



The Attitudes of University Students on the Assessment of their Learning

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Contribution

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There is a widespread consensus on the idea that students' attitudes towards their assessment is related to their performance. It has been repeatedly stated that how students organize their workload is conditioned by how their assessment is carried out in practice (Boud, 1990; Tang, 1994; Thomson and Falchikov, 1998; Segers and Dochy, 2006). In clarification of this statement, the revision of students' workloads carried out by Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005) indicates that the perception of the assessment – not only the method used by the teacher – exerts a significant influence on how students focus their studying and learning.

Students' attitudes towards their assessment would be a part of what Stiggins and Conklin (1992) identified as *classroom assessment environment*. More specifically to the university environment, students' learning could be more influenced by their perceptions of the educational environment than by the very educational practices that are set in place (Entwistle, 1991).

If we accept this premise, students' attitudes towards assessment as an important part of their assessment environment, this can be considered as a relevant factor in the learning process in the university environment.

The analysis of how assessment is perceived indicates that, according to their own experiences, students generally understand assessment as a way of accountability rather than a means towards the advancement of their education. Other studies carried out in different contexts have revealed that university students understand assessment simply as a necessary process to get their qualifications (Hawe, 2002); and only serves the purpose of categorizing or classifying students, rather than being utilized to diagnose, motivate and improve their learning (McLelland, 2001). In rating the

assessments carried out in universities, students are unhappy with the lack of feedback from the tests and exams they have to sit (Brown, 2007), and consider the necessity for a higher level of feedback focused on the improvement of their performance (Duffield and Spencer, 2002).

The new configuration of higher education, which stems from the European convergence that resulted in the creation of the EHEA, has provoked a new understanding of the teaching and learning practices in the university environment. Teaching practices based on academic and professional competences, self-learning or the development of learning abilities throughout our lifetime are factors that separate the current teaching methods from the traditional methods on which the transmission of knowledge was based upon. In this new context, changes must also take place in the discipline of assessment (Calderón and Escalera, 2008).

According to this new premise, our focus will be based on the study of the attitudes of students towards the assessment of their learning, trying to rate them based on the new teaching environment that has been born in Spanish universities. Specifically, our objective is the creation of a measuring system to gauge these attitudes, taking into account its technical characteristics, and utilizing it to provide a first description of the attitudes of university students regarding this fundamental aspect of the teaching/learning process.

Method

We listed 24 items on how an assessment can be understood, its purpose, use, and the reactions it can trigger. This was presented to 26 judges, experts in Education in different Spanish universities. Items could be scored from 0 to 5, subject to their relevance (adequacy of the item to understand the perceptions on assessments) and clarity (degree of clarity and precision in the writing). Other comments and essays were also presented. Many changes took place.

This resulted in a draft of the Scale of University Students Attitudes Towards Assessment, including 24 items similar to Likert's, with 5 degrees of agreement. These findings were put to 4.580 students individually from 9 Spanish universities in 2009-2010 (60,03% women and 39,97% men) who were studying different levels of 54 degrees with experience in EHEA.

An analysis of the main components was carried out to explore the fact-finding structure. 21 elements were retained, which form part of the final version. Furthermore, the convergent validity (Campbell and Fiske, 1959) was analyzed calculating the average correlations in each dimension; reliability was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. The description of attitudes was based on the average and standard deviation, calculated on the score average per dimension.

Expected Outcomes

a) Fact-finding structure

Basis of application:

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measurement of sampling adequacy: 0,856

Barlett's sphericity test: Chid-grid=20.562,281 ($p < 0,001$)

Extraction of factors:

Main components method, with varimax rotation

Extracted factors: 5, with 52,88% variance explained

Rotated solution: Matrix of rotated components

Dimensions: they reflect different perceptions of assessment (means towards the improvement of learning, verification and valuation of achievements, and as a grading system), as well as opinions on the quality and authenticity of the same. The last subscale being the emotional aspect of attitudes (rejection towards assessment).

b) Convergent validity and reliability:

Cronbach's Alpha for the global scale of 21 items is 0,71. Regarding the convergent validity, the average correlations between the items of each dimension score over 0.30, except the subscale assessment as grading system (0.24).

c) Attitudes towards assessment

- The perception of assessment as a learning checker (3,5365) or grader (3,3865) clearly dominates over that of assessment understood as a means to learning (2,9976).

- Lack of transparency, fairness, authenticity and relevance of the assessment constitutes a widespread opinion (2,50).

- Rejection levels towards assessment are considerable (3,31).

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