FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT IMBALANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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In many university contexts, summative assessments—such as end-of-term exams or final coursework—carry significant weight, often determining the majority of a student's final grade. Because of this high-stakes emphasis, formative assessments may become undervalued or overlooked, despite their essential role in supporting learning throughout the semester. The central concern driving this research is that the dominance of summative assessment may hinder student development, reduce classroom participation, and contribute to superficial learning and unethical academic practices.

The primary issue this situation is that, summative assessments frequently overshadow formative assessments in higher education settings. When students feel that only final grades matter, they are less motivated to engage in weekly seminars, practical activities, or formative tasks designed to build understanding. This can result in limited participation, incomplete work, and a lack of meaningful interaction with course material. In some cases, students may still achieve high final grades, sometimes through dishonest means, despite minimal involvement in formative learning processes.

This imbalance negatively impacts student learning outcomes and weakens the overall effectiveness and fairness of assessment practices. Existing literature highlights the pivotal role of formative assessment in enhancing teaching and learning. Formative methods—such as collaborative projects, quizzes, journals, and classroom discussions—provide continuous feedback that helps students monitor progress, identify weaknesses, and adjust their learning strategies. They are flexible tools that accommodate diverse learning styles and enable instructors to address student needs in real time.

Studies by Mok & Li (2011) and Boud & Falchikov (2006) emphasize that combining formative and summative assessment produces a more complete picture of student learning. Formative approaches such as self-assessment and peer assessment cultivate deeper learning and encourage students to take greater responsibility for their academic development.

Despite these benefits, challenges persist. One major concern is ensuring the authenticity of student work; as academic dishonesty may increase when assessment systems rely heavily on high-stakes summative tasks. It suggests that designing assessments that emphasize higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application can reduce opportunities for cheating while improving learning. Overall, thus, consistently underscores that formative assessment is essential for supporting high-quality education, yet it remains undervalued in many higher education systems.

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