

Chapter 13

E–Assessment in Portuguese Higher Education: Framework and Perceptions of Teachers and Students.

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ABSTRACT

The new learning scenarios resulting from technological development and in particular of Web 2.0 make it necessary to rethink the teaching practices in higher education, namely at the level of assessment strategies aligned with more recent paradigms. The assessment of competences requires an approach where knowledge, abilities, and attitudes are integrated, implying the use of a variety of assessment strategies. What models can anchor this new assessment culture? How can one design an assessment program that guarantees the quality of this new approach? Based on a new theoretical framework for e-assessment in higher education, the authors construct and apply a survey aimed to identify the practices and the perspectives of the teachers, and the experiences and the perspectives of the students in public higher education institutions. In this chapter, the authors present and discuss the results obtained and advance a proposal for teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

The educational scenario created by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) facilitates student mobility and the compatibility of academic qualifications/titles. This scenario has a number of objectives, one of which is capacity-building for professionals and citizens, which, in addition to the acquisition of technical-scientific knowledge, involves developing a set of competences that allows them to successfully deal with complex situations in their working life. There is an emphasis on general competences that everyone should develop in terms of lifelong learning and its assessment, specifically advocating competences of teamwork, the ability to plan, communication skills, research and the processing of information, analysis and summarizing and using technological tools.

Boud (2000) e Boud e Soler (2016) use the expressions “sustainable assessment” questioning to what extent assessment plays a role in training participants for professional life, criticizing that most assessment activities are inadequate for preparing participants for real life. Several authors (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner e van der Vleuten, 2007; Sluijsmans, Prins, & Martens, 2006; Oliveira, Tinoca & Pereira, 2011) have put forward new initiatives, discussing the implications of assessment design for the participants’ lifelong learning competencies. In fact, the new technologically enriched learning scenarios tend to be more closely connected with most future professional labor contexts where digital technologies are almost always present. Consequently, it is necessary to create strategies, technological tools, as well as encourage the development of capacities that facilitate adaptation to these changes.

This new approach to the attribution of academic degrees has involved major changes in the way the courses offered by universities are planned. The focus is on the student and their learning, on the competences to be developed and not just on what the teacher should teach. This change of focus requires a new assessment paradigm and a change in the methodologies used, as well as in the strategies implemented to assess the competences developed by the students (Amante, 2011). In this sense, it’s important to “build” teachers’ capacity to provide instruction for all types of learners” (Schleicher, 2015, p. 9).

According to Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirchner & Vleuten (2007), “if European countries want to reform their curricula, assessment must play an important role in the reform process and assessment approaches need to focus on the integrated assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p.115). These authors propose a Competence Assessment Programme (CAP) that consists of a combination of different types of assessment, which involves the definition of the criteria necessary to analyze quality.

It is widely recognized that using one single assessment method is not enough to evaluate the competence of a given individual. Therefore, it is necessary to develop CAPs that include new forms of assessment, substituting the “test culture” for an “assessment culture” (Birenbaum, 1996; Dierick & Dochy, 2001). The “assessment culture” is critical of both using tests as the only valid form of assessing learning and the excessive reliance on these tools for planning teaching, and instead focuses on different forms of assessment, moments, participants and processes.

In the “test culture”, assessment was based on a quantitative paradigm where “differentiating among students and ranking them according to their achievement” (Birenbaum, 2003, p. 15). The testing culture where instruction was always followed by assessment, as disjoint activities, was based on decontextualized tests, where the quality and validity of the items was the main concern and was guided by psychometric theory. This raises the question of how to design an assessment system that warrants the quality of these new assessment strategies. Specially, because the methods, techniques and criteria traditionally used in psychometrics are recognized as insufficient to assess learning in competence based programs framed by contexts, which are strongly influenced by the use of technology. So being, we have watched the

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