

Assessment of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A Case Analysis of a University in the South of Europe

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Abstract: The focus of assessment in higher education has been moving from assessment 'of' to assessment 'for' learning and teaching. This shift suggests that formative assessment with feedback can be more beneficial to learning and teaching than traditional summative assessment. In view of the tension that arises between the move towards formative assessment and the role of summative assessment, this study examines how the University under study seeks to balance these two aspects of assessment. The study made use of interviews, questionnaires and documents to collect data. The participants are lecturers and students at the Faculty of Education. Five lecturers and 5 students were interviewed individually, while 15 lecturers and 29 students completed online questionnaires. The documents were obtained from the University's website. The findings reveal that the university in question recognises the importance of formative assessment, and has established policies and guidelines on the implementation of assessment of learning and teaching. Findings indicate that there is an imbalance between formative and summative assessment of learning and teaching, favouring the latter against the former. Although policy-makers, lecturers and students are aware of the importance of formative assessment, the traditional summative assessment is still the dominant assessment mode. Such a situation has caused challenges to the assessment policies, created struggles for lecturers and resulted in students' dissatisfaction with the learning process.

Keywords: formative assessment; summative assessment; higher education; university

Introduction

The assessment of learning and teaching permeates the educational process (Natriello 1987). Assessment, in Brookhart's (2004) broad definition, may be defined as 'collecting information about something to be used for some purpose' (p.5). In this study, 'assessment of learning' refers to collecting information about student learning status for the improvement of learning or assigning end-of-course grades. On the other hand, 'assessment of teaching' refers to collecting information about teaching performance to improve teaching or evaluating teaching effectiveness. There are two major types of assessment in both learning and teaching, namely summative and formative assessment (Berk, 2005; Boud and Falchikov, 2006). Summative assessment 'gives assessment information that is useful for making final decisions: for example, assigning end-of-term grades to student' or giving a score that indicates teaching effectiveness or accountability about teachers. Formative assessment, however, 'gives assessment information that is useful for continued student learning, positive classroom change, and other improvements' (Brookhart, 2004, p. 6).

In higher education, summative assessment of learning 'provide(s) certification of achievement'. Certification is used for 'employment and further study', and for students to be able to 'graduate with a validated record of their performance in the program in which they have participated' (Boud and Falchikov, 2006, p.401). Formative assessment of learning, on the contrary, aims to enable students to make more effective evaluation of their current learning achievement and to find out their further learning direction within their programme of studies (Boud and Falchikov, 2006). More importantly, 'the essence of formative assessment is that it provides feedback to students during the course so that they have opportunities to improve' (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, p.12). Summative assessment of teaching, however, provides evidence on teaching effectiveness to 'sum up our overall performance or status to decide about our annual merit pay, promotion, and tenure' while formative assessment of teaching 'uses the evidence to improve and shape the quality of our teaching' (Berk, 2005, p.48).

Summative assessment has been playing a predominant role in evaluating whether students can finish the course successfully and graduate with a certificate (Boud, 2000) as well as in evaluating teaching effectiveness (Seldin, 1999, as quoted in Berk, 2005). It has taken up 'too high a proportion of staff time, energy and resources at the expense of preparing effective learners' (Boud, 2000, p.152), leading formative assessment to be neglected (Boud, 2000). Clearly, assessment should serve higher education according to its new trend, that is shifting from mainly 'classification, prediction, and sorting' (Gordon, 2008, p.3) to promoting students' growth and development

(Messick, 1999) and more importantly, to cultivate lifelong learners in a learning society (Boud, 2000; Boud and Falchikov, 2006). Boud (2000) advocates the concept of 'sustainable assessment', stressing that in a lifelong learning society, university students not only need learning assessment during their study at university, but the university should also equip students with the competence of self-assessment after graduation. Therefore, 'students need to become assessors within the context of participation in practice' (Boud and Falchikov, 2006, p.399). In other words, 'a renewed focus needs to be placed on the role of formative assessment...in order to focus learners' attention on the processes of assessment and to permit them to learn how to make these processes their own' (Boud, 2000, p.152).

Freeman and Dobbins (2013, p.142) adopted a meaningful term 'shared ownership' to emphasize the important nature of collaboration between teachers and students for the course enhancement. 'Shared ownership' stresses that the assessment of learning and teaching 'should be a two way and reciprocal process' (p.144). Furthermore, Astin (1984) states that 'the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development' (p.529). This is also true when students are given opportunities to participate in their learning assessment activities such as self-assessment and peer-assessment.

The literature clearly underlines the need and benefits of shifting from traditional summative assessment to formative, participative assessment in higher education. However, given the reality of assessment in higher education, it seems that universities are unable to escape from making use of summative assessment as their assessment of choice. In view of this tension between the move towards formative assessment and traditional summative assessment as the dominant mode, universities strive to find a good fit between formative and summative assessment of learning and teaching. The literature indicates that the main difference between formative and summative assessment is whether feedback is provided or not, suggesting that lecturers can also make a formative use of summative tests by giving feedback to students (Black and Wiliam, 2012; Brown et al., 1997). The feedback can be provided by the teacher, peers or the learner himself/herself (Leahy and Wiliam, 2012). In addition, if summative assessment methods are used along with formative assessment methods, they 'provide students with a final perspective on their work as it has emerged over time' (Maki, 2010, p. 160). This indicates that formative and summative assessment can be integrated together to maximise the outcomes of students' learning. If 'summative assessment is put into the context of formative assessment, in a "both/and" as opposed to an "either/ or" structure, then each can enhance the other, providing multiple measures of learning (Stefanakis 2002, as cited in Smith and Barclay 2010, p.98). A framework of student learning assessment, therefore, needs to include both formative and summative assessment,

focusing on the provision of feedback to students. However, it is often the case that there is insufficient time for staff to mark assignments or written examinations, and 'assessment is viewed by some departments/schools as an extra rather than a recognised use of staff time' (Brown et al., 1997, p.9). University staff may be inclined to design multiple-choice examinations to avoid overload, even though they can create opportunities for students to provide feedback for themselves and their peers.

Few studies have sought to examine how universities seek to balance formative and summative assessments and what challenges they encounter in this process. This paper presents a case study which sought to explore how Grant University (fictitious name) is addressing this challenge by examining how it conducts assessment of both learning and teaching.

The staff and students at the Faculty of Education at Grant University were invited to participate in this study. The Faculty of Education is an important place to train students to become effective teachers with knowledge, skills of, and attitude towards, teaching, learning and assessment in schools, and faculty staff often serve as a role model for demonstrating good practice of teaching and learning assessment. Therefore, it was considered valuable to understand education staff's and students' experience of assessment in examining the assessment practices at the Grant University.

Context of Grant University and Higher Education in Its Country

There are about 80 institutions of higher education, including state and independent institutions, in the country where this study has been carried out. Table 1 provides general information about higher education in the country. There is only one university, Grant University, which is a public university and the highest teaching institution in the country. Its structures and programmes have been recently harmonized to be in line with the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area. Grant University has an overall student population of 11,500, including over 1000 international students from 92 different countries, following full-time or part-time degree and diploma courses, many of them run on the modular or credit system. The University regularly hosts a large number of Erasmus and other exchange students (presently 450 students). A basic Foundation Studies Course enables international high school students who have completed their secondary or high school education overseas but who do not have the necessary entry requirements, to qualify for admission to an undergraduate degree course at the Grant University. It has over 700 faculty members, fourteen faculties and a number of centres and institutes and awards both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees up to doctorate level (first, second and third cycle levels).

Grant University uses the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) to define learning outcomes of a given course or programme. Sixty ECTS are the equivalent of a full year of study or work. In this system, a typical 'first cycle' (or Bachelor's) Degree, would consist of 180 or 240 ECTS, whereas a typical 'second cycle' (or Master's) Degree, would consist of 90 or 120 ECTS, with at least 60 ECTS at second cycle level (European Commission 2016). Table 2 illustrates an example of the ECTS required for a first cycle programme at Grant University.

Table 1. General information on higher education in the country of Grant University

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Types of institution | Universities | 1 (state) |
| | Higher Education Institutions: | 21 (state and independent) |
| | Further and Higher Education Institutions: | 44 (state and independent) |
| | Junior colleges | (4 public; 9 private) |
| Study period of programs | Undergraduate | 3-4 years |
| | Master | 1 (FT) -2/3 years (PT) |
| | Doctoral | 3-7 years |
| Annual expenditures | Higher than €50 million. | |
| Tuition fees per student per year | Undergraduate courses and postgraduate courses leading to professional qualifications at Grant University are free for national and EU citizens. | |

Source: NCFHE (2014)

Table 2. Course Plan: Areas of study for one of the undergraduate programmes in teacher education at the Faculty of Education, Grant University *

| | 1 st year | 2 nd year | 3 rd year | TOTALS |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Education Studies | 14 ECTS | 4 ECTS | 6 ECTS | 24 ECTS |
| Professional Issues | 18 ECTS | 20 ECTS | 28 ECTS | 66 ECTS |
| Pedagogy | 18 ECTS | 30 ECTS | 14 ECTS | 62 ECTS |
| Research/Research Methods | 4 ECTS | | | 4 ECTS |
| Field Placement | 6 ECTS | 6 ECTS | 12 ECTS | 24 ECTS |
| TOTAL | 60 ECTS | 60 ECTS | 60 ECTS | 180 ECTS |

*Note. Intake October 2016 (full-time programme; 3 year duration)

Over the past decade, there has been a 50% increase in the number of students pursuing tertiary education in the country. The English language is the medium of instruction at the University. The University has grown rapidly with an increase in the number of courses offered, diverse, new areas of studies, and a steadily growing student population. Following the

country's entry into the European Union, Grant University has undertaken a harmonisation process to bring its courses fully in line with the Bologna Declaration.

Methodology

This study made use of documentary analysis, online surveys and interviews as methods of data collection, seeking to ensure validation of data through cross verification from different sources. For example, when interviewees talked about the policy and regulations of teaching and learning assessment at the university or faculty level, this was cross checked with similar data from documents and the survey and vice versa. The period of data collection was between June and October, 2014.

The documentary analysis was based on documents about assessment retrieved from Grant University's official website. These included 'Assessment' and 'Student Feedback' issued by the Programme Validation Committee; 'University Assessment Regulations, 2009' and 'General Regulations for University Undergraduate Awards' in the Education Act; 'Guidelines for the Writing of Effective Learning Outcomes' as well as 'Study-unit Feedback: the outcomes' issued by the Academic Programmes Quality & Resources Unit and 'Methods of Assessment for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Study-units' published by the University.

The participants in the online surveys included lecturers and students who were teaching and studying at the Faculty of Education of Grant University. The Faculty has 70 academic members and 958 students. Two versions of the anonymous online questionnaires were designed and sent to all lecturers and students at the Faculty. The questionnaires for both lecturers and students comprised 5 parts: 1) background information; 2) experiences on assessment of learning; 3) perspectives on assessment of learning; 4) experiences on assessment of teaching; and 5) perspectives on assessment of teaching.

Fifteen lecturers and 29 students completed an online questionnaire. Tables 3 and 4 show the characteristics of students and lecturers who completed the online survey according to gender, length of teaching years, year of study, etc. The online questionnaires were sent to all Faculty lecturers and students, with a response rate of 21% and 3% respectively. The data collected from the survey was analyzed descriptively including percentages and mean.

The participants in the interview were not randomly selected but mostly through snowballing and recommendations by other faculty members; some were volunteers from the survey. In all, 5 lecturers and 5 students were interviewed individually on various aspects of assessment of teaching and learning. Five lecturers and 2 students who were interviewed were

recommended by a faculty member while 3 students were invited via the emails they left on their own accord. Students who were interviewed included one in his second year, one in the third year, and two in their last year of study as well as one master's student. The lecturers who were interviewed included 2 female and 3 male lecturers; they were lecturers, senior lecturers or associate professors. The interview questions for both lecturers and students included the practice and challenges of assessment of learning and teaching, as well as the factors that influenced the implementation of assessment. In addition, their suggestions for supporting or improving the practice of assessment of learning and teaching at their university were also explored.

The interview data was analyzed according to a framework including the participant's related background information, the policies in both assessment of learning and assessment of teaching, the perceptions of lecturers and students on the implementation of assessment policies, and the suggestions from interviewees and on-line survey respondents. A 2-digit coding system for interview data was adopted; for example, F1 represented the first interview data from faculty; S1 represented the first interview data from student. For the purpose of preserving anonymity some information that might disclose the participants' identity is not presented in this paper.

Table 3. Characteristics of students who completed the online questionnaire

| Feature | Category | N | Total |
|---------------|-----------------------|----|-------|
| Gender | Male | 5 | 29 |
| | Female | 24 | |
| Year of study | Undergraduate | 21 | 29 |
| | Master's | 4 | |
| | PGCE | 3 | |
| | Other (not indicated) | 1 | |

Source: This study

Table 4. Features of academic staff who completed the survey

| Feature | Category | N | Total |
|-------------------|---------------------|----|-------|
| Gender | Male | 8 | 15 |
| | Female | 7 | |
| Rank | Full Professor | 2 | 15 |
| | Associate Professor | 3 | |
| | Lecturers | 10 | |
| Years of teaching | 3-5 | 3 | 15 |
| | 6-15 | 5 | |
| | 16-20 | 3 | |
| | 21 or more | 4 | |

Source: This study

Findings

Policy and Regulations - both formative and summative assessments valued, but summative assessment is the dominant mode

Most of the assessment policies published on Grant University's website are about assessment of learning; only the document on 'Student Feedback' is about assessment of teaching. The analysis of the policies and regulations on the assessment of learning reveals that Grant University has been aware of the impact of assessment on students' current learning and future career. The policy points out that 'assessment is at the heart of the learning experience for students' and 'quality assessment practices are an important element of the student experience, with the outcome of assessment influencing students' future lives.' Furthermore, 'assessment determines what needs to be learnt, and drives the learning outcomes.' In the section 'Purposes of Assessment', it is clearly written that assessment serves many purposes, including promoting student learning by providing appropriate feedback on performance (formative) and providing a mark or grade which may be used to make progress decisions (summative). In addition, it states that 'a comprehensive assessment plan will include formative and summative assessment'. Formative assessment is often 'conducted during or at the beginning of a programme'; its major purpose is 'to improve quality of student learning and should not be evaluative or involve grading students.' Summative assessment, however, is 'administered on completion of a study-unit or other component of a programme, and determines whether or not the student has "passed" ...it is usually fairly formal and comprehensive in nature.'

The 'General Regulations for University Undergraduate Awards' mentions that assessment may be made in a continuous, final or continuous and final mode, but for the most part, it focuses on summative assessment as its intention is to determine whether students can get undergraduate awards. Moreover, the 'University Assessment Regulations, 2009', clearly defines assessment as 'all forms of assessment that are used to award a mark and/or grade that contributes towards the award of any University qualification.' Although the regulations emphasize the variety of assessment methods, including written supervised examinations, oral examinations, home assignments, portfolios, projects, fieldwork, case studies, logbooks, continuous assessment of a placement, most of the space goes to explain how to conduct formal written examinations.

The 'Guidelines for the Writing of Effective Learning Outcomes' show that Grant University appreciates student-centred teaching approaches in view of the 'shift from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching approaches ... the current focus is on what students are expected to be able to do at the end of a

study-unit or programme.’ To be more in line with the student-centred teaching approach, ‘Assessment’ that is issued by the Programme Validation Committee stresses the importance of both formative and summative assessment. It underlines the principles, objectives, and process of assessment as well as the application of formative and summative assessment. However, the formative assessment regulations are for reference only and serve mainly as guidelines. On the other hand, Grant University provides very detailed regulations about written examinations in ‘General Regulations for University Undergraduate Awards’, including the process of preparation and implementing examinations. This suggests that Grant University gives primary importance to final examinations, and hopes to maintain a higher level of validity, reliability, objectivity and fairness through summative assessment.

The ‘Student Feedback’ policy indicates that Grant University follows the Bologna Process by emphasising the need to involve students as collaborators in teaching and learning. It adopts the phrase ‘student feedback’ to refer to assessment of teaching. According to this policy, the major objectives are to ‘provide students with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their learning experiences and to provide feedback to lecturers in order to improve delivery and/or content of the study-unit.’ The student feedback form focuses on six issues, namely 1) general questions on the study-unit; 2) comparison between study-unit description and actual delivery; 3) lecturing methodology; 4) lecturer attributes; 5) method of assessment; and 6) administration and resources. Students are ‘invited by means of an email providing a link to complete a brief online feedback form on an anonymous basis towards the end of selected study-units.’ However, ‘participation in student feedback is on an entirely voluntary basis and confidential and anonymous...even though students must log on to the designed online system to provide feedback, all student login data is kept separate from their feedback responses.’ It is important to note that ‘only a selection of study-units are evaluated to avoid student fatigue associated with this exercise, but all study-units will eventually be evaluated over a definite period.’

Grant University is aware of the significance of formative assessment of teaching using ‘student feedback’ instead of student evaluation of teaching. In addition, the feedback that is collected from students is mainly used for the improvement of teaching, and is not used as an indicator of personnel decisions. However, the implementation of student feedback policy seems more summative-orientated. Firstly, it is conducted once a semester at the end of selected study-units. Secondly, the results provided to lecturers are of a quantitative nature mainly showing the number of completed study-unit feedback forms, response rate and the frequency in each rating category.

The document analysis suggests that from a quality assurance perspective, Grant University is aware of the importance of formative assessment and has set fairly clear and openly accessible regulations and policies on the implementation of assessment of learning and teaching. There seems to be a gap, however, between university policies and actual practices, with summative assessment of learning (written examinations) and teaching (student feedback collected at the end of the study-unit) being the dominant assessment mode. The overall the paradigm shift towards formative assessment in many universities across the world is still in its early phase (Gipps, 1994). Another factor might be that summative assessment in higher education has been playing a predominant role in evaluating whether students can complete the course successfully and finally graduate for a long time (Boud, 2000). Thus it is not easy to change this traditional role in a short time.

Lecturers' perspectives - formative assessment in mind, but summative assessment in practice

The findings from the lecturers' interviews and questionnaires reveal that all lecturers agreed that formative assessment is critical to student learning and has a positive impact on students:

Another issue I find is that students need to be more involved in the assessment... First of all, you are more likely to learn, because you are engaged and evaluating yourself as well. So in that way, one is more likely to benefit from the learning process, as the focus there is not only on teaching, but teaching and learning. Maybe here we are still too focused on summative assessment, while the assessment is done at the end of the study unit by the lecturer. I think we should go for formative assessment, more formative, rather than summative, and more continuous assessment (F1).

It's not just pass or fail, what grade I did get. But what have I learned from this assessment, what are my strengths and what are my weaknesses in the area? And I think there will be a little bit more emphasis on self-evaluation, to encourage more learning, and also peer-evaluation, where students maybe give feedback to each other (F1).

I am a process person. I am very much in the process to help students. The assessment in the end does not reflect all your qualities. It's always a challenge to assess students because I believe that whatever the assessment, the written or the

examination would never reflect the actual standard of students. That is more than just one hour examination (F3).

When I have a choice, I do what I really think is the best to do. I would give students something that is relevant to what I really want them to learn. For example, to observe a pupil, to devise and give lessons, to evaluate how well they engage the child, and they do overall reflection. So, for me, it is the best assessment form I would like to do (F4).

The findings from the questionnaires resonate with the results from interviews. Table 5 shows the mean of each question on the purposes of assessment in the questionnaire.

Table 5. Mean number of questions on the purpose of assessment

| Items | N | M | SD |
|--|----|------|------|
| 1) The aims of university SLA are to equip students with the lifelong learning knowledge, skills and attitude. | 15 | 3.40 | 0.63 |
| 2) The aims of university SLA are to help students improve their quality of learning and ways of learning. | 15 | 3.46 | 0.63 |
| 3) The aims of university SLA are to differentiate students 'achievement for selecting purpose for advanced learning and employment. | 15 | 2.80 | 0.67 |
| 4) The aims of university SLA are to provide students' learning outcomes as a criterion for the society to determine whether the curriculum is appropriate or not. | 15 | 2.53 | 0.91 |
| 5) The aims of SLA are to determine whether students can finally pass the course. | 15 | 2.60 | 0.82 |
| 6) The aims of university SLA are to provide feedback to students so that they can understand their learning progress and further learning direction. | 15 | 3.40 | 0.63 |

Source: This study

In the six questions, those (1,2,6) with formative-orientated nature got higher scores than those (3,4,5) with summative-orientated nature. It seems that while the shift from summative to formative assessment has been gaining ground amongst lecturers, assessment of learning is in fact 'still too focused on summative assessment' (F1) with very few lecturers giving assignments instead of examinations (F2). 'There are some courses where everything is examined' (F2). According to lecturers, the university policy of assessment, the class size, the national examination culture as well as the pressure on writing papers, might be the major factors leading to a summative-driven culture even in the face of the increasing awareness on the importance of

formative assessment. Some lecturers pointed out that such issues are preventing them from engaging in more formative assessment (F1-F5).

The lecturers said that they are expected to follow the University regulations on assessment and adopt written examinations as one of the important modes of assessment. For example, a lecturer said that he knew that assessment in the end did not reflect students' overall qualities, but it was university policy, so lecturers had to follow it (F3, F5). The survey also shows that amongst the items on difficulties faced in assessment, the item 'restriction of school policy' got the highest score (M=2.60). Moreover, all lecturers who were interviewed (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5) and who participated in the survey (M=3.38) saw class size as the most important factor that affected their selection of assessment methods. A lecturer said that 'one of the challenges I have is that I teach a very large groups of students; some of my groups range from 60 to 152. When you have such big numbers, doing examination is much easier' (F2). Another lecturer also pointed out the difficulty to assess a big group of 150 students, remarking that an assignment would mean that he would need to correct 150 essays of 2000 words each (F1). A lecturer remarked:

For certain lectures I have about 200 students. I cannot give a (formative) assignment to such a large number. What I do is to give multiple choice examinations. Multiple choice examinations are good for assessing knowledge and concepts, but they restrict you in the way you assess students. I don't give short questions or case study when the numbers are large, because I will need to correct too many papers (F4).

An implicit culture focused on examination is another reason for the present summative based situation. A lecturer observed that 'the culture in the country makes students tend to look mainly at the results. They are happy if they pass, but they are sad if they fail. Even teaching, unfortunately, is for examinations at the end' (F3). The struggle between assessment and research also influences lecturer' assessment decisions. A lecturer mentioned that:

It's a problem mainly for my own academic work. Because instead of doing my academic writing, I am doing assessment work. I must say, many times I am very tempted to let them (students) do the examination. Because I can't do this any longer. I do not get a promotion when I should if I don't have enough publication. I would have written much more if I had less big groups and less marking (F2).

However, some of the lecturers still try to make use of formative assessment as best as they could, and hope that they would find a better balance between the two (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5). For example, F5 pointed out her practice:

Because my research area is about effective learning, I believe that formative assessment with feedback is helpful to improve student learning even though the University emphasizes very much on written examination. In order to make a better balance between formative and summative assessment (examination), in my course, I have a final examination to meet the University's policy, but I also design a project for students and divide the project into several stages. Therefore, I can give students feedback at different stages to achieve the formative effect.

The policy of 'student feedback' is the primary form of formal teaching evaluation. (F1). Both the interviews and survey data show that all lecturers are aware of this policy that aims to 'provide students with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their learning experiences' and to provide feedback to lecturers in order to improve delivery and/or content of the study-unit' (F1-F5). A lecturer mentioned that 'I think it gives one a way of improving and this would allow students' voices to come out even more. Today, we have created a platform where students can raise their concerns and talk' (F3). The lecturers agree that the purpose of student feedback is formative 'which aims to create an opportunity for student to give their feedback to lecturers in order to improve teaching quality' (F3, F4). However, the summative nature of the exercise which is only conducted once at the end of the study-unit, may have reduce the formative function of this assessment. In addition, many lecturers found several issues with this system of analysis, such as issues of validity, representation, qualitative results, content and low response rate as well as the lack of lecturers' participation and involvement (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5). As a result, lecturers did not see the results of student feedback as providing valuable information for teaching improvement. For example, a lecturer said that:

It is not a reliable measure, students very rarely take it seriously and very few actually fill in these forms. Some students who did not come to lectures regularly, still fill in the form. Moreover, students might mistake some processes which take place in teaching. For example, I am a very punctual person, and I always go 5 minutes before the lecture, and I usually have problems because the other lecturers are in the room continuing with their own lecture. But I have always to tell them leave. So I am always before time, and I keep the time, and then I let the students leave ten minutes before the hour, so that they can get the next lecture on time. But when I saw the forms, half of the students said I was not on time. How can it be? (F1)

In order to make 'student feedback' more meaningful to teaching, some lecturers design their own forms to collect student feedback during the course. For example, a lecturer mentioned that he asked students how they felt about the course informally (F4). Some lecturers said that they hoped that instead of one-way measure, there would be a reciprocal meeting between lecturers and students to have a face-to-face discussion (F1, F3). In addition, lecturers also hope that every study-unit needs to be evaluated by students (F3).

Student Perspectives: unbalanced experiences in assessment of learning and teaching

The students interviewed experienced different types of assessment, such as examinations, essay writing, group work, research project and logbook in different study units (S1-S5). However, examinations were the most used assessment type, especially in education study-units because these usually had a big group of students, ranging from 50 to more than one hundred students (S1-S5). Students found that their lecturers chose the types of assessment according to class size. For some small class, lecturers tended to choose other assessment methods. For example, a student reported that 'in some practical courses, we are assessed not by an examination, but by discussion and performance playing' (S2). For other big class, with 90 or more students, using examination would be the best for lecturers, but not fair for students (S2). Some students thought that examinations were a feature of the national culture, but they still preferred to have non-examination types of assessment because they would benefit from lecturers' or peers' feedback (S2, S3). Another issue in relation to examination was about its content validity and its time of administration. A student shared his story about the examination:

For example, this year, I had a course which was taught by two professors. First semester is taught by one professor and the second semester, we have the other one. But when it comes to assessment, we only take one final examination at the end of the second semester (at the end of the year) with one hundred questions which are set by the two professors. I think it is not fair at all to be judged on this examination. What if you are having a bad day or are sick at the examination day? What If you fail the exam? It shouldn't be 100% exam-based (S2).

It seems that students are experiencing an imbalanced assessment situation that attached more importance to summative assessment than to formative assessment. Moreover, multiple choice questions seemed to be the main type of questions in examinations; this did not reflect students' learning achievement (S2, S4).

Only 35% of students who participated in this study reported that they had opportunities to complete the student feedback form on the study units. Some of students did not even know about its existence (S1, S3, S5). However, irrespective of whether students had experience in evaluation of teaching or not, they still agreed that 'student feedback' was one of the best ways for them to give feedback and have their voice heard (S2, S4), to improve the system focused on examinations and regulations (S2), and to help lecturers to improve their teaching (S4).

Another issue related to the student feedback assessment is on anonymity and confidentiality. Students seemed concerned about anonymity when they logged in to complete the feedback form. Every student who was interviewed expressed their concern in disclosing their identity. A student said that 'because we need to log in to fill it up, we might be identified by the lecturer' (S2). Another student who participated in the survey suggested that 'all efforts should be employed to make sure students remain anonymous if they so desire'.

Overall, students valued the activity of assessment of teaching, but they were not happy with its execution. Although the university has given them the opportunity to have their say, only some study-units were included in the assessment, and thus not every student had the opportunity to give feedback. In addition, giving feedback to lecturers only happened at the end of selected study-units; it was usually too late for lecturers to improve their teaching during the process of the course. The students proposed that assessment of teaching should be done university-wide and need to be mandatory, and that every study unit needs to be evaluated (S3, S5). Most students (86%) expected that this activity should be done twice in a semester, namely at the mid-term and the end of the semester, preferably, completed in a written form in the classroom.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings of this study reveal that from a quality assurance perspective, Grant University has set fairly clear and openly accessible regulations and policies on the implementation of assessment of learning and teaching processes. In actual practice however, there is a discrepancy between policy and practice; while policy underlines the importance and benefit of both formative and summative assessments, summative assessment appears to be the university's assessment of choice. Overall, it seems that Grant University is still having difficulty to find a balance between formative and summative assessments. In fact, this is an issue which many other universities are struggling with as well. A study by OECD (2013a) pointed out several common policy challenges both in student assessment and teacher evaluation

across various countries. One of the main issues is that it is difficult to 'balance external assessments and teacher-based assessments in the assessment of learning and integrating student formative assessment in the evaluation and assessment framework' as well as to 'combine the improvement and accountability functions of teacher evaluation' (OECD 2013b, p.1). However, 'different assessment policies and practices influence students' motivation, effort, learning styles and perceptions of self-efficacy as well as teaching practices and teacher-student relationships' (OECD 2013a, p. 4). Therefore, in order to improve students' learning, Grant University may need to invest more effort in reconstructing its assessment policies.

All the lecturers who participated in the interviews and the online survey are aware of the university policies and regulations of assessment, and make use of assessment methods as stipulated in the regulations. In terms of assessment of learning, both lecturers and students argued that the university put more emphasis on the final written examinations, which do not offer feedback to students on the improvement of learning. Lecturers reported that choosing the method of assessment is a struggle because of the dilemma resulting from the focus on examinations and summative assessment on one hand and the principles of formative assessment on the other. Students who participated in this study suggested that feedback from non-examination forms of assessment would be more beneficial to their learning, and hoped that their lecturers could adopt more formative forms of assessment.

In relation to the assessment of learning, it is worthwhile to reflect on what Goubeaud and Wang (2004) remarked on the importance of teachers' role in assessment:

The instructional practices and assessment strategies used by teacher education faculty are critically important in view of current reform efforts aimed at preservice training programs. Student achievement depends to a large extent on the skills and practices of K-12 teachers, and teachers depend on the preparation they receive from teacher educators. One of the ways new teachers can become more competent in using various types of assessment strategies that improve student learning is to experience these assessment strategies first hand, modeled by teacher educators in preservice programmes (p.13).

A teacher education programme that employs the assessment strategies it espouses will be more likely to produce preservice teachers who are equipped to use such strategies (p.12).

Clearly, Grant University and its faculty members need to reconsider their policy of assessment of learning to achieve more balance between formative

and summative assessment, particularly as they form part of a teacher education faculty and thus they are role models for their students in teaching and assessment. In addition, education students also need first hand experiences of assessment so that they could become more competent in using various types of assessment strategies in their classrooms.

Like many universities around the world, Grant University collects feedback from students on the respective study-unit, seeking to promote student participation and ensure teaching enhancement. As already mentioned, however, the present system is fraught with difficulties and limitations, with only a number of selected study-units being assessed on a semester basis, student participation being voluntary and, students needing to log on in order to complete the feedback form, thus compromising anonymity. This policy has been stated explicitly by the university administration through its website, but it seems that in the case of students, only some were aware of it. Lecturers reported that the online student response rate was too low to offer constructive suggestions for teaching improvement. Overall, both lecturers and students appreciated the value of this assessment activity, but wished that every study-unit should be assessed every semester by every student who registered for the study-unit.

Astin (1984) observed that 'from the standpoint of educator, the most important hypothesis in the theory is that the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement' (p.529). In view of the issues of assessment of learning and teaching found in this study, it is a priority to create opportunities for the involvement for both lecturers and students in this exercise. As the findings showed, students did not participate much in the assessment of learning and teaching, with a similar situation on the part of the lecturers in the assessment of teaching. Therefore, the issue of 'involvement' and active participation needs to be addressed at the university level, the lecturers' level and students' level.

The purpose of this case study was to understand how Grant University seeks to balance the move towards formative assessment with the traditional summative assessment mode. The results show that at policy, lecturer and student levels, there is an imbalance between formative and summative assessment of both learning and teaching, favouring the latter against the former. Although policy-makers, lecturers and students in this study are aware of the importance of the formative assessment of teaching and learning, the traditional summative assessment is still the dominant assessment mode. Such a situation has caused challenges to the assessment policies, created struggles for lecturers and resulted in students' dissatisfaction with the learning process. In order to improve the quality of learning and teaching, Grant University thus may rethink, in principle, the

relationship between formative and summative assessment by locating summative assessment into the context of formative assessment as an integrated mode of assessment, using summative assessment methods along with formative ones to provide students with 'a final perspective on their work as it has emerged over time' (Maki 2010, p.160). In practice, Grant University may seek to achieve this balance by considering the following action steps:

- create opportunities for students to provide feedback to themselves and their peers to reduce the pressure on lecturers
- reduce the weight of examinations in the final grade so as to give more weight to non-examination assessments;
- encourage different testing modes besides multiple choice questions;
- encourage lecturers to adopt diversified assessment methods apart from written examinations so as to create a multiple assessment culture amongst student teachers; in this way the traditional examination culture may change in schools as well besides university;
- modify the policy of "Student Feedback" to allow all study-units to be assessed every semester by every student registered for the study-unit;
- introduce and explain the rationale of the student feedback policy to students and lecturers before implementation, especially the issue of anonymity, which appears to be a concern for students;
- reduce the class size of education courses by dividing into smaller groups or train postgraduate teaching assistants to help with the assessment;
- support institutional change in assessment through e-assessment policies and procedures.

This was a small scale exploratory case study with a limited number of research participants from one Faculty at one University, and any conclusions and recommendations thus need to be considered against this limitation. The study has, however, underlined the relationship between summative and formative assessment in learning and teaching, indicating an imbalance in favour of summative assessment. While further, more representative and University wide research is clearly recommended, this study suggests that higher education institutions need to examine their policy and implementation of assessment to ensure an integrated formative-summative assessment of learning and teaching.

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