ASSESSING STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research looks at the diverse topic of assessment and evaluation in higher education, focusing on students' viewpoints and experiences. Considering the different aspects impacting learning and skill development, including the changing dynamics of professionalization within the educational system, the study seeks to understand the complex link between assessment techniques and student performance. Data were obtained from undergraduate students enrolled in two Romanian institutions, covering a wide range of academic levels and study subjects. A survey was used to collect demographic information and responses to Likert-scale questions about students' satisfaction with academic achievement, preferences for assessment techniques, self-perceptions, study habits, and stress associated with evaluation procedures. Students were also questioned about their performance objectives, assessment preferences, and recommendations for improving academic support services. A descriptive analysis was undertaken to investigate university students' perceptions of the survey items. Because they promote meaningful learning experiences, lessen academic stress, and promote ongoing self-improvement, assessment tools are essential to this process. The results indicate that supportive academic settings and well-crafted assessment techniques can raise student engagement and motivation, which will ultimately help create a higher education system that is more future-focused and sustainable.

Keywords: Higher education, evaluation choices, academic accomplishment, skill development.

1. Introduction

Sustainable higher education is an educational system that promotes long-term academic, social, and economic progress while maintaining inclusion, equity, and adaptation to future problems. It combines sustainability ideas into academic institutions by encouraging lifelong learning, ethical responsibility, and environmental and social consciousness. A sustainable higher education system stresses student well-being, competency growth, and employability in a continually changing labor market (Klußmann et al., 2019). This approach stresses creative teaching and assessment approaches that improve critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, preparing students for both professional and societal contributions (Kim, 2022). In addition, sustainable higher education prioritizes assessment and evaluation methods that go beyond traditional grading systems to encourage deeper learning, self-reflection, and skill acquisition (French et al., 2024; Marsh & Hagan, 2024). Digital innovations, formative assessments, and competency-based evaluations help create a student-centered learning environment, reducing stress and promoting engagement (Rayens & Ellis, 2018). Institutional policies also play a crucial role in sustainability by integrating flexible learning pathways, interdisciplinary collaboration, and environmentally conscious practices (Martin & Godonoga, 2020). By embedding sustainability principles into curriculum design, teaching methods, and institutional governance, universities can create an education system that remains resilient, equitable, and impactful (Chankseliani et al., 2021), ultimately shaping individuals who can address global challenges and drive sustainable development forward.

2. The importance of competency-based assessment for lifelong learning

In a continuously changing world, education must do more than just impart knowledge; it must also provide students with the skills they need to adapt, grow, and prosper throughout their lives. Competency-based assessment (CBA) is particularly important in this context (Ponomariovienė et al., 2025). Unlike traditional assessments that emphasize memory and standardized testing, CBA focuses on

what matters most: the capacity to apply knowledge, solve problems, and demonstrate mastery in real-world circumstances (UNICEF, 2019).

Consider a student learning not only to pass an exam, but also to understand complicated subjects, collaborate with others, and think critically in unexpected scenarios. Students are encouraged to take responsibility of their learning by using competency-based assessment, which allows them to go at their own speed and improve their abilities through continual feedback. This strategy not only encourages self-directed learning, but it also develops transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability, which are useful even beyond graduation (UNICEF, 2019).

3. Assessment methods for sustainable learning: Balancing tradition with innovation

Innovative assessment methods, such as project-based learning, digital simulations, and collaborative evaluations, promote a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment (Kapsalis et al., 2019). They go beyond the strict limitations of traditional testing, allowing students to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of ways. E-portfolios offer a comprehensive snapshot of a student's abilities, whereas AI-powered assessments adjust in real time to customize learning. Integrating these approaches transforms education toward sustainable learning, where assessments are about building curiosity, resilience, and a lifetime learning mentality rather than just grades. The future of education lies in integrating tradition and innovation, with evaluations serving as stepping stones to deeper engagement, meaningful learning, and long-term success.

4. Goals of present study

The major purpose of this study was to investigate students' attitudes about assessment, evaluation, and academic participation in higher education. The purpose of this study was to discover significant elements impacting student achievement and well-being by examining students' academic satisfaction, assessment choices, self-awareness, confidence, and stress.

5. Methods

5.1. Participants and data collection

This study employed a survey-based quantitative research design to examine students' perceptions of assessment, evaluation, and academic engagement in higher education. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising 27 items, categorized into six subscales: (1) academic satisfaction and development, (2) preferred evaluation methods, (3) self-awareness and accountability, (4) belief in personal competencies, (5) assessment-related stress, and (6) learning strategies and preparation. The survey primarily included close-ended Likert-scale questions, as well as demographic items capturing participants' age, gender, program enrollment, and level of study. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.992 confirmed the high reliability of the survey instrument. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, and responses were collected over a three-month period from March to June 2024. Participants provided informed consent before completing the survey, and all responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The study sample comprised 273 undergraduate students enrolled at two universities in Romania. The gender distribution of participants was 77.7% female (n = 212) and 22.3% male (n = 61), reflecting the broader demographic trend of female overrepresentation in higher education in Romania. The age distribution of participants was as follows: 18–24 years: 215 students, 25–34 years: 43 students, 35–44 years: 8 students, 45–55 years: 7 students

Regarding the level of study, 89% (n = 243) were enrolled in bachelor's programs, while 11% (n = 30) were in master's programs. In terms of program enrollment, 58.6% (n = 160) were in vocational higher education courses, while 41.4% (n = 113) were in Bachelor/Master of Science programs.

5.2. Research questions
1. What are students' overall perceptions of academic satisfaction and development?
2. What are students' preferences regarding evaluation methods in higher education?
3. How do students perceive their self-awareness and accountability in academic settings?
4. What is the level of belief in personal competencies among students?
5. How prevalent is assessment-related stress among students?
6. How do students evaluate their learning strategies and preparation?

6. Results

A descriptive analysis was conducted to explore students' perceptions across the six subscales. The results indicate that students generally expressed positive academic experiences, with **Academic Satisfaction and Development** having the highest median score (Mdn = 4.000, SD = 0.757), suggesting that most students feel satisfied with their academic progress. **Preferred Evaluation Methods** scored a median of 3.600 (SD = 0.712), indicating that students had mixed preferences regarding assessment types. **Self-Awareness and Accountability** had a median of 3.800 (SD = 0.754), demonstrating that students recognize their role and responsibility in their learning process. In terms of confidence, **Belief in Personal Competencies** scored a median of 3.750 (SD = 0.744), showing that students generally feel capable in their academic abilities. However, **Assessment-Related Stress** had a median of 3.500 (SD = 1.061), revealing that a considerable number of students experience anxiety related to assessments. Lastly, **Learning Strategies and Preparation** received the lowest median score (Mdn = 3.400, SD = 0.805), suggesting that students may require additional support in developing effective study habits and preparation techniques.

7. Conclusions

The study offers useful information about students' perspectives of academic satisfaction, assessment preferences, self-awareness, confidence, and stress in higher education. The findings imply that most students have favourable academic experiences, although there are significant disparities in assessment preferences and stress levels. Students reported higher levels of worry over assessments, emphasizing the importance of supporting interventions to alleviate stress and boost confidence. The findings underline the need of using a variety of evaluation techniques to meet different student preferences and lessen anxiety. To foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, educators may consider using a variety of evaluation methods, such as practical assessments and group-based assessments. In addition, institutions might introduce tailored academic support programs to assist students in developing appropriate study techniques and resilience in dealing with assessment-related stress.

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