

Rethinking Assessment: Alternative Evaluation Methods in Higher Education

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Abstract: This essay explores the need to rethink assessment practices in higher education, challenging the reliance on traditional methods such as standardized testing, examinations, and quizzes. While these conventional approaches have been integral in measuring student performance, they often emphasize rote memorization and timed recall, potentially undermining deeper learning and genuine engagement with the subject matter. Critics highlight the limitations of such assessments in providing a comprehensive picture of student understanding and practical skills, leading to a shallow learning experience focused on short-term grades. This study advocates for alternative evaluation methods—including portfolio assessments, peer evaluations, and project-based learning—that promote profound learning, collaboration, and real-world relevance. By examining these innovative approaches, the essay aims to demonstrate how they can enhance student motivation, critical thinking, and skill acquisition, thus better preparing students for the complexities of modern life and the workforce. Ultimately, the paper seeks to equip educators, administrators, and policymakers with insights to transform assessment from a mere grading tool into a catalyst for growth and development, fostering a richer educational experience for diverse learning styles.

Key words: Assessment, Skills, Evaluation, Project-Based, Summative, Formative

INTRODUCTION

Conventional evaluation methods in higher education predominantly depend on standardized testing, examinations, and quizzes to assess student performance. These methodologies have been fundamental in educational institutions, frequently prioritizing rote memorization and the capacity to retrieve material under time constraints. Although these methods offer a standardized approach to assessing student success, they may not adequately reflect a student's holistic comprehension or practical abilities. Critics contend that conventional examinations may promote a shallow learning experience, wherein pupils prioritize short-term grades over profound, genuine engagement with the topic. Assessment is integral to higher education, fulfilling various roles that transcend the simple

allocation of marks. It offers essential feedback to students and instructors, guides teaching methods, and enhances institutional responsibility. Effective evaluation procedures can augment student motivation, foster critical thinking, and facilitate the acquisition of skills essential for success in the workforce. In a complex and fast evolving environment, effectively and comprehensively assessing student learning has become crucial, necessitating a re-evaluation of assessment processes by institutions. This essay seeks to examine alternative evaluation approaches that contest conventional assessments in higher education. This study aims to elucidate the advantages of new methodologies—such as portfolio assessments, peer evaluations, and project-based learning—in enhancing profound learning, encouraging collaboration, and aligning evaluations with real-world applications. The objective is to furnish educators, administrators, and policymakers with insights on how alternative assessments might improve the educational experience, accommodate varied learning styles, and equip students for the intricacies of contemporary life and employment. The paper promotes a more sophisticated comprehension of evaluation as a mechanism for growth and development, rather than simply a means of measurement.

The Limitations of Traditional Assessment

Standardized testing has historically served as a fundamental component of educational assessment, intended to offer a consistent metric of student performance across diverse demographics (Popham, 2001). Nonetheless, these evaluations entail considerable disadvantages. They frequently emphasize rote memory at the expense of critical thinking, compelling students to concentrate on test-taking strategies instead of achieving a profound understanding of the content (Kohn, 2000). This may result in a limited comprehension of topics, wherein students may perform well on examinations yet find it challenging to implement their knowledge in real-world contexts.

Moreover, standardized assessments might intensify disparities among students. Variables such as

socioeconomic status, resource accessibility, and exam preparation opportunities can significantly impact scores, compromising the principle of equity in education (Haertel, 2013). Additionally, the significant pressures linked to these evaluations might foster a tense atmosphere, resulting in anxiety and disconnection among students (Harter, 2012). This emphasis on testing results may undermine a more enriching educational experience that prioritizes creativity, teamwork, and personal development.

Conventional grading systems frequently utilize a rudimentary numerical or letter structure that inadequately represents the intricacies of student learning (Guskey, 2011). These systems might condense a student's comprehensive educational experience into a singular grade, fostering a "fixed mindset" in which students may perceive their abilities as immutable rather than subject to development (Dweck, 2006). This may result in a harmful emphasis on grades instead of knowledge of the subject matter, with students often driven by the aspiration to attain high scores rather than a sincere pleasure in learning (Kohn, 1999). Furthermore, the pressure to excel academically might foster a competitive environment that undermines teamwork and peer assistance (Putnam, 2000). Students may feel pressured to prioritize their academics over substantive interaction with their peers, resulting in a culture of individuality rather than communal learning. This academic pressure can adversely affect psychological well-being, leading to stress, burnout, and a reduced passion for learning (Schaufeli, 2017).

Traditional examinations frequently inadequately evaluate competencies essential for success in the real world. In the contemporary job market, employers prioritize qualities including problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and adaptability—skills that are seldom evaluated through traditional examinations (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Conventional approaches emphasize academic knowledge, which may not translate into the practical abilities necessary in professional environments (Wiggins, 1990).

Furthermore, the disparity between academic evaluations and practical applications may render students ill-equipped for postgraduate tasks. For example, although students may perform well on scheduled examinations, they may encounter difficulties in collaborative, project-oriented settings that necessitate negotiation, critical thinking, and imaginative problem-solving skills (Sawyer, 2006). This discrepancy underscores the necessity for evaluative systems that capture the intricacies and requirements of real-world scenarios, prompting

students to cultivate a more comprehensive skill set that transcends just academic achievement. Although traditional assessment methods are valuable, their limits require a reassessment of how we evaluate student progress and achievement in higher education (Brusilovsky & Millán, 2007).

Emerging Trends in Assessment

In reaction to the constraints of conventional assessment approaches, educators are progressively embracing alternative evaluation methods that prioritize comprehensive learning and skill enhancement (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004). The following diverse methodologies encompass:

1. **Portfolio Assessment:** This approach enables students to compile a collection of their work over time, illustrating their educational progression and demonstrating their competencies and accomplishments (Barrett, 2010). Portfolios promote self-reflection and provide a more holistic framework for assessing a student's talents beyond a singular exam score (Wolf, 1991).
2. **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** PBL involves students in authentic challenges or projects, necessitating the application of their knowledge in practical contexts (Thomas, 2000). This approach fosters teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity, while allowing for various methods of evaluating student performance based on the final project outcomes (Bell, 2010).
3. **Peer and Self-Assessment:** Engaging students in the evaluation process through peer reviews and self-assessment fosters a sense of ownership over their learning (Topping, 1998). This method cultivates critical evaluation skills in students and enhances their understanding of the subject, while also encouraging a collaborative learning atmosphere (Boud, 1995).
4. **Competency-Based Assessment:** This model emphasizes evaluating students according to their proficiency in demonstrating specific competencies or skills, rather than the duration of class attendance or traditional grading systems (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2011). This tailored approach enables students to progress at their own pace, ensuring complete comprehension of the topic prior to advancement (Hernandez, 2018).

Importance of Formative vs. Summative Assessments

Comprehending the difference between formative and summative evaluations is essential for efficient evaluation in higher education.

1. **Formative Assessments:** These are continuous evaluations intended to track student learning and furnish input that can enhance teaching and learning methodologies. Examples encompass quizzes, conversations, and reflective journals. Formative assessments pinpoint areas of student difficulty, enabling educators to modify their curriculum accordingly. This ongoing feedback mechanism cultivates a growth mentality, prompting students to connect more profoundly with the content and assume responsibility for their education.

2. **Summative Assessments:** Conversely, summative assessments examine student learning at the conclusion of an instructional period, typically via final examinations or projects. Although summative exams gauge the overall efficacy of educational programs, exclusive reliance on them might impose pressure on students and may not offer a holistic perspective of their capabilities. Integrating both formative and summative evaluations enables instructors to evaluate comprehension during the learning process and assess final results.

The Role of Technology in Modern Assessment

Technology is revolutionizing assessment processes in higher education, providing innovative tools and methodologies to improve the evaluation process:

1. **Online Assessments:** Digital platforms provide several assessment styles, encompassing quizzes, interactive simulations, and multimedia presentations. Online examinations offer immediate feedback, allowing pupils to comprehend their performance instantaneously.

2. **Data Analytics:** Sophisticated data analytics enables educators to monitor student achievement longitudinally, discern trends, and make data-informed decisions on curriculum and instruction. This information can be crucial for customizing educational experiences to accommodate the demands of varied learners.

3. **Adaptive Learning Technologies:** These systems modify the complexity and nature of questions according to a student's performance, offering a tailored assessment experience. This versatility guarantees that all students are suitably challenged, promoting a more profound engagement with the topic.

4. **Gamification:** Integrating game-like aspects into examinations can augment motivation and engagement. This method can transform evaluations into interactive experiences that foster learning through competition and collaboration.

5. **Collaborative Tools:** Technologies that enhance group work enable peer evaluations and joint projects, allowing students to showcase their abilities in team environments. These technologies equip students for the collaborative dynamics of contemporary businesses.

The rising trends in assessment indicate a transition towards more inclusive, adaptable, and technology-enhanced evaluation approaches designed to offer a thorough comprehension of student learning. By adopting these trends, educators can develop more significant assessments that correspond with the requirements of the contemporary educational environment and enhance students' preparedness for future problems.

Alternative Evaluation Methods

A. Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment is a form of evaluation that entails the systematic compilation of student work, demonstrating their progress, abilities, and accomplishments throughout time. This method prioritizes introspection and individual development, enabling students to showcase their educational progression through diverse artifacts, including essays, projects, presentations, and artistic endeavors. The principal aim of portfolio assessment is to offer a more holistic perspective of a student's competencies, promoting self-evaluation and analytical thinking.

Benefits:

Comprehensive Insight: Portfolios provide a multifaceted perspective on student learning, encompassing strengths and places for enhancement beyond a solitary test score.

Promotes Reflection: The act of compiling and contemplating their work aids students in cultivating metacognitive skills, hence fostering deeper learning and self-awareness.

Demonstrates Development: Portfolios can exemplify the evolution of pupils over time, rendering them especially useful for monitoring advancement in extended projects or research.

Challenges:

Time-consuming: Students and teachers may find that creating and assessing portfolios takes a lot of effort, necessitating careful preparation and coordination.

Subjectivity in Evaluation: Portfolio assessments may bring subjectivity, so it's critical to set precise criteria and rubrics to guarantee consistency and fairness.

Student Resistance: Some students may need assistance to understand the importance of portfolio evaluation, particularly if they are used to traditional grading techniques.

B. Peer and Self-assessment

Peer and self-assessment involve students evaluating their own or one another's work and providing feedback based on established criteria (Topping, 1998). Techniques for this approach may include standardized rubrics, guided inquiries, and collaborative discussions (Sluijsmans, Dochy, & Moerkerke, 1999). Successful implementation generally requires the establishment of clear standards and objectives for evaluations, instruction on effective feedback methods and rubric use, and the cultivation of a safe environment that promotes trust and transparency among peers (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

The impact on student learning is substantial. Engaging in assessment fosters critical thinking by allowing students to develop analytical skills while evaluating their own work and that of their classmates (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Additionally, peer feedback enhances engagement, prompting students to invest greater effort in their work, knowing it will be shared and evaluated collectively (Falchikov, 2005). This method promotes a collaborative classroom atmosphere, facilitating dialogue and shared learning experiences (Dornyei, 2001).

Regarding accountability, peer and self-assessment foster a sense of ownership in the learning process. When students evaluate their own work, they assume greater accountability for their learning results, perhaps enhancing their performance. Moreover, engaging in peer assessment instructs students in providing and receiving constructive comments, thereby cultivating evaluative abilities that are beneficial in both academic and professional settings.

C. Assessments

Project-based examinations involve students in intricate, real-world difficulties, necessitating the application of knowledge from multiple disciplines. This approach prioritizes genuine learning, enabling students to engage in projects with real-world significance, so acquiring practical skills and knowledge pertinent to their future professions. Moreover, these projects frequently require interdisciplinary collaboration, promoting a more cohesive comprehension of subjects and enhancing teamwork among students.

Effective project-based assessments depend on explicit criteria that encompass both the methodology

and the ultimate outcome. Well-defined rubrics provide transparent benchmarks for evaluation, guiding students in their work and clarifying expectations. Moreover, delivering continuous feedback during the project facilitates modifications and enhancements, prioritizing development and education over merely end results. This ongoing feedback mechanism not only fosters student growth but also improves the overall quality of their output.

D. Competency Based Assessments

Competency-based examinations emphasize the exhibition of certain abilities and competencies instead of conventional grade criteria. This methodology emphasizes mastery learning, urging students to attain a profound comprehension of the material and guaranteeing they have completely mastered the necessary abilities prior to advancement. Furthermore, competency-based evaluations facilitate individualized learning by enabling students to progress at their own pace, affording them the necessary time to thoroughly comprehend subjects.

Customized learning routes empower students to traverse their educational experiences according to their interests, strengths, and deficiencies. This approach features a customizable curriculum, allowing students to select topics or projects that align with their interests, so increasing engagement and motivation. Furthermore, educators can modify their instructional approaches and assistance according to each student's progress, guaranteeing that every learner obtains the requisite support for their achievement.

Alternative evaluation methods, including portfolio assessment, peer and self-assessment, project-based assessments, and competency-based assessments, offer flexible approaches to measuring student learning (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004). These methodologies promote increased engagement and understanding while preparing students for real-world challenges, making them essential in today's educational landscape (Barrett, 2010; Thomas, 2000).

Challenges and Considerations

Introducing alternative evaluation methods in higher education frequently encounters considerable institutional opposition due to entrenched traditions and enduring practices that favor conventional assessment techniques. This resistance can be ascribed to multiple sources. Initially, there exists a widespread apprehension regarding change among academics and administrators, who are concerned that alternative evaluations may compromise academic rigor or result in uneven grading. Numerous institutions depend on

the consistency and predictability provided by conventional systems, rendering them reluctant to investigate alternative methodologies. Cultural norms in academia predominantly endorse standardized testing and conventional grading systems, posing difficulties in altering attitudes. Altering these entrenched standards requires time and persistent work, since educators and stakeholders require compelling evidence of the advantages that alternative methods can offer. Moreover, institutions may recognize risks linked to the shift towards new assessment models, apprehensive about possible adverse effects on student performance metrics, accreditation procedures, or overall institutional standings, thereby exacerbating their hesitance to embrace innovative practices.

The effective implementation of alternative evaluation methods significantly relies on comprehensive training and support for instructors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Faculty members must possess the necessary skills and knowledge to design and administer these innovative assessment procedures effectively (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Ongoing professional development initiatives focused on alternative assessments can help educators understand their benefits, acquire best practices, and create effective assessment tools (Guskey, 2000). Workshops, seminars, and peer mentoring can enhance this professional growth and provide valuable insights (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Furthermore, institutions must guarantee that educators had sufficient resources, including evaluation instruments, technology, and support personnel, to mitigate burdens and promote the exploration of innovative methodologies. Collaboration among faculty members is essential, cultivating a community of practice where educators can exchange their successes, challenges, and solutions concerning alternate assessments. This cooperative method enhances educators' confidence and fosters an environment conducive to innovation.

A primary problem in implementing alternative evaluation methodologies is achieving a balance between rigor and flexibility. Although these strategies seek to foster individualized and captivating educational experiences, it is crucial to maintain academic standards. Institutions must guarantee that alternative assessments uphold the rigor anticipated in higher education by instituting explicit criteria and uniform evaluation processes, so ensuring that assessments remain demanding and significant. Concurrently, adaptability is essential to meet varied student requirements and learning preferences. Educators ought to be motivated to modify their evaluation methodologies while remaining consistent with the institution's educational goals and

achievements. Creating assessments that are both demanding and adaptable necessitates meticulous thought and deliberation, empowering educators to construct evaluations that intellectually push students while permitting creativity and individual expression.

While the shift to alternative evaluation techniques poses several problems, overcoming institutional resistance, ensuring sufficient training for educators, and achieving a balance between rigor and flexibility can enable successful implementation. By strategically addressing these difficulties, institutions can cultivate a more inclusive and effective assessment framework that adequately equips students for the intricacies of the contemporary world.

Future Directions in Assessment

The amalgamation of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics is poised to transform assessment methodologies in higher education, providing robust instruments to improve the efficiency and efficacy of evaluation techniques. Artificial intelligence can evaluate student performance data to develop customized learning experiences, adapting tests to individual learning styles and speeds. This customization facilitates adaptive testing, wherein the complexity and nature of questions modify according to student replies, yielding a more precise assessment of comprehension and proficiency. Furthermore, schools can utilize predictive analytics to discern patterns in student performance, facilitating the anticipation of challenges and successes, so allowing for timely interventions for at-risk students. AI-driven automated grading systems can facilitate the evaluation of exams, especially for objective questions, optimizing the grading process and allowing educators to concentrate more on instruction and delivering tailored feedback. Furthermore, advanced learning analytics, via ongoing data collection and analysis, furnish educators with insights into learning trends and behaviors, guiding instructional strategies and promoting a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

Innovative feedback techniques are essential for improving the learning process by offering students prompt, constructive, and actionable observations. Technology enables immediate feedback during evaluations, permitting students to promptly recognize their strengths and flaws. This prompt engagement fosters a growth mentality and facilitates prompt modifications in learning processes. Integrating diverse feedback modalities—such as auditory, visual, and textual comments—enhances accessibility and engagement for varying learning preferences. Instruments such as video annotations enable

educators to provide tailored feedback on student assignments. Moreover, online systems for peer feedback might improve learning by facilitating structured feedback exchanges that cultivate critical evaluation skills and promote communal learning. Facilitating reflective practices via structured prompts enhances students' comprehension of their learning processes, while innovative tools aid in monitoring progress and fostering lifetime learning competencies.

As assessment methodologies evolve, corresponding policies must also adapt. Institutions and policymakers must consider several implications, beginning with the need for new evaluation methods to align with accreditation standards to maintain educational quality while embracing innovative practices (Ewell, 2010; Schmid et al., 2016). This alignment is essential to ensure that advancements in assessment do not compromise institutional accountability and effectiveness (Bresciani, 2006). Policymakers must modify regulations to support alternative evaluation methods that maintain academic integrity. Furthermore, regulations must emphasize equal access to varied assessment techniques, guaranteeing that all students gain from innovative practices, especially by tackling digital disparities and supplying essential resources and training. Institutions ought to adopt policies that encourage continuous professional development for educators in assessment design and execution, thereby fostering a culture of innovation and enhancement in assessment methodologies. Ultimately, policies must adapt to acknowledge the legitimacy of alternative assessments in evaluating student learning outcomes, reconsidering the definitions and evaluations of success in higher education while transcending conventional metrics.

The future of evaluation in higher education is influenced by technological breakthroughs, novel feedback systems, and changing policy frameworks. By adopting these modifications, institutions can establish a more equal, efficient, and stimulating assessment environment that equips students for the intricacies of the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of alternative evaluation methods reveals significant shortcomings in traditional assessment practices, particularly in their ability to foster deep learning, critical thinking, and real-world skills. Methods such as portfolio assessments, peer and self-assessment, project-based assessments, and competency-based evaluations offer promising alternatives that promote a more holistic understanding of student capabilities. Key findings highlight the importance of formative assessments for

continuous feedback, the role of technology in personalizing learning experiences, and the need for institutional support in facilitating a shift toward these innovative approaches. Furthermore, the challenges related to cultural resistance, faculty training, and the balance between rigor and flexibility must be addressed to create an effective assessment landscape.

To establish a more effective assessment framework, educators and institutions need to embrace innovation by encouraging the exploration and implementation of alternative evaluation methods that enhance student engagement and align with learning objectives. Additionally, investing in comprehensive professional development is crucial to equip educators with the necessary skills and resources for designing and executing innovative assessments. Finally, creating supportive policies that advocate for equitable access to diverse assessment methods is essential, ensuring that all students benefit from personalized and meaningful learning experiences. By committing to these actions, institutions can foster a more inclusive and effective assessment landscape.

The future of assessment in higher education is centered on a transformative approach that prioritizes student learning and development over traditional metrics. This vision includes a holistic assessment framework that integrates diverse methods to accommodate various learning styles, foster collaboration, and emphasize skill mastery. Additionally, leveraging AI and data analytics will enable the creation of adaptive, personalized assessment experiences that meet individual student needs while maintaining academic rigor. Finally, establishing a culture of continuous feedback and improvement will ensure that assessments are regularly evaluated and refined to align with evolving educational goals and workforce demands.

By embracing these changes, higher education can better prepare students for the complexities of modern life, equipping them with the critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills essential for success in a rapidly changing world. The transition to more inclusive, effective assessment practices represents not just a shift in methodology, but a commitment to fostering a generation of learners who are engaged, empowered, and prepared to tackle the challenges of the future.

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