

Student Feedback on Evaluation and Assessment Processes in Higher Education

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This study focuses on evaluation as a challenge of higher education, approached from the perceptions of students at a private university in the north of the city of Quito-Ecuador, carried out in the academic period 2020-2021. It is an exploratory descriptive research that uses mixed methods and approaches the subject from the qualitative-interpretative paradigm with the aim of integrating data and understanding the perceptions of students around the evaluations of which they are participants. The target population was 250 students who, after consenting to their participation, provided information through a questionnaire with a Likert-type scale. The aspects analyzed were: objectives, factors, importance, validity of the evaluation in the teaching-learning processes. It is concluded that the population under study perceives evaluation as synonymous with measurement and assignment of qualifications to be promoted to a higher level and reflects limited learning. However, they consider it important to be applied in the training process.

Keywords: assessment, summative, formative, educational evaluation, university evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Today, educational innovation is a permanent objective in the educational field; systematizing existing experiences to identify strengths and weaknesses, and discovering new perspectives for the development of educational activities that ensure educational quality are undoubtedly an emerging issue in higher education (Sengupta et al., 2021). For the aforementioned reasons, this study considers the evaluation process because it is one of the greatest pedagogical challenges in the university and even more when the process is analyzed using students' feedback. Evaluation, when considered in an integral way, implies addressing the complexity of interactions attached to it. In this case, students and teachers build the process (Balula & Moreira, 2014) together with actors who are not directly involved in the educational field.

It is necessary to emphasize that evaluation cannot be limited to measuring the achievement of educational objectives as stated by Gronlund (1973), Mager (1975), and Lafourcade (1989). To some extent, grades represent a guideline of the contents acquired by the student body and allow quantitative comparison in relation to the expected standards. However, grades do not provide comprehensive information on student participation in the teaching–learning process and their socio-educational relationships; therefore, attitudes, values, skills, and, in general, the effort students make in the fulfillment of tasks, review of notes, and readings are little or are not evidenced in summative or questionnaire-type evaluations (Robles et al., 2015).

Several authors, including Casanova (1995), Cabrera (1999), Prieto (2001), Casanova (1995), Cabrera (1999), and Prieto (2001), state that evaluation consists of issuing a value judgment although every evaluative process leads to an opinion with subsequent effects of approval or disapproval through evaluative appraisals; these must be the result of a systematic and organized process that allows showing to what extent the proposed changes have been achieved as a result of the teaching–learning process. Therefore, evaluations cannot be sporadic or only applied at the end of school cycles.

It should be noted that evaluation is currently applied from an integral perspective (Quesada et al., 2019) and has a broad meaning focused on the student’s education, and the results achieved are not focused on the measurement and qualification of the learning acquired by the students; however, it does allow assessing the effectiveness of the educational process and redirecting methodological strategies if the optimal levels are not achieved (Castells, 2011). In other words, quality of learning is sought for which the necessary curricular measures are taken to promote the development of students’ cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Undoubtedly, another aspect of evaluation that has been relegated is its usefulness. This is because evaluations, which should focus on answering the reasons for which it is evaluated and the purposes to which it responds in the teaching-learning process, are intrinsically linked to a school’s ranking, which distorts their true meaning. Therefore, students are evaluated to estimate the effectiveness of the educational response and, if necessary, to reorient methodological strategies in order to provide learning opportunities to all students regardless of their condition.

Then, the opportunities mentioned in the previous paragraph are specified in the formative evaluation in order to overcome the quantification of contents acquired by the student in a school stage, using an evaluation that adapts to the needs of a diverse student body and allows obtaining information on the development of the educational process of each and every student throughout the course, thus providing data that should allow reorienting, regulating, modifying, or reinforcing the educational process of each student and identifying strengths within their educational processes (Castillo & Cabrerizo, 2010).

Thus, the results of formative assessment allow timely decisions to be made and, in the case of students who do not achieve the expected learning, the results are necessary to redirect methodologies and curricular resources to ensure that the educational context offers learning opportunities and accessibility to knowledge for all students in an equitable, egalitarian, and fair manner. In this way, evaluation results may be used to support learning and participation, and to reduce school dropout, which “is due to various factors, it is undeniable that at least the teacher (teaching), the student (learning) and the evaluation as an articulating and legitimizing processor of this process have a direct impact on it” (Fonseca, 2016, p. 320).

In this sense, the formative purpose of education is crystallized in procedural evaluative processes that allow monitoring the academic progress of the student body and making decisions; finally, based on the results and interpretation of the various evaluation instruments applied, criteria are issued on the progress of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes achieved by the students. However, it is essential to specify that the aforementioned criteria must contemplate the participation of those being evaluated, who by involving themselves in their own evaluation visualize the goals and self-regulate their learning for its effective achievement.

With regard to participatory evaluation and its effectiveness, it is essential to allow those being evaluated to be involved in the design of the evaluation process and that the instruments used be agreed upon by both the evaluator and those being evaluated; in this way, the evaluation is a shared responsibility and the benefits are individual and institutional. Students who develop self-evaluative skills, such as the

assessment of their learning, products, and attitudes, are prepared to make judgments and evaluate their peers not as a control mechanism but as a learning mechanism because the more participation and involvement the greater the impact on their own training and that of their peers.

The socio-educational responsibility of higher education goes beyond evaluating the learning of its students through a meta-analysis of its evaluation processes and their impact on professional training, i.e., evaluating its evaluation processes, the results achieved and not achieved, the difficulties, and the effects. In this sense, it is essential to carry out a deep analysis of the processes involved and the evaluation instruments applied; undoubtedly, the evaluated are the protagonists in order to offer key information related to the question: What are students' perceptions about the evaluation processes?

METHODOLOGY

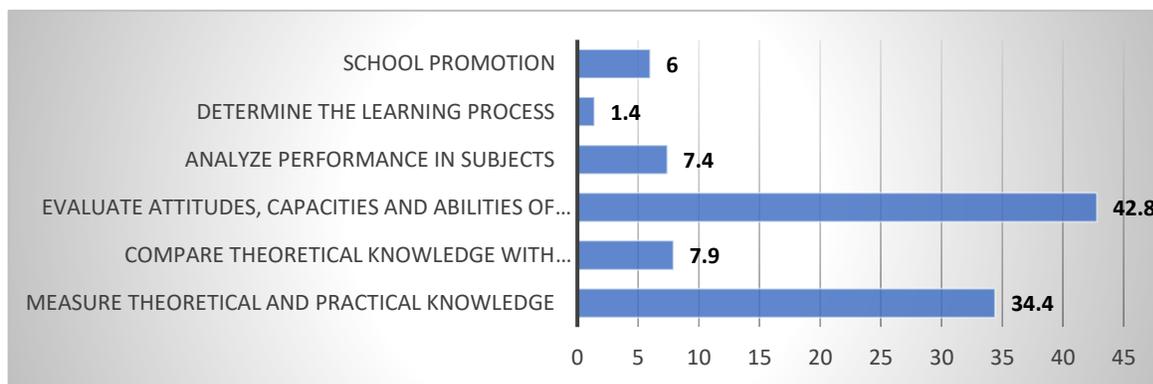
This study has a descriptive exploratory scope that uses mixed-methods and is approached from the qualitative–interpretative paradigm in order to integrate data and understand students' perceptions regarding the evaluation processes in which they participate. It is an exploratory descriptive research developed in a private university located north of the city of Quito in the academic period 2020–2021.

The survey instrument, comprising closed and multiple choice questions, was designed and applied to a sample of 215 students aged between 17 and 35 years (150 women and 65 men), and distributed between the first and ninth semesters. In addition, structured interviews were conducted with 5 teachers and 2 authorities. Descriptive statistics techniques were used to process the information and obtain the distribution of frequencies and their percentage and accumulated values. Quantitative data were grouped by representative dimensions to strengthen and characterize the findings. Taking into account that it is important to combine different research instruments to obtain diverse and complementary information, it was contrasted with the qualitative information obtained from the key informant interviews.

RESULTS

The following section reports the results obtained from the described survey of students in an institution of higher education.

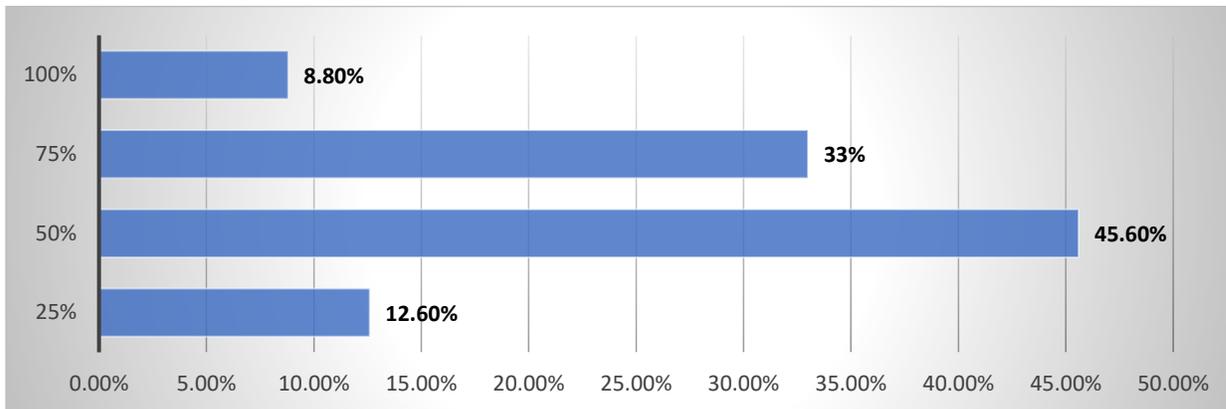
FIGURE 1
ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES



The data reveal an important percentage of students consider the main objective of evaluation to be the assessment of attitudes, abilities, and skills developed in the teaching–learning process; however, a considerable percentage perceives evaluation as a measurement of theoretical and practical knowledge, which evidences the confusion between evaluating as a process and measuring as a mechanism to assign a

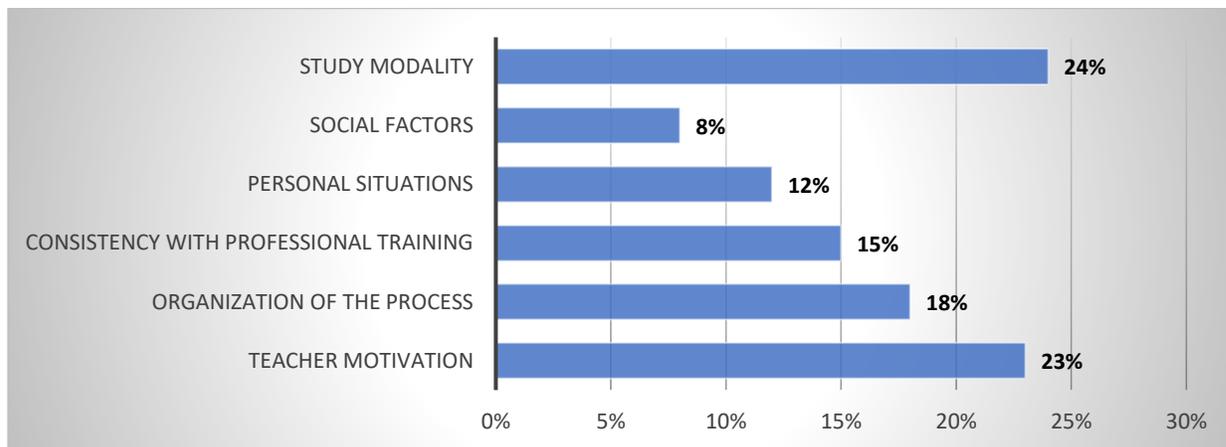
grade. The percentage of respondents who consider evaluation as a strategy to verify the learning process and make pertinent readjustments is also minimal.

FIGURE 2
EVALUATION AS A REFLECTION OF LEARNING



As can be observed, the percentage of students who consider evaluation as an integral reflection of their learning is minimal and a considerable percentage perceives that the evaluation barely represents half of what they have learned.

FIGURE 3
FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE EVALUATION



According to the perceptions of those investigated, the modality of studies (face-to-face, virtual, distance, blended learning) is a determining factor in evaluation. Also, according to a considerable segment of the researched population, teacher motivation is relevant in evaluation, whereas social and personal factors are limited.

The survey data reveal that attention to diversity is limited. Most respondents consider that it occasionally contains diversified resources for the support and participation of all, which is ratified by the percentage of informants who consider that evaluation never or rarely attends to individual differences.

The data reveal that evaluation is considered of high significance for the investigated population and is, therefore, essential in socio-educational processes.

According to the data obtained, an important segment of the population investigated considers that evaluation achieves the objectives set when it is carried out during the teaching–learning process as this will contribute to the integral formation of the students.

FIGURE 4
ATTENTION TO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

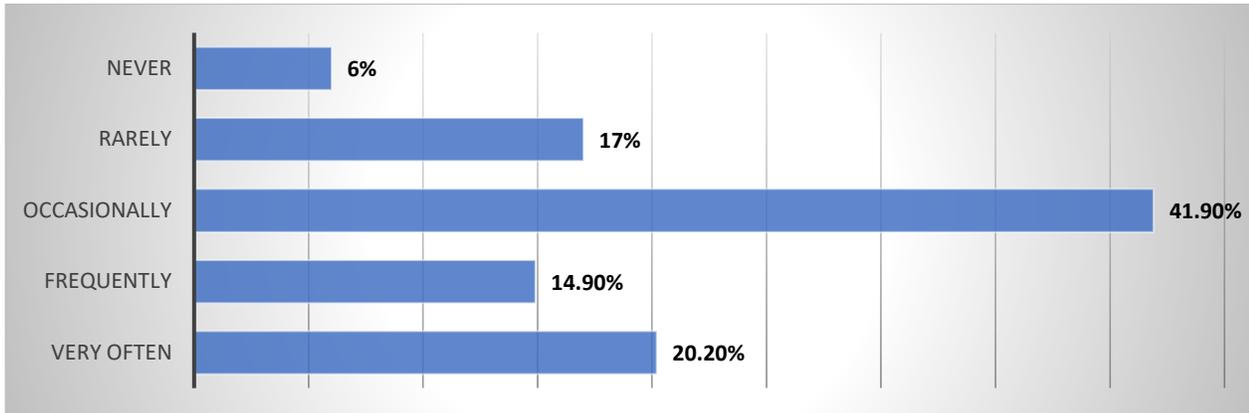


FIGURE 5
IMPORTANCE OF THE EVALUATION

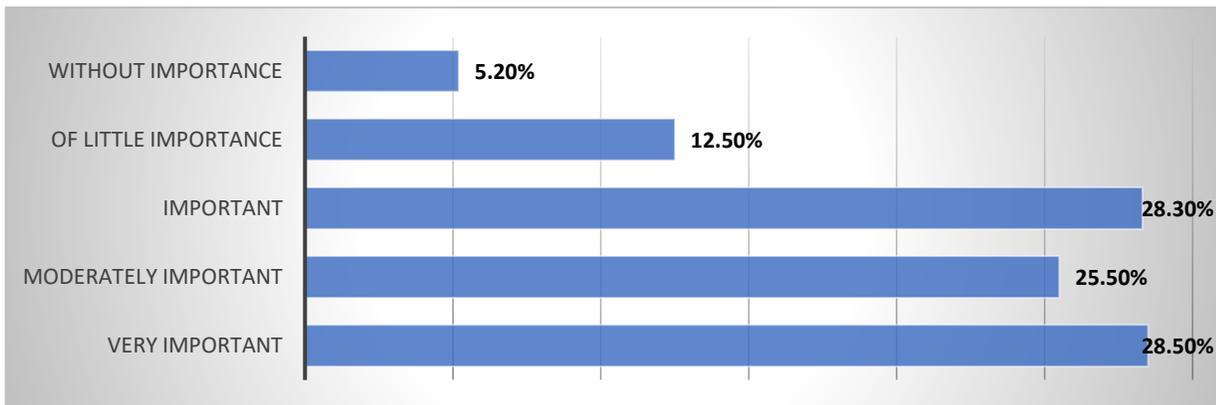
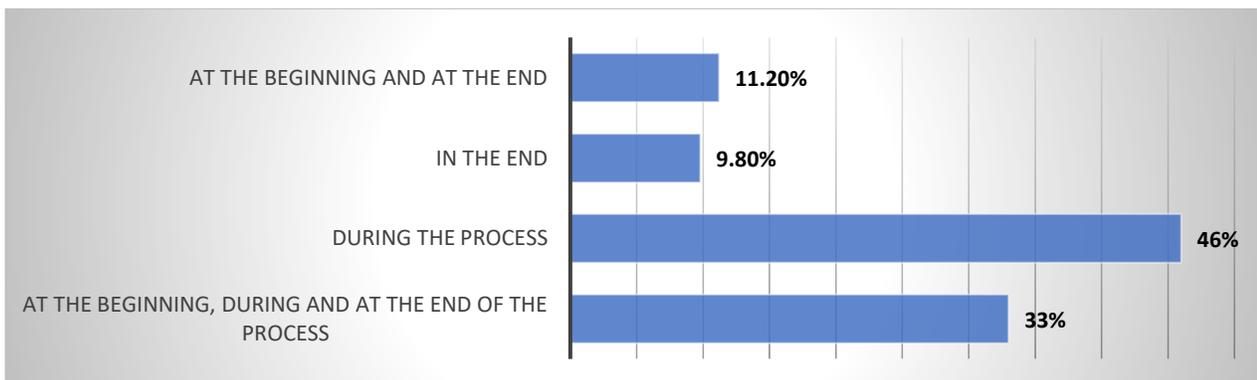


FIGURE 6
VALIDITY OF THE EVALUATION DEPENDING ON THE MOMENT OF ITS APPLICATION



DISCUSSION

Based on the data presented above, we can conclude that students' perceptions about evaluation in higher education are diverse and divergent as are the models that have been applied and that seek to be systematized in the field of higher education. Perhaps these perceptions are a reflection of this amalgam of theories and pedagogical approaches that have been tested and are being tested, motivating the concept of assessment to become polysemic according to the associated contexts, variables, and processes (Báez et al., 2014). This statement is supported by the findings analyzed below and based on existing knowledge regarding the variables studied and the information emerging from the observed reality, which from an academic and scientific point of view, constitute valid premises for reaching such a conclusion.

Regarding evaluation and its objectives, it is essential that students understand the reasons why they are being evaluated (Figure 2). According to Rizo (2013), "the learning arrival points must be defined so that the student understands well the objectives to be achieved" (p. 4). In this sense, students can foresee all the resources they must invest in their preparation and be clear about the "why and what" of learning, which undoubtedly motivate their participation and empowerment.

The results reveal a tendency to relate evaluation to the assessment of attitudes, abilities, and skills, i.e., it is not only focused on assessing the contents learned, and also to practical aspects that promote professional development (Figure 1). However, evaluation is also related to the measurement of theoretical-practical knowledge; this may be conditioned to evaluative practices focused on level promotion, which evidences the traditional confusion between evaluating, measuring, and grading that although they "share a semantic field, they are differentiated by the resources they use and the uses and purposes they serve" (Hamodi et al., 2014). However, they should not be considered synonymous terms as they relegate the essentiality of evaluation in its formative scope whose competence is to reorganize educational actions and benefit less advantaged students.

On the other hand, it is interesting to see that the lowest percentage is attributed to determining learning, which could mean that students do not see that the information resulting from the evaluation is driving decision-making in terms of the reformulation of institutional policies, teaching strategies, or processes of articulation among actors in the educational sphere.

In line with the above and in relation to evaluation as a reflection of learning, a large segment of the researched population considers that learning is reflected only to a limited extent in the evaluation (Figure 3) from which we can infer the low level of student satisfaction with the process. This could be an indicator of how the procedures, methods, and techniques used are not the most suitable in the application of the evaluative act. It is necessary for meaningful learning to occur on the part of students in order to raise their protagonism in the construction of the same, promote high levels of motivation and, most importantly, to generate awareness in the students about the importance of what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is evaluated. In other words, it is necessary that students develop a mental representation of the final product expected in each of the educational activities, including the evaluative ones, thereby conferring sense and meaning to the entire teaching-learning process, including evaluation (Correia de Oliveira Neto, 2020).

As Torres (2013) points out, when considering the place of evaluation in educational practices, it is observed that the reproduction and control of students' knowledge has been privileged over the construction processes. The author asserts: "evaluation is still considered, for the most part, as a process disconnected from teaching and aimed simply at measuring, accrediting or certifying learning results," which reaffirms Alcaraz (2015) by placing himself in the traditional educational approaches, where evaluating is synonymous with measuring and the numerical representation aimed at indicating how much had been learned and not what, how, or for what purpose the new learning had been acquired. The information acquired by rote was taken into account and not the real interests, concerns, or capabilities of the students. Here it should be noted that in higher education currently, the importance of learning outcomes is highlighted, the participation of students in the construction of knowledge from a dialogue of knowledge, the subjectivity of the actors of the educational community that provides inputs for the organization of the academy and its governance (Brunner et al., 2020). Thus, it is necessary to rethink some aspects of evaluation such as the role of the teacher, the evaluation process and the forms to be used, the teaching-

learning process as a whole and, from each of its components, the optimization of learning environments (which tend to be mostly virtual) as well as the forms of knowledge construction. These elements undoubtedly make the evaluation a more valid process mostly because it starts from the particularities of the student body and its possibilities and opportunities.

In relation to evaluation and from another perspective, changes experienced in terms of the modality of studies also influence the perceptions of the evaluation process, findings that are aligned with those mentioned by Cano (2008) who states that the innovation of technology is attractive for academic institutions although its implementation is usually subsequent to commercial use and necessarily linked to other inputs, devices, and internet connectivity, and not always within the reach of all people. This becomes an additional complication to the regular stress that evaluation entails, agreeing with Gonzalez (2007) who found that the automated evaluations derived from the study modality have a better relationship with the contents reviewed during the lecture, i.e., being oriented toward the objectivity of the evaluations, and that subjects with more practical content have more acceptance by the students when the teaching and subsequent evaluation are by synchronous or asynchronous digital means.

An important percentage of the researched population considers that evaluations should be carried out during the teaching–learning process. This continuous assessment of learning also allows the revision of the teaching process because at this point it is possible to reorient the methodologies used to achieve the desired outcomes. The findings are in line with Prieto (2008) who states that “during the evaluation process, the objective should not only be the assessment of knowledge acquired by students, but also of teachers’ actions in contributing to achieve the development of the competencies intended by the programs” (p. 105). This would allow students to receive necessary feedback on their progress or difficulties. To contribute to their progress, the adequate design of the instruments that allow the collection of the results of the evaluations is essential.

In relation to evaluation and attention to individual differences, it is notorious that an important segment of the population frequently perceives their attention (Figure 4); that is, different forms of evaluation are made in such a way that the participation of all students is encouraged regardless of their condition, abilities, and possibilities, all of which is framed within the inclusive approach. However, it is evident that not everyone receives the necessary support at the time of evaluation, which places them in a position of disadvantage and exclusion. When evaluating, it is necessary to provide multiple response opportunities that recognize the heterogeneity of the student body or as Castillo (2018) mentions, “improving the possibilities and overcoming the limitations of educational institutions but not of the student body”; i.e., educational institutions must implement policies that transform the inclusive culture and practices to value and promote the participation of all students framed in the criteria of equity, equality, and justice (O’Brien et al., 2022).

Regarding the perception that the group studied has about the importance of evaluation (Fernandes & Caetano, 2022), most respondents expressed a positive appreciation about the relevance that evaluation presents during the teaching–learning process (Figure 5). Vargas (2004) indicates that evaluation is not only important in itself but also serves to assess the processes of an academic program as well as its results. Agreeing with what is mentioned by Ocampo (2017), education causes multiple and constant changes and cognitive and physical restructuring where skills, forms of behavior, and abilities are developed. To verify this, the above-mentioned is fulfilled. In addition to other achievements previously raised, it is necessary to be supported by evaluations that also impact on the improvement of educational quality. Likewise, evaluation can be used at different moments of the academic process; e.g., when used before starting a new knowledge it will diagnose the student’s level of knowledge and when applied in the middle of the process the results it will serve as feedback on the effectiveness of the same process, allowing to reorganize, adapt, or define activities in order to meet the objectives. When used at the end of the process it will demonstrate the acquired competences (Núñez, 2012). In contrast, a group of students describe it as unimportant or even unimportant, for which, it may be necessary to focus attention on reviewing, among others, the criteria, processes, and techniques used in the evaluation (Ocampo, 2017).

Most of those investigated agree that evaluation is valid throughout the teaching–learning process, i.e., at the beginning, during, and at the end, and provides a valuable indicator that allows inferring the

recognition of evaluation as a decisive instrument in the process of knowledge construction and its consequent measurement in a systematic way.

In addition to the requirements established for the same, since through the evaluation it is possible to know how is the appropriation of knowledge of the students in relation to their learning, for this different techniques and instruments are used and the different functions of the evaluation are applied according to the moment and the context, where through the formative function the teacher can regulate the teaching–learning processes starting from the learning rhythms, the needs and the interests of the students. On the other hand, validity also means that the student can verify his or her achievements, receive feedback, and verify at the end of the educational cycle the achievement of the expected learning; additionally, it allows communicating academic results to the family. As stated by Maccario (2001) and quoted by Fernandez et al. (2007, p. 29): “Evaluation is the act of issuing a value judgment, based on a set of information on the evolution or results of a student, in order to make a decision.” In other words, the tendency among students is to perceive an assessment as valid in terms of both its content and its form.

When reference is made to the relevance of evaluation, we find that most of those investigated characterize it as very pertinent or pertinent; that is, it meets students’ expectations and also complies with previously established curricular planning, taking into account the objectives proposed at the different levels (didactic unit–subject–discipline–cycle–career) and how the knowledge systems are related to each other as well as the evaluative instruments (Figure 6). The coherence and relevance of the methods and techniques for such purposes is inferred as well as the fulfillment of the fundamental functions of evaluation. According to Hernández (2013), social, control, and pedagogical functions serve to justify the why, how, and when of evaluation, and are essential in the direction of the teaching–learning process in the formation of the student body and in the pedagogical actions to be developed by the teaching staff in view of the results derived from each evaluative exercise. The tendency is to perceive the evaluation process as objective, reliable, and precise; where all the contents to be evaluated are related to what is being taught and the students know and understand previously the evaluation criteria as well as the requirements established for their performance. On the other hand, it contributes to the formation of students’ professional skills on the basis of being a valid, reliable, flexible, and impartial process.

With respect to the objectivity of the evaluation, the perception of those investigated is biased. An important group considers that evaluations are occasionally objective, maintaining a discrete position, as well as the objectivity of the evaluative processes is also severely questioned. This is an interesting point within the analysis because the objectivity of the evaluation can be composed of two main elements. On the one hand, we have the validity and reliability of the instruments with which the evaluation will be carried out, which refers to whether the contents are related to the desired objectives and competences. On the other hand is the ideological neutrality of the teacher. This coincides with Salom (1999) who considers the above as one of the greatest crossroads where education fails, arguing also that education and evaluation have a clear political component that prevents them from being neutral in nature. This discussion exceeds the objectives of this research so it is advisable that it be expanded in future studies. Regarding the objectivity of teachers when evaluating, Marín (2008) determines that the perception teachers have of their students determines the way in which they give feedback, the time dedicated to answering their questions, and the expectations regarding their approval. It should be noted that these expectations, in general, are conditioned by students’ personal characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic level, race or ethnicity, physical appearance, and oral language patterns (Sanchez, 1996, p. 16). In general, the study identified that students have negative experiences from their evaluation process; this inconsistency in objectivity in evaluation can result in demotivation, wrong learning, and subjective perception of unfairness in students, disadvantaging the learning environment (Marin, 2008, p. 300).

CONCLUSIONS

Concepts on evaluation are multiple and diverse. They also provoke diverse associations as to their pertinence, validity, and objectivity in function of the teaching–learning process in the students who, when giving their criteria about it, also reveal their alignment around these conceptions.

From the above, it can be indicated that the different functions of the evaluation, considering the moment and the context as well as the use of instruments and techniques, will allow the teacher to regulate the teaching–learning process based on the needs and interests of the students, being in this sense necessary to install moments of feedback between students and teachers that allow redefining the evaluation process.

The validity of the evaluation process also includes that the student can verify his or her achievements, receive feedback, and verify at the end of the educational cycle the achievement of the expected learning; additionally, it allows communicating the academic results to the student’s family.

Therefore, it is necessary to rethink some aspects of evaluation such as the role of the teacher, the evaluation process and the forms to be used, the teaching–learning process in its totality and from each of its components, and optimization of the learning environments, which tend to be mostly virtual, as well as the forms of knowledge construction; elements that will undoubtedly make the evaluation a more valid process above all because it starts from the particularities of the student body and its possibilities and opportunities.

In addition to the requirements established for it, because through the evaluation it is possible to know how is the appropriation of knowledge of the students in relation to their learning, for this different techniques and instruments are used and the different functions of the evaluation are applied according to the moment and the context, where through the formative function the teacher can regulate the teaching–learning processes based on the learning rhythms, the needs, and interests of the students. On the other hand, validity also means that the student can verify his or her achievements, receive feedback, and verify at the end of the educational cycle the achievement of the expected learning; additionally, it allows communicating the academic results to the student’s family.

Evaluation focused on obtaining information on the progress of students’ learning has traditionally been limited to the application of questionnaires (oral or written exams) that contribute very little to their integral formation and less to a promotion that responds to the development of skills and potentialities, which not only allows them to be promoted to an immediate higher level but also prepares them to achieve autonomy and personal fulfillment. Note that evaluations conditioned to answer questions about contents addressed in the classroom do not include other aspects that are indicators of learning such as attitudes, skills, abilities, and values. Therefore, evaluation in its broad sense is an opportunity to know and assess the student from different emotional, social, cognitive, and attitudinal aspects that characterize a human being of diverse nature and with different abilities and possibilities to process information and demonstrate their learning in different scenarios, situations, and processes.

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