes.

While designing an assessment, whether it is online or classroom, Bloom's taxonomy is one of the most useful tools available to educators. It is the answer key to how students learn and help equip educators with the knowledge they need to design valid assessment techniques. It outlines the different levels of learning for students and the most appropriate technique to assess the domain teachers desire to enhance. The first step is to develop an actionable learning outcome. Then identify the action verb within that learning outcome (i.e. explain, identify, categorize, etc.). The third step is to determine which cognitive learning level (Bloom's level of Learning: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create) this verb fits into (i.e. explain → analyze). Finally, choose an effective assessment method (i.e. multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, matching, oral discussion/essay, comments).

Thus, in order to make our assessment fair and appropriate for our students, we should adjust it to the needs of your class, maintain a healthy dose of empathy for our students and remember that there will always be room for improvement.

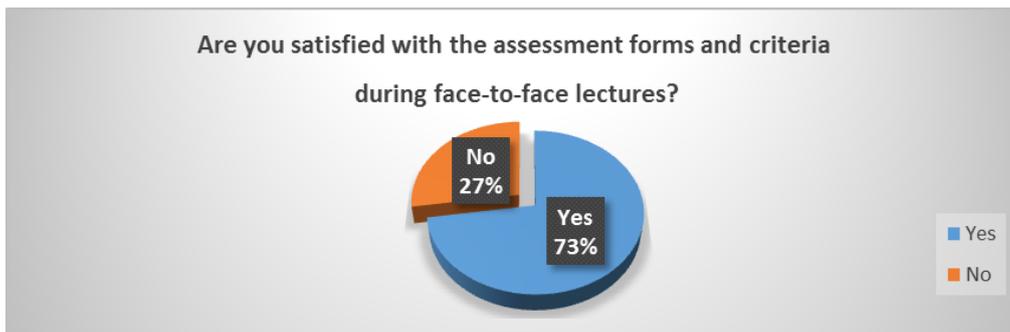


Figure 1. Dissatisfied students still require further analysis and elaboration.

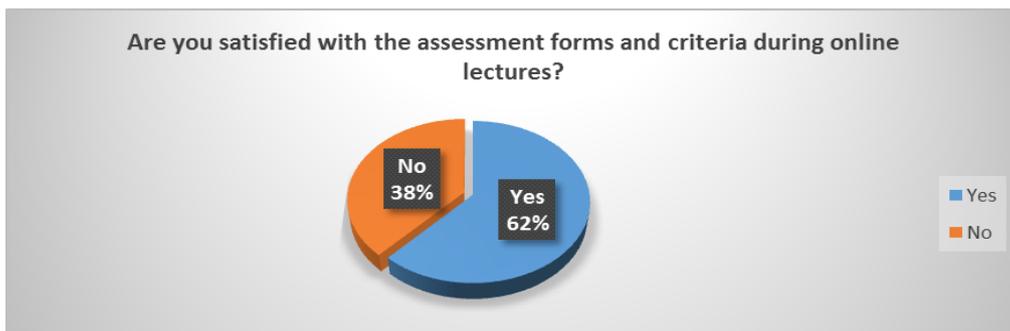


Figure 2. Strengthened our assumption and assessment faults.

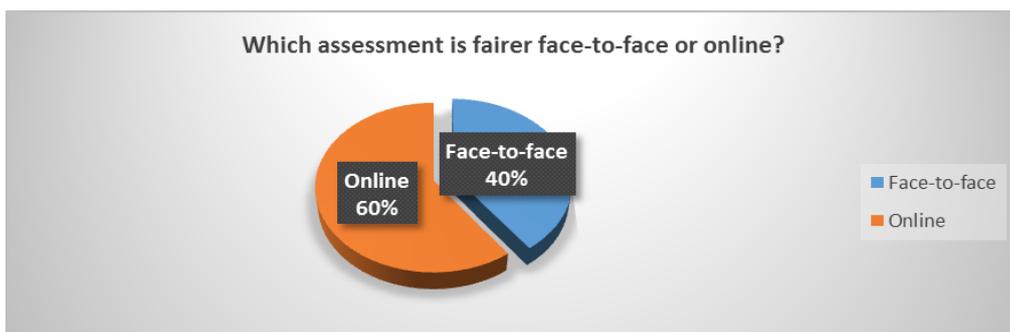


Figure 3. Students' demotivation and their achievements.



Figure 4. Students need instructions and guidelines for improving their achievements.

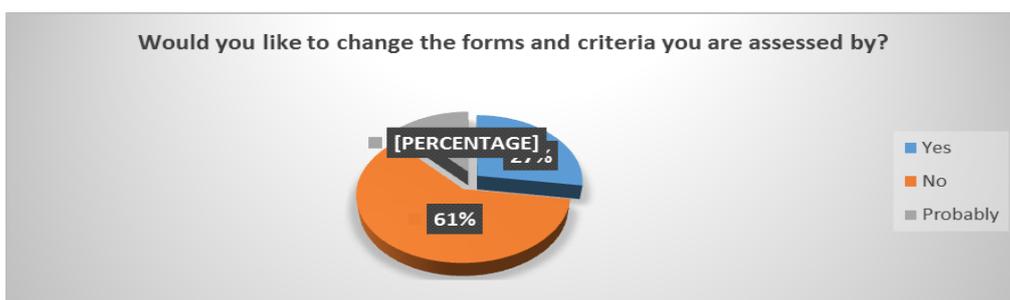


Figure 5. Students' awareness and involvement in the designing of assessment.

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