Educational assessment tools for an equitable supervision

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Abstract

To improve the evaluation system in higher education, I propose five supervisory tools that are compatible with an equitable supervision, or more specifically, clinical supervision within higher education. I realized this method in one of my Masters course with twenty students. In order to provide a justification for the development of this model, I reflect on the feedback upon collecting the students’ views from the questionnaire distributed combining their reaction on this model. Hence, the reaction of students and their enthusiasm to achieve better feedback will be viewed. Thus, this will consequently reflect my own feedback. Nevertheless, student views on new developments are very important but can’t be seen as the entire justification.

1. Introduction

One of the many vital tasks of the educational supervisor is evaluation; supervision and evaluation are inseparable actions (Matthews & Crow, 2003).

Unfortunately, classroom observations are often done for the purpose of making summative judgments by teachers. Therefore, assessments should be included in the routine reports submitted to the administration rather than to collect data that can be used for professional growth and development.

To use data collected during teacher observations for evaluation, I propose five supervisory tools that are compatible with a reasonable supervision within higher education. In this context, the supervisory tools suggested might be the implementation of a:

• New assessment/strategy schedule
• Assessment of Group Work and Research to be writing
• Oral assessment on the above
• Laboratory Work assessment
• Reflect on the feedback

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2. Traditional methods of evaluation

At our University USEK\textsuperscript{1}, the final mark awarded for a course in bachelor or Masters degree is a numerical score of 100.

The evaluation criteria can vary from a course or program to another. They are listed on the course syllabus distributed to students by the teacher at the beginning of the semester. Students can also consult these criteria in the Student Booklet published by the academic unit of attachment on our university website.

My activities related to developing the quality of teaching and learning materials at the Faculty of Sciences and Computer Engineering since 2000 were preparing and undertaking courses in: Electronics for Engineering students, Mathematics for Agronomy, Architecture and Business students and Didactic for Masters students as well as supervising thesis.

In general, the passing grade for a course is 70 or P/R (Pass/Repeat) for remedial courses. A score above 80 is required for a Masters course. To provide students a critical and fair evaluation, each category of courses is treated differently\textsuperscript{2}.

2.1. Evaluation criteria for B.S and Masters students

For each course, evaluation of student work is done in accordance with the following schedule:

- Attendance and participation: 10%.
- Research works and / or projects (if any): 10 to 20%.
- Quizzes: 10 to 20%.
- Midterm: 20 to 30%.
- Final Exam: 35 to 40%.

Unfortunately, in mathematics and electronics courses for B.S students, the research works and projects are minimized in advantage of continuous and summative exams\textsuperscript{3}.

Since mathematics and electronics exams are mostly rigid and categorical, student is noted on every step he makes during the resolution of the exercise and not only on his final result. Therefore, we test his capabilities for scientific investigation and constructive mind rather than the memorization of theories and laws (Bachelard, 1975).

3. Problematic

My essay lies in the assessment in Masters courses. This field is poorly explored and remains a traditional built-in evaluation system and criteria.

In our case, the important gravity of a Masters assessment is a "mark". For this, students may miss the teacher feedback purpose; some of them may take a disoriented message from his mark because the feedback comments are barely significant. They may concentrate only on the grades; they may rely more on memorizing than on any constructive approach. In fact, poor feedback can cause further confusion and disengagement from the learner (Elbra-Ramsay, 2011).

Our style does not evaluate properly the competence of students and their feedback due to the marking style which barely shoes real competence. I believe that we cannot evaluate with a "standardized assessment", we must establish "individualized assessments" throughout projects.

4. Assessment and feedback strategy proposed

In order to improve assessment to provide effective feedback to Masters learners, because:

\textsuperscript{1} USEK is the French name for the Holy Spirit University at Kaslik.
\textsuperscript{2} Courses Marks and Alphabetical equivalents are available on the USEK website.
\textsuperscript{3} Note that, midterm and final exam must be presented anonymously and they are unified for all sections and branches in USEK.
Assessment is at the heart of the student experience (S. Brown, Rust, & G. Gibbs, 1994). From our students’ point of view, assessment always defines the actual curriculum (Ramsden, 1992). Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates . . . If you want to change student learning then change the methods of assessment (G. Brown, 1997).

Since our main focus is on representing a meaning for an assessment feedback, in purpose to overpass any learning gap and enhance of self-monitoring, I suggest introducing five steps to allow effective feedback within Masters Education:

- New assessment strategy/schedule
- Group works and research/projects to be in writing
- Oral assessment on the above
- Laboratory activities

In the fifth step, I should reflect on the feedback upon collecting the students’ views from the questionnaire distributed. The reaction of students will be viewed, their literature through their written and oral presentations, their group work and their enthusiasm to achieve better feedback. Those steps will consequently reflect my own feedback.

5. Implementation

5.1. New assessment strategy/schedule:

To be compatible with this strategy and act upon it, I must change accordingly the assessment strategy for Masters courses as follow:

- Attendance and participation: 10%.
- Group Work and Research projects in writing and in Oral presentation: 60%.
- Laboratory work: 30%

Here, quizzes and exams are omitted. This allows my students to have better time to schedule their work as may be different from other institutional regulations; despite the fact that I may not have the authority to change other institutional regulations. However, I am confident that the above weighted assessment could result in better feedback by both students and myself; because it causes less anxiety on the part of the students and therefore their work would be at ease, it would reflect better their capabilities and would improve future performance.

5.2. Assessment of Group Work and Research projects in writing

A learning environment by group work and research would increase continuity of content in a course, supports the links between the different disciplines, make a break with the teaching and learning routines that fragmentize courses in scattered subjects.

(Vellas, 2008) argued that all researches and collaborative work are designed to make the learner active so he could better build and learn.

In this situation of a collaborative project and research, feedback must be written to encourage and develop rationale and self-criticism for the students.

I adopt the study of (Rust, 2002) for marking and feedback in order to promote learning and facilitate improvement. Feedback should:

Be prompt, start off with a positive and encouraging comment, include a brief summary of my view of the assignment, relate specifically to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, balance negative with positive comments, turn all criticism into positive suggestions, ask questions which encourage reflection about the work, use informal, conversational language, explain all my

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4 Adapted from an unpublished workshop handout of David Jaques;
comments, suggest follow-up work and references, suggest specific ways to improve the assignment and to go about the next assignment, offer help with specific problems [...].

In this strategy, to get my assessment goal, feedback should be written in a clear language and punctuated in a positive way. I should enlighten the learning outcomes and assessment criteria and explain my comments. In general, my feedback should initiate follow-up in order to improve future assignments. Currently, this method is not fully implemented because the work is based mostly on quizzes and midterm exams which reflect memory work more than competence.

5.3. **Oral assessment to be presented by Power point**

To start an oral activity inside the class, I must indicate to the students what things they have to focus on during their oral presentation. During their presentation, I should figure out their purpose, activate background knowledge of the topic in order attend to the relevant parts. By training the students to present their work, I could help them improve their language, their listening and their communication skills.

The other students, the listeners, will be able to concentrate, focus on the important information and summarize what they have listened to. On the other hand, by acting as a jury in a thesis defense; asking specific explanations and recommending some information on the topic, they will acquire skills that help them argue better and make decisions.

5.3.1. **Impact of oral presentation assessment**

Being observed by their colleagues (Peer observation) would provide unthreatening way of addressing a problem. It would extend curiosity that drives much of the best research into learning and stimulate critical reflection on oral presentation performance. The observers are well used to give feedback to the oral assessment of their colleagues. Nevertheless, oral assessment could be boring if it is long or hard to understand. The observers may not take presentation seriously.

5.4. **Laboratory work assessment**

In a context of laboratory work assessment, the learner explores the situation of experience, considering solutions by adopting a process of “trial and error”.

The implementation of laboratory work will be manifested in a collaborative learning. As a teacher, I organize the teams so that the members are homogeneous, which places me in a good position to evaluate the work of each member, to follow the schedule, plans, writing and presentation of the laboratory reports. This organization would relieve me of formative assessments as the work is done by well-defined steps in a given period of time.

5.4.1. **Impact of laboratory work assessment**

In the situation of a laboratory work assessment, the learning environment plays a key role in the acquisition of knowledge and expertise. As a teacher, I could initiate a cognitive challenge for students taking into consideration several factors: the level of study, the time to complete their task, the technological equipment available... my purpose as a teacher would be to test the students’ abilities to demonstrate:

- Performance in expressing their knowledge in activities;
- Knowledge of negotiating and defending their adopted solutions;
- Focusing on the functionality of their laboratory work by organizing and bypassing the difficulties that emerge;
- Competence in unified group work;

This learning environment would relieve me as a teacher of many tasks to better focus on deepening procedures and coordinating the group work. In this strategy, we should move from a paradigm where the situation is a teacher centered and the student is merely a receiver. The student is an actor and responsible for his learning (Giardina, Depover, & Marton, 1998).
6. Reflect on the feedback strategy

For almost 15 minutes, my 20 Masters students in DID680 course, have completed and have returned their anonymous answer sheet (Table 1: Questionnaire and Comments). Although their projects and lab work are conducted as groups, their responses on the questionnaire are individual.

According to students’ responses to questions 1, 2 and 8 (Use of feedback): 18/20 of students agree that feedback prompt them to go back over material covered in the course. Therefore, I conclude that their feedback is helpful for future understanding and progress.

According to students’ responses to questions 4, 5, 11 and 17 (Coverage of syllabus): 17/20 students assume that the assessment system made them quite selective and strategic about what parts of courses they studied. Hence, students get a clear picture about the syllabus and so they were able to select what is better regarding their performance.

According to students’ responses to questions 3, 15 and 16 (Quantity and quality of feedback): the feedback showed that 18/20 students were satisfied with the way they received their grades on this assessment system.

According to students’ responses to questions 10, 14 and 18 (Appropriate assessment): the students’ answers show that, unlike the old strategy, this method is based on comprehension rather than memorization.

According to students’ responses to question 24 (Overall Satisfaction): 20/20 students were satisfied; hence, I conclude that my method of assessment gives accurate and appropriate feedback.

According to students’ responses to questions 7, 9 and 12 (Clear goals and standards): the statistics show that students have clear idea about the goals and the standards of the course.

According to students’ responses to questions 20 and 21 (Deep Approach): most of my Masters students seek deep understanding more than superficial ones.

Noting that, while reflecting on my feedback strategy, I have considered “agree” and “strongly agree” students as “agree”. Regarding “neutral” students, I have assumed that either they didn’t understand the question or they didn’t want to show their opinion.

According to students’ Comments: my students believe that this new way was very helpful because it led them to research better and understand the course before coming to class. Information was diversified in that, every one made his own research regarding the same subject. Most of them considered that the oral assessment improved their self confidence and clarified new topics. In addition, they appreciated the oral assessment because they could express their ideas in front of their colleagues and that could make them understand better what they are talking about. Still others enjoyed the course because they were not frightened or stressed about exams and they had the freedom to research and apply their knowledge in a relaxed atmosphere. Students start caring more about the notes provided rather than their marks on the subject.

7. Conclusion and prospective

To use data collected during teacher observations for evaluation, I have proposed five supervisory tools within higher education. By implementing this method, feedback from students showed that they are satisfied and relaxed; they feel capable to select what parts of the course to study and comprehend rather than memorize it. Hence, students get a coherent picture about the syllabus and so they were able to decide on what is better regarding their performance.

For Oral Assessment, as an evaluator, I have received immediate reactions and responses. I realize that, oral assessment is very time-consuming; in this strategy, clear assessment criteria are required so that students would be fully aware of how the performance will be judged to increase reliability. They seemed ephemeral because there is no record of the process itself to ensure its fairness.

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5 The individual answer sheets could be find by contacting the author on: marietheresesaliba@usek.edu.lb
For the Research Assessment strategy, I assume that, although it may not be directly relevant, it can build student’s sincerity and credibility and develop professional skills and significant analysis.

My main idea of Group Project Assessment strategy is that real-world problems capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking to solve a problem. Students need to do much more than remember information; they need to use thinking skills, they also have to learn to work as a team and contribute to a group effort. They must listen to others and make their own ideas clear when speaking, be able to read a variety of material, write and express themselves in various modes, and make efficient and impressive presentations.

For Lab Assessment strategy, I noticed that, from my students’ answers and their reaction in lab, using a student-centered design promote student’s motivation; it engages them in active learning, encourages students’ creativity and provides an avenue for student self-assessment and reflection. Usually this strategy is the most costly approach by time consuming and by designing and executing lab work for both students and well trained teachers.

My prospective is to put into practice these tools in higher education for an equitable evaluation. This method allows for transparent supervision where data collected by teachers is shared with other teachers openly and explicitly in order to help them understand their performance better and determine their points of weakness and those of strength. Then teachers, along with the coordinators, come up with an action plan to help them improve their performance.

8. Tables

Table 1: Assessment Experience Questionnaire and Comments you would like to make

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The feedback received prompts me to go back over what I had done in my work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I used the feedback I received to reflect over material covered in the course</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The feedback received on my work is not clear</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I had to study the entire syllabus to do well in the assessment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It was possible to be selective about what parts of course I should study due to the assessment system</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I had to put the hours of study regularly every week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It was constantly easy to know the work expected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I paid vigilant attention to feedback on my work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The outcomes of the course made by the teacher are clear</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The teacher was more interested in testing what I had memorized than what I understood</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>It was possible to choose topics I could afford not to study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The expectations in this course seemed not enlightened enough</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I had to work consistently hard to meet the assessment requirements</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Teacher always asked me questions just about facts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I didn’t understand some of the feedback on my work</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The feedback received on my work came too late to be useful</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I had to study every topic due to the assessment way</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I needed a good memory to do well in the assessment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I usually memorize important facts which may come in useful later</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I usually get started to understand what I am asked to study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I often question myself about facts that I heard in classes or read in books</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>I had to concentrate on memorizing a good deal of what we have to learn</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I had to study things without having a chance to really understand them</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Generally I was satisfied with the quality of this assessment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Elbra-Ramsay, C. (2011). Can Quality Marking be used to provide effective feedback within higher education? The Journal of Pedagogic Development, University of Bedfordshire, Volume 1 Issue 2


