

Chapter 19

Authentic Assessment: An Inquiry into the Assessment Process at Master's Degree Level

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and discuss the concept of authentic assessment at Master's degree level. Firstly, this chapter attempts to provide a better understanding of the Master's program within the context of the Bologna system by providing a short historical perspective on the evolution of the Bologna process, as well as trying to identify the true beneficiaries. The chapter also addresses some of the challenges of the assessment process with two main themes: types and aim of the assessment process. Furthermore, the authors focus on the role of the authentic assessment, at a Master's degree level – as reflected by students' perception and correlated with its intended purpose. Drawing on the findings, the authors attempt to shape a description of what authentic assessment is and what it should be at Master's degree level.

INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education reform process is an ongoing process, linked to the development of an international education system within a competitive global society. The aim of the Bologna Process is not to harmonize national educational systems, it is about providing tools to connect them. The main goal is

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to allow the diversity of national systems to be maintained, while the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) improves transparency between higher education systems, as well as implements tools to facilitate recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges between institutions.

In order to meet the EHEA goals, the universities' mission is to support individuals, by providing them with high quality learning experiences that will enable them to be capable of performing meaningful tasks in the real world. To do so, the university has to be able to evaluate to which extent students acquire a basic level of knowledge and skill in a certain field.

Nevertheless, to keep with the students' centered learning approach, the assessment process has to provide unique experiences that give them the possibility to demonstrate competences. Authentic assessment provides students with the opportunity to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills.

The chapter attempts to provide a better understanding of the Master's program in the Bologna system by providing a short historical perspective on the evolution of the Bologna process, as well as trying to identify the true beneficiaries of a Master's program taking into account that the development of the Bologna process serves the purpose of diversification of higher education. The diversification of higher education is necessary in order to meet the European labor market needs and to heterogeneously increase student population.

Furthermore, we focus on the role of the authentic assessment, at a Master's degree level – as reflected by students' perception and correlated with its intended purpose. By developing this 'meta-assessment', we aim to reveal how relevant the Master's program is for the students and to make inferences on whether the modernization of Higher Education should be reflected in further restructuring of the master's program, in a manner which would better answer the Master's students' needs.

BACKGROUND

A Historical Perspective on the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process is meant to provide a new model of international governance and policy-making in the field of higher education and its main purpose is to engage students, higher education institutions, stakeholders, and public authorities in debate over a common project. This common project aims to the development of new and comprehensive education system that will allow students to choose from a wide and transparent range of high-quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures both within and between national higher education systems.

The transformation of higher education systems and institutions in all developed countries in recent years has been driven by a series of meetings of ministers responsible for higher education at which policy decisions have been made in order to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

EHEA was launched in March 2010 and among its main objectives was ensuring the development of more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education across Europe. It also targets the concept of teaching methods which focus on the student's learning process and the importance of students' mobility, especially on the subject of increasing mobility and recognition of European university degrees.

In the most recent ministerial meeting, The Yerevan Ministerial Conference, 47 countries with different political, cultural and academic traditions cooperated on the basis of open dialogue, shared goals and common commitments to create a new reform of our higher education systems. According to the

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