THE MANIFESTATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN THE STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Studies of the condition of education show that global and local changes are ongoing. This gives an impetus to explore new ways to improve the system of learning achievements and progress of Lithuanian pupils as it mismatches the expectations of the society. The study of The National Agency for School Evaluation (Quality of Activity of General Education Schools, 2015) demonstrates that the majority of Lithuanian schools are unable to adapt quickly and their curricula are focused on students’ knowledge and development of academic abilities. Assessment and self-assessment of pupils’ attainments, application of feedback in education remain the most problematic components of a lesson. Meanwhile, studies have shown that higher educational attainments are more determined by these processes. This research analysed the strategic documents of secondary schools that regulate assessment of the teaching and learning process. The chosen approach was the analysis of documents’ content based on the manifest analysis type, which helped to “decode” the action of assessment for students teaching and learning in the education practice. The following episodes that are at the core of the whole assessment system were used in the analysis: the manifestation of teaching and learning assessment types (diagnostic, formative, summative); the manifestation of assessment attitudes (assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning); the manifestation of assessment orientation to all dimensions of personality growth (subject skills, general competences, maturity of personality); the manifestation of roles in the process of assessment of education participants (students, teachers).

Keywords: teaching and learning assessment, secondary school.

1 INTRODUCTION

Studies of the condition of education show that global and local changes are ongoing. This gives an impetus to explore new ways to improve the system of learning achievements and progress of Lithuanian pupils as it mismatches the expectations of the society.

The study of The National Agency for School Evaluation ([25]) demonstrates that the majority of Lithuanian schools are unable to adapt quickly and their curricula are focused on students’ knowledge and development of academic abilities. Assessment and self-assessment of pupils’ attainments, application of feedback in education remain the most problematic components of a lesson. Meanwhile, studies have shown that higher educational attainments are more determined by these processes ([34], [15], [9]).

Assessment is a powerful tool to perfect the process of teaching and learning ([10]). According to Marzan (2003), any improvement of learning and teaching must be based on efficient and appropriate practise of teaching and learning of students. The manifestation of such practise is regulated by school-confirmed evaluation rules (which are deliberated with students, parents and social partners).

Reorientation in education to the results-oriented (self-)education paradigm ([28], [6]) is also essentially changing the approaches of didactics. The necessity for such systemic changes in Lithuania is perceived at the strategic level and is included in the main documents governing education ([20], [8]), but its implementation in educational practice is complicated. This research analysed the strategic documents of secondary schools that regulate assessment of the teaching and learning process. The chosen approach was the analysis of documents’ content based on the manifest analysis type, which has helped to “decode” the action of assessment for teaching and learning of students in the education practice. In Lithuania, each education institution following the strategic documents regulating the national system of education and complying with the local context, students’ needs and parents’ possibilities creates its own system of assessment of individual progress.
2 METHODOLOGY

The data collection for the research proceeded by employing the method of content analysis applied to the documents which comprised strategic documents regulating the procedure of assessment of pupils' attainments and progress in secondary schools. The research sample consisted of 60 Lithuanian secondary schools which were randomly selected from 60 municipalities (one school from each municipality). Compulsory documents regulating the procedure of assessment of students' attainments and progress in schools were chosen for the investigation. The conducted content analysis of the documents allows us stating that schools must have the procedure documents regulating assessment of teaching and learning, which must be publicly available under obligation in compliance with the approved national strategic documents. The analysis of the documents employed a chosen manifest type of analysis because directly expressed, obviously manifesting components without searching for a hidden content are more suitable for this case ([27]).

The following episodes that are at the core of the whole assessment system were used in the analysis: the manifestation of teaching and learning assessment types (diagnostic, formative, summative); the manifestation of assessment attitudes (assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning); the manifestation of assessment orientation to all dimensions of personality growth (subject skills, general competences, maturity of personality); the manifestation of roles in the process of assessment of education participants (students, teachers).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Theoretical Approaches to Manifestation of Assessment of Teaching and Learning

Research studies have proven that students' learning attainments are determined by a balanced system of assessment. Scientists ([11], [24]) have presented many pieces of evidence proving that students' attainments depend on the applied system of assessment. When assessment is planned with regard to the learning goal, it becomes the fundamental of conscious learning ([13]). The system of assessment of teaching and learning employed by an education institution must comprise the following elements: comply with proportions according to assessment types (diagnostic, formative, summative) ([30], [14], [15], [35], [5]); to balance manifestation of assessment provisions (assessment of learning, assessment for learning, assessment as learning) ([19], [9]); to focus on all dimensions of personality growth: subject abilities, general competences, maturity of personality ([22]) in compliance with the purpose to balance the roles of participants (in this case, we will analyse the roles of a teacher and a student only) ([32]).

3.1.1 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which proportionately meets the assessment types.

In the system of assessment of students' attainments, all types of assessment (diagnostic, formative, summative) are equally important and perform their specific functions. In Lithuania, attention is focused only on tests and examinations which can only assess knowledge and specific abilities. There is lack of methods which would help to assess (and self-assess) student's general competences and and the potential for learning ([25]). To allow the system of assessment successfully function at various levels (student, teacher, school, national level), it is important to provide that all assessment types are coordinated with each other ([7]). To ensure this coherence, it is important to know the opportunities provided by each assessment type.

3.1.2 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which includes balanced manifestation of assessment provisions.

The diversity of established assessment forms and assessment methods implementing them in Lithuania is high; therefore, present-day teachers enthusiastically use multitude of suggested assessment tools. Nevertheless, abundance of suggestions requires teachers' critical attitudes employed while selecting them, i.e. it is important not only to formally recognise them according to a given classification but also to assess them in compliance with the set education aims and added pedagogical value for a student reaching for set aims because it is the only way to make better decisions in pursuit of progress in every learner. According to the purpose of performed assessment, experts of education, scientists ([19], [9]) follow three provisions: assessment of learning, assessment for learning, assessment as learning. The situation of the Lithuanian comprehensive education
conditions as well as the goals set in strategic documents currently actualise the provisions of assessment for learning and assessment as learning as well as the necessity of practical manifestation of them because the role of assessment forms meeting the latter provisions for personality growth and maturity is more significant than assessment of learning. Therefore, teachers planning assessment of students should correct the planning of assessment to pay more attention to assessment for learning and assessment as learning.

3.1.3 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which focuses on all dimensions of personality growth: subject abilities, general competences, maturity of personality.

When we deal with a person's potential, we should not focus only on the potential of subject abilities (21). Such provisions are followed also by Lithuanian strategic documents which set an aim to assess students' subject, general abilities and maturity of personality. The performed research works ([33], [18], [3], [4]) illustrate that maturity of personality not only determines attainments and progress but also successful performance in the future.

3.1.4 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which balances the roles of participants according to their purpose.

Assessment of individual progress is efficient when it functions in school as a system where each participant of the education process has his/her own role and accepts it with responsibility. Research studies demonstrate ([16], [1], [23]) that open, trust-based collaboration of all interested parties is one of the most important factors for child’s successful learning. Viewing it from the learner’s position, self-assessment of own attainments becomes a significant component of not only entire system of assessment ([11]) but relates to management of own processes of learning and acceptance of higher responsibility for the learning ([3]). Students who are oriented towards management of own learning as well as self-assessment are keen to more extensively use the strategies based on meta-learning and are more successful ([29]). Therefore, it is important to all parties to come to an agreement on what aim and assessment strategies will be applied, what success criteria ([12], [2]) and what distribution of responsibilities ([17]) will be set.

3.2 Research data analysis

Manifestation of assessment is treated as part of the culture of learning. The research data is analysed in compliance with the consistency and logic emphasised in the theoretical provisions stating that assessment of the assessment system existing in an institution will allow viewing it as a fundamental of assessment conducted by pedagogues determining practical manifestation of assessment in pedagogue’s daily performance. The research results are presented by introducing the manifestation examples and interpretations of them in each episode.

3.2.1 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which proportionately meets the assessment types.

While assessing students’ learning progress and learning attainments, the formative, diagnostic, summative assessments are employed. Even though in many cases documents mention all three forms of assessment, still manifestation of them is different in both their volume and content. The “diagnostic assessment performed at the beginning and end of the stage” (D3), “<...> throughout the entire education process” (D35) is the most detailed in its planning. The purpose of the diagnostic assessment is usually associated with the beginning of a new topic, chapter, aim to find out obtained knowledge; however, there are some cases when this type is used in the running and at the end of the learning process, too: “applied before starting a new chapter, <...> when learning or having completed the topic” (D8).

The summative assessment “used after ending a programme, course, module (D33-D54); <...> is dedicated to identify students’ attainments and to diagnose, too” (D7, D8, D33-D41, D43, D48-D54), to prove “<...> student’s attainments at the end of the curriculum” [D35; D38; D41]. In the course of this assessment, it is necessary to “<...> generalise, sum up the results and certify” (D31, D32, D36, D38, D42). “Students' progress and attainments are assessed by employing the 10-point scale” (D38, D42; D56), and obtained results are considered as legitimate and significant at personal, institutional and national levels. This determines that in many cases the school community discuss on the principles and elements of such assessment, follow common agreements.
The formative assessment is applied in lesson when assessing students’ individual progress each day and continuously. Therefore, in majority of cases the documents indicate that the formative assessment “is planned by a teacher within the lesson framework” (D31, D34, D41 etc.), and manifestation of common agreements is more an exemption than a rule. Since the results of the formative assessment are not that directly significant at institutional or national levels, an assumption can be drawn that the planning of such assessment is a teacher’s personal matter. However, without foreseeing possibilities of school community to agree upon the purpose, aims, methods, criteria, manifestation etc. of formative assessment, it may make an impact on a distorted perception of the essence of formative assessment, episodic character of its manifestation, eclectics. This is proven by the cases when formative assessment is perceived as an action intended for “<...> forming a mark <...>”, and “a formed mark is written down <...>” (D42); formative assessment is mistakenly understood as formal assessment or assessment types. Besides mentioned forms of assessment, cumulative, criteria-based, normative assessments are singled out, too (D2, D5, D12). The purpose of formative assessment is not completely perceived and this is demonstrated by considering formative assessment as “increasing students’ self-confidence <...>”, however, this can be achieved “<...> by praising on the basis of merit, avoiding threatening by referring to marks” (D17). It is observed that threatening by referring to marks is not eliminated, since it is only suggested to avoid it.

3.2.2 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which includes balanced manifestation of assessment provisions.

Descriptors of the assessment procedure foresee assessment of “<...> students’ knowledge, application of it, understanding, subject-related abilities, skills, endeavours, personal progress, general abilities” (D32, D38, D43), and aim at “assessing the level of students’ attainments and progress, finding out strengths, needs for learning of each student <...>” (D31-D33, D36, D38, D39, D42, D47, D51), as well as “student’s learning is being corrected with regard to the information regarding assessment” (D36, D38, D44). Obviously, analysis of student’s learning and insight into problems and opportunities for solution of them are delegated to a teacher, and a student as such remains passive. In single cases it is suggested “<...> to make decisions jointly with a student and his parents (foster parents, caregivers) concerning further steps in learning, necessary support to a student” (D33, D36, D38-D42, D47). Moreover, when foreseeing various procedures defining assessment, such verbs as to diagnose, to find out, to enhance, to present, to apply, to help, to inform and the like dominate, which allows supposing that actions are traditionally focused on initiatives of a teacher as a main actor and direct towards provision of support to a learner in descriptors of the assessment procedure. This allows drawing an assumption that the teacher’s role in education practice will also be prevailing and in many cases the individualisation and not personalisation approach will dominate, i.e., the provision of assessment of learning prevails. Manifestation of the provision of assessment for learning is recorded only when delegating to a student “<...> to self-assess own level of attainment, to set the goals of learning” (D31-D33, D36, D38-D40, D42, D47, D51), even though the initiative of the decision-making remains with a teacher, when “self-assessment forms and periodicity are foreseen by a subject teacher with regard to the level of attainment in class, students’ needs” (D34). It can be stated that internal strategic documents of schools include prevailing manifestation of the provision of assessment of learning; the provision of assessment for learning is expressed much lesser; and the provision of assessment as learning actually does not exist.

3.2.3 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which focuses on all dimensions of personality growth: subject abilities, general competences, maturity of personality.

Synergy of assessment of maturity of personality, subject-related attainments and attainments is regulated by Lithuanian strategic documents; therefore, this manifestation should also be characteristic to local documents of schools. Typically, many cases point out that “they seek helping a student to learn and become mature as a personality” (D1, D31-D55). Even though majority of cases indicate that “<...> assessment must stimulate maturity of personality <...>” (D1), still almost in all cases manifestation of the dimension of maturity of personality in a document remains declarative and beyond details. In single cases, the striving to assess students’ behaviour and discipline in marks “<...> in each lesson, which at the end of each moth is converted into a mark and, with regard to the amount of weekly hours given to a taught subject, is written down as a mark for a particular taught subject” (D43) shows that the very maturity of personality is perceived improperly.

Major attention is focused on assessment of subject-related attainments in accordance with single taught subjects – in many cases details of their assessment are presented in separate sections of
descriptors of the assessment procedure, such as “Assessment of Students’ Progress and Attainments in Taught Subjects” (D8) or in sub-sections titled by a common phrase, where procedures of assessment of taught subjects are presented in detail.

In some cases, the striving to assess general competences is expressed directly “<...> to help teacher have insight of student’s learning possibilities, to develop personal, initiative- and creativity-based, social cognition, communicative and knowing how to learn competences, to find out problems and gaps” (D32), “<...> to set goals of learning <...>” (D1, D34, D38, D46, D53). However, in many cases, manifestation of assessment of general competences is typical, usually episodic and oriented towards separate elements of knowing how to learn, such as “to help a student to know himself/ herself, to understand his/ her own strengths and weaknesses, to self-assess the level of own attainments, to set goals of learning” (D1, D31-D33, D36, D38-D40, D42, D47, D51).

The content analysis of documents demonstrated that descriptors of assessment procedures had inconsistent manifestation of dimensions of subject-related abilities, general competences and maturity of personality. Manifestation of subject attainments dominates; assessment of general competences is poorer expressed; and assessment of maturity of personality is expressed in a declarative manner, illustrating that the provisions established in national documents regulating education are complied with.

3.2.4 Episode: The teaching and learning assessment system which balances the roles of participants according to their purpose.

In the documents of some schools, the roles of participants of the education process are defined in separate sections (D33-D35, D39). In other cases, the roles of participants can be judged by the responsibilities delegated in the course of the assessment process. The teacher’s role is more focused on planning, recording, introduction, information, design of methods and, in separate cases, support to a student, generalisation of accumulated data: “<...> is planning learning attainments and assessment of students with regard to attainments, needs and possibilities of students in class <...>” (D2, D3, D9, D34, D35, D38). Also, attention is paid to monitoring of own performance aiming to “estimate success of teacher’s <...> work” (D1), teachers “<...> ensure coherence of methods and forms of assessment of students’ progress and attainments in school <...>” (D4, D18, D27).

The role of students is focused on reacting to teacher’s suggestions, independent or teacher-assisted taking care of own learning, i.e. “<...> to analyse attainments in own learning” (D45), “<...> to self-assess own attainments and progress, to plan further learning <...>” (D2, D3, D34); to know “<...> the norms and criteria of assessment, procedure of assignment for each taught subject <...>” (3); “<...> to accumulate proofs of all subject-related competences in a portfolio for each assessed subject <...>” (D5). The descriptors presenting the purpose of usage of assessment information may have no students as a target group to receive this information (it is intended for a teacher, parents, administrative staff only (D5)) or they appear when there is a need to make decisions concerning further learning (D14) (eliminating an initiative to be an active participant in own learning since the beginning of the learning process). As mentioned earlier, analysis of manifestation of provisions of assessment points out traditional roles focused more on initiatives of a teacher as a major actor.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- The research works prove that students’ attainments in learning are determined by a balanced system of assessment. An efficient system of teaching and learning in institution must encompass the following elements: meet the proportions according to assessment types (diagnostic, formative, summative); to balance manifestation of assessment provisions (assessment of learning, assessment for learning, assessment as learning); focus on all dimensions of personality growth: subject abilities, general competences, maturity of personality; to balance the roles of participants according to the purpose.

- In the practise of education in Lithuanian schools, in most cases the priority is given to diagnostic assessment. Schools prioritise the traditional measures and methods of assessment (e.g. tests, control assignment, questionnaires) that most often state the students (self-)learning. Such assessment has deeper traditions in the application of education practise because apparently they are clearer to a teacher and the procedures of evaluation require less time etc.

- A general tendency is observed: manifestation of different episodes is complex, reciprocally conditioning. For instance, a traditionally formed prioritising attitude towards subject-related
attainments conditions domination of the diagnostic and summative assessment forms, and the formative assessment in the school assessment system manifests episodically. This impacts the most usual assessment of students’ learning (without giving priority to provisions: assessment for learning or assessment as learning), and the assessment process as such has not become a mode of students’ learning in daily learning activities. This determines misbalanced manifestation of the roles of participants of the education process where initiatives are placed at teacher’s disposal.

REFERENCES


