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ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 203 (2015) 280 – 284

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

International Conference EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY CHALLENGES - TEACHERS
FOR THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY - 3RD EDITION, EPC-TKS 2015

Analyzing the Relationship Between Assessment Styles and School Results

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Abstract

The study aims at analysing the relationship between teachers' assessment styles and students' school results, by presenting a cross-sectional research carried out on a sample of 285 teachers and 370 students enrolled in Romanian secondary education institutions. The assessment styles were identified through the investigation method based on the opinion questionnaire as a tool. The results come to support the superiority of the preponderantly alternative assessment styles in connection with students' school results.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of EPC-TKS 2015.

Keywords: Assessment style; School performances; Traditional Assessment; Alternative Assessment.

1. Introduction

Evaluation has been traditionally seen as a process intended to measure students' school results, a process which is accomplished periodically and centers on the knowledge accumulated by students. Changes in the field of education, especially those regarding the theories of curriculum and instruction, have also lead to natural changes in the theory and practice of educational evaluation. Having in view the alternative paradigm, evaluation is conceived as the issuance of value judgments relating to the process and product of learning, and based on some clear

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evaluation criteria (cf. Manolescu, 2010). Different evaluation modalities allow the appearance of assessment styles or conducts, which evidently imply a series of teacher behaviours which are placed in direct relationship with the ways assessment is made, evaluation methods are used, attitudes are expressed during the evaluation process, etc. In the present study, we will observe a series of behaviours expressed by teachers during assessment (those which maintain a constant character) under the name of assessment styles. According to the binomial traditional evaluation – alternative evaluation, there may be delimited the preponderantly traditional assessment styles and the preponderantly alternative ones. Teachers having a preponderantly traditional assessment style are placing the accent upon the quantitative aspects of evaluation, they use preponderantly summative evaluations, centered on knowledge; they also use heavily traditional methods of evaluation (evaluation by oral, written or practical examinations) and do not have in view the whole of students' personality (attitudes, personality traits, behaviours etc.). The preponderantly alternative assessment styles belong to teachers who are passing judgments regarding the quality of students' school performance, who center upon the optimization and improvement of didactic process, use evaluation to support the students' learning activities and resort to alternative or complementary evaluation methods (project, portfolio, observation of student's behavior, case study, investigation, etc.). In the theory and practice of educational evaluation, there are multiple points of view regarding the implementation of evaluation strategies. On the whole, the specialty literature underlines three categories of results coming from studies concerned with these problems: studies which support the idea that in certain contexts, traditional evaluation is more adequate than the alternative one (Law and Eckes, 1995); studies which claim that alternative evaluation is more appropriate during certain instructional situations (Dikli, 2003); studies that point to the fact that joining the traditional type of evaluation with the alternative one would be the most proper educational approach (Manolescu, 2010).

The studies concerned with the issues of assessment styles are quite few in the specialty literature (Cocoradă 2004; Marcus and Catina, 1980; Noizet and Caverni, 1978; Potolea, 1982; Radu, 2000). Also, the relationship between teachers' assessment styles and students' school results is studied to a very little extent in the field of school pedagogy (Cocoradă, 2004; Bota, 2013). In this context, our paper aims at bringing to light a research problem which can lead to an improvement in quality of the didactic act in the pre-university education, by focusing upon the relationship between examiners' evaluation conducts and students' school results.

2. Objectives and research question

Based on the theoretical premises of the paper, the research is centred upon two objectives:

- To identify the assessment styles of the teachers included in the investigated sample;
- To identify the differences between students' school results and teachers' assessment styles.

In other words, with this study we wish to provide an answer to the following research problem: to what extent the results obtained by students who are evaluated preponderantly in the traditional way, differ significantly from their results when they are evaluated by teachers in the alternative way?

3. Method

3.1. Measures

During this study, we considered the assessment style as being another constitutive element of the educational style. Therefore, we elaborated a questionnaire through which we could identify the dominant assessment style as being traditional or alternative. The questionnaire is made of 10 items, 9 items with closed answers, pre-coded answers and one with an open answer. The questions of the questionnaire had in view: the evaluation criteria; the evaluation methods and the frequency of their application; the organizational structure of evaluation (individual or groups); students' cognitive capacities observed in the process of evaluation; the contents of evaluation tests; types of items and the frequency of their usage in evaluation tests; the consistency between curriculum and the contents of evaluation tests; the way in which marks are given; the manner of communicating the obtained results.

3.2. Participants

The investigated sample included 285 teachers who teach in 14 schools belonging to the Romanian urban educational system. Teachers' ages ranged between 24 and 60 years old, as for the distribution according to gender, the sample included 189 women and 96 men. From the same 14 schools, 370 students (students of teachers described before), with ages ranging between 14 and 19 years old, took part in the study. From the students' total number, 222 were attending the science profile classes, and 148 the humanistic profile. As for the gender distribution, 201 were girls and 169 boys.

3.3 Procedure

During the first semester of the school year, the questionnaire was applied to identify the assessment styles, and at the end of each semester the students' school results were collected, and an average of the marks was estimated for each discipline.

4. Results

4.1. Identification of teachers' assessment styles

The first objective of research was to identify the teachers' assessment styles, and the results are shown in Table 1. The analysis of distribution for the investigated group of teachers indicates a dominant position for the preponderantly traditional assessment styles, so that 169 of the investigated subjects manifested traditionalist characteristics. As for the preponderantly alternative assessment styles, we notice in Table 1 a frequency of 116 answers.

Table 1. Results regarding the assessment styles - Frequencies

Assessment styles	Frequencies
Preponderantly traditional	169
Preponderantly alternative	116

Concerning the predominantly traditionalist styles, we have to mention the fact that the accent is placed particularly on moments of control, verification and examination, on finding the exact measure in which students acquired the knowledge, on giving marks as a standard of classification, hierarchy and certification, on verifying, in most situations, the level of memorization. Also, the most frequently used evaluation methods are the oral, written and practical tests, and the evaluation criteria call upon aspects relating to the volume and accuracy of knowledge, to the precise reproduction of information by students. We also recall the fact that the traditionalist type of evaluation may be rather restrictive, as it excludes certain domains of learning, such as attitudes, behaviours and personality traits (Manolescu, 2010). On the opposite side, teachers who manifest their preference for the alternative type of evaluation distinguish themselves by their concern to assure the adjustment, optimization and improvement of the entire process; they offer feedback, so that students may become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their own learning process. In order to establish some clear and transparent evaluation criteria, there is a need to acknowledge and respect the students' needs and their learning potential. At the level of evaluation methods, we mention the systematic observation of the student's behaviour during the activities, the portfolio method, the project methods, self-evaluation (Bota, 2013).

4.2. Analysis of differences in school results in relation with assessment styles

The second objective of research focused on establishing the differences in school results obtained by students at disciplines studied with teachers having different assessment styles. Data in Table 2 indicates the existence of

significant differences in students' school results relating to teachers' assessment styles. We observe that the preponderantly alternative assessment styles present some statistical significance by comparison with the traditional styles when we refer to students' school results. These results provide important and relevant data, which describes the relationship between evaluation and school results, in a way in which the alternative assessment styles hold the potential to favour superior school performance.

Table 2. Significant differences in school results relating to assessment styles

Variables	Assessment style	No. of subjects	Average	SD	Value t	Significance
School results	Preponderantly traditional	169	7.73	0.80	-2.86	p<0.05
	Preponderantly alternative	116	8.00	0.79		

Thus, the pedagogical urging for teachers who are limiting themselves to the traditional styles is to try to optimize those styles at the level of elements which allow it. We are taking into account the evaluation methods, and the criteria depending on which evaluation and contents/nature of evaluation tests etc., are accomplished (Bota, 2013). According to the results of research, students' results were better when evaluated in the alternative manner, as they had the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths in contexts where diverse evaluation methods were applied (project, portfolio, case study, investigation etc.). Also, the alternative approach of evaluation offered the students an opportunity to transfer and apply knowledge in real life contexts, encouraged group activities and presented teachers with various occasions to better observe students' progress (Winking, 1997).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The paper brings into discussion an important issue of the theory and practice of school evaluation: the assessment styles and their impact upon school results. Based on the obtained results (Table 2), we are able to offer an answer to the research question we started from: there are significant differences between the results obtained by students when they are evaluated in a preponderantly alternative way, in comparison with students evaluated preponderantly in the traditional manner, favouring the first category, which obtained superior school results. The results confirm the conclusions of other specialists according to whom, alternative evaluation is more adequate to contemporary education, as it offers a holistic image over the student's evolution and reflects more accurately the whole of school performances (Bota, 2013; Manolescu, 2010; Radu, 2000). Also, the paradigm of alternative evaluation centers upon the assessment of superior cognitive capacities and offers the students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities. (Dikli, 2003). The usefulness of identifying the assessment styles consists in: optimization of evaluation conduct for teachers and students who prepare for a teaching career; compatibilization of teachers' assessment styles with their teaching style and also with students' learning styles; identification of most adequate evaluating conducts in different pedagogical contexts; acknowledgment of advantages and disadvantages for each assessment style; identification of the impact assessment styles have upon learning, and also upon school results obtained by students.

One of the limiting aspects of this research has in view the identification of evaluation styles by using a single opinion questionnaire applied to teachers, a fact that lead to some subjectivity concerning teachers' opinions relating to their own evaluation styles. In order to counteract this disadvantage, we are proposing a diversification of methods to identify the evaluation styles in a further research. A second limiting aspect points to the fact that by students' results we referred strictly to their marks and we didn't take into account other relevant aspects concerning students' school accomplishments: attitudes, capacities, competences. In our future studies, we intend to work on a more complex approach of school results in order to focus also on the qualitative aspects of students' progress.

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