

Resistance to Evaluation and Assessment of Higher Education Students: A Problem Solving Scenario and Approach

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ABSTRACT— *Evaluations through written exams are one of the most important processes to move to other grades and levels of studies for students whether in primary, secondary of higher education education. It is important to understand the processes by which evaluation goes by in order to optimize it, improve it and engineer better of its systems. For this, the paper presents an interesting case study dealing with the aspects of the process of evaluation of students in undergraduate programs. The case presents some issues, occurring during examination phase, faced by both students and a teacher and the scenario leading to the resolution of these problems. The case study shows that during examination phase, there can be some resistance by the students to undergo examination and thus this issue has to be resolved. The results of this case study lead to the conclusions that this challenge of examination resistance can be resolved at the short-and long-term by the implication of both sides of the examination process; From one side, the students and their leader, and from the other side the administration and the teacher. The implications of the results are that motivation to success and awareness about the importance of examination are the two key success factors for the on-going process of an examination.*

Keywords— Evidence-based research, Examination process, Students' resistance to examination, Higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The higher education is composed of various types of systems and approaches leading to the development of students, teachers and education administration for the objective of continuous development of the economic and cultural environments. One of the most important part of higher education is the examination of a learning process that occurs in the middle or at the end of a course. Nowadays, with the development of higher education practices, examination is replaced by a more focused term that is assessment. According to [1], the term assessment is linked to both sides of higher education –teachers, institutions and students, and it is also sometimes substituting evaluation because this latter is also used to evaluate assessments. The information about the term assessment is taken from the research of [1], they state that assessment includes examination, quizzes and exercises and was associated with these terms in the 1970s. Assessment is also to measure effectiveness of institutions and teachers and not only students and learners. According to [2], the academic world and learners tend to consider the student assessment as a measurement tool rather than an evaluation of skills and excellence and this call for the use of better assessment tools that can be derived from the business and art sectors. Also, there are other assessment methods as self-assessment and co-assessment that are evaluated by students and that have positive features [3].

In the case of examinations, the teachers use comprehensive types of examinations techniques as multiple-choice questions –mostly referred to written examinations [1] and other types of examination methods. Also, the assessment type –examination- goes through a specific process in which certainly various types of factors play a major role for its optimal engineering and development. The question is what factors are influencing this examination process and more precisely what challenges and obstacles can slow down this process. Thus, the aim of the paper is to present a case study of an examination process and to analyze it to derive the factors influencing the examination process and its resistance. The next section presents a literature review on the assessment approaches and methodologies, the third section describes the research framework that is explaining in more details the reason behind the study, the fourth and fifth section present the results and the discussion with implications for examination process in higher education, and the final section presents a derived model from the results and some conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The assessment process is composed of various systems and approaches that are continuously developed and improved for higher education high performance. There are various research dealing with the aspects of assessment approaches and thus providing specific strategies and methods for the improvement of assessment in higher education

[4;5]. According to [6], it is important for academicians to understand that assessment methods are an entire part of the learning process and that they have to develop the necessary skills to move from theoretical studies to practical classroom actions. Also, it is also important that the teachers, within their own context of teaching and learning processes, focus on the provision of assessments for a higher level of thinking skills [6]. That is, to provide understandable, a bit complex, and not too easy assessments. The research of [7] propose various assessment methods that are widely used in specific sectors; the written and computer-based simulations, oral examination, and live simulations. And [8] develop a structured method with specific standards to facilitate to students the understanding of the assessments criteria and processes based on explicit and tacit knowledge transfer methods; The focus on explicit knowledge sharing among staff and students concerning the assessments is sometimes useless and needs to be combined to socialization in order to facilitate the further understanding of assessments criteria and standards [8]. .

Besides, the combination of different assessment forms motivate students to be more responsible and reflective and can be used in different manners in higher education [9]. For instance, the self-assessment can be beneficial for the formative assessments and co-assessment for the summative ones [9]; co-assessment is sometimes related to self-assessments [9] and it means that students can evaluate their learning processes but allowing staff to control final assessments [10]. Concerning examination types of assessment, according to [11], there is a difference among coursework and examination assessment students' performances. Thus, this leads to the increase of interest toward the understanding of the different types of assessment and the students performances. Also, according to [1], validity and reliability in examination processes is very important; in examination, the reliability should not be based on the unique objective of acquiring correct answers and it is based on the level of tolerance of the teacher. Also, validity has various types as content validity that means to which extent the test measures the supposed content, or predictive validity leading to the measurement of the future performance. According to [12], the evaluation process is a matter of motivation and value judgment; it has the objective of recordkeeping in order to provide grades to the students, and evaluation is made by the students to judge their own capacities or by the administration for the development of the transcripts for instance; Also, the teachers evaluate information of the assessments to analyze their own pedagogical processes.

There is also the summative assessments of teaching that are another method of assessment; According to [13], it is considered as a little obstacle to the autonomy of teachers, leading to speculative critics and it is unable to measure teaching processes. Also, these assessments are though providing feedbacks on the courses and teaching and are an interesting tool showing the quality of teaching and supporting the involvement of students in the improvement of quality learning [13]. Also, it is to mention the difference among the summative types of assessments and formative ones in that the firsts are not automatically the sum of the seconds because they differ in criteria judgements and information focus [14]. Formative assessment is criterion-referenced and thus take into consideration the stage of skills and specific learning content reached by the students, whereas the summative assessments means the sum of evidences and not a set of judgements, and the description of the overall learning achieved at a certain time.

The formative assessments are divided into two types that are the planned and interactive assessments; the first one is based on the interpretation and observation of the assessment by the teachers and then taking action, whereas the second is related to the recognition and responding, and carried out within some groups of students [15]. Also, criteria of formative assessment are set by both staff and students [9]. According to [16], formative assessments are not often understood in higher education because research on this subject was lacking and the author states through a conceptual framework that the students' discipline of studies, the level of student intellectual development and knowledge sharing concepts are important for the development of these types of assessments. Also, following this research, [17] state that formative assessments and self-regulated learning are two concepts that should be linked to empower the capacities of the students to regulate by themselves their behavior, thinking and motivation during the learning process.

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The examination type of assessment is one of the most important systems in higher education. It is composed of various types of examinations as multiples choice questions, short essays and others. According to [18], the students learning process is based on the assessment methods used and vice-versa. Also, the students prefer MCQ exams to essays but they do not favor them when there are better evaluation methods [18]. According to [19], the existing assessment methods are calling for the generation of new types based on more complex criteria for a better evaluation of the performance. Also, the students have different perceptions on the importance of the multiple choice questions and essays examination in regard to the learning approaches and processes. That is, the students consider that in multiple choice questions examinations, they use light learning approaches and that MCQ evaluate low levels of learning processes in contrast to the essays examination [20]. Also, it is to consider that students play a major role in the improvement of the assessment methods [21]; peer-assessment made by students is similar to teacher marks when judgment is based on understood criteria, and it is similar to faculty assessment when academic products and processes are rated [22].

Besides, according to [23], students tend to choose modules of learning in higher education programs according to the involved assessment and that obviously some assessments are difficult. And if the performance varies from one student to the other, the support provided to the students need to be personalized according to the problem they face in

assessment task. The research of [24] through the analysis of a large set of course-experience questionnaires filled by the students and that are assessments for learning, state that student experience is based on staff support, module design and active engagement. Also, the research of [25] uses a framework to understand assessment utilities and to enable compromise and trade-off in examination practices. According to [11], examination types of assessment do not lead to high performance of the students, however, [23] demonstrate that the student performance is depending at the same time on various types of assessment as examination and coursework. The research of [26] states that, in order to improve students' performance, classroom assessment need to be seriously taken into consideration; to invest in assessment of learning, to start programs to make available the necessary resources for teachers, to provide professional development programs to teachers concerning assessment, to change licensing standards about certifications to show there is competences in assessment.

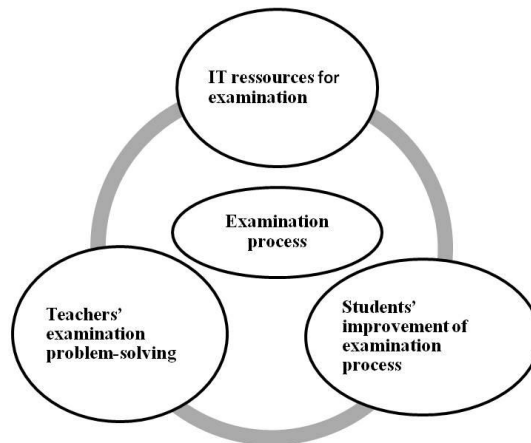


Figure 1: Factor impacting on the examination process improvement

From the literature review and the research framework, we can see that various research focalize on the performance aspects of the students according to the learning processes and assessment types stating that performance do depend on various factors as the number of assessment types, the type of personalized support and the impact of learning processes. This means that there are various factors in higher education impacting on assessment effectiveness. For instance, it is to mention that there can be quality issues in higher education as lack of resources whether IT-based or organizational-based affecting course classes, their courseworks and examinations processes and obviously affecting the learning process of the students. (Figure 1).

Proposition 1: The low quality level of examination is mainly due to the lack of resources and quality of learning process of the students

Also, more precisely, the focus is on the behavior of the students during examination process that can slow down the on-going process of examination and on the behavior of the teachers and administration to overcome this. Also, according to [26], academic learning is not only a matter of grading and assessment, and accumulation of knowledge but it also has the objective of achieving excellence in a discipline. Academic learning is an ambiguous process that has at the beginning clear objectives but that through progressive steps develops toward the creation of more elaborated strategies and actions, and toward the monitoring of the gaps among actual status and the desired to be situation [27] (Figure 1).

Proposition 2: The teachers continuously acquire the necessary capacities to solve examination process resistance.

The term resistance is used "to define the various behaviors of the students slowing down or leading to the decrease in efficiency of an examination process and the different solutions proposed by them and the teachers to overcome the issues an challenges" (Figure 1). According to [17], self-regulation of students is a process by which students goes beyond learning practices in higher education and acquire capacities to regulate their own education based on cognitive, behavioural and motivational aspects.

Proposition 3: The students can play a major role in the improvement of the examination process.

Thus, the research frames the following research questions:

- What is resistance to examination?
- What the reasons for resistance to examination are?
- What are the possible solutions to this resistance?

4. RESEARCH METHOD

The research uses a case study to answer the research questions on resistance to evaluation. The case study research method is an empirical research investigating on a phenomenon within its real-life context [28]. Also, since this case study is in the context of education, the research also uses the evidence-based practice that is a methodology leading to decision-making based on evidences and on the subject of the study characteristics, situations and preferences [29]. Also, in education studies, the case study approach is used to facilitate the understanding of learning and assessment [6].

Table 1: Data collection method

Place of assessment	Classroom	Administration	Auditorium
Data collection method	- Discussion - Observations - Written notes	- Email - Discussion - Written notes	- Written notes - Discussion - Observations
Units of analysis	Students, teacher	Administrator, teachers, students	Students and teachers

The data collection method was based on synchronous and asynchronous processes in which data about the situation were recorded according to each occurring event (Table 1); The major unit of analysis were the students, the teachers and the administration of the higher education institution. The data collection method is based on the interactions of the discussions, taking place in different locations as in the examination auditorium, the administration offices and the classroom, occurring at a face-to face or IT-based manner among the researcher and the teacher, the students and the administration, and the observations of the researcher during these interactions; The data were collected through hand-written notes and usage of emails' contents.

5. RESULTS

5.1 The context of the case study

The examination process is undertaken to assess the capacities of the students of a specific module's two courses 'organized during the spring semester of the academic year 2012-2013. The students are in their 1st year of an undergraduate program of civil engineering in a higher education institution majorly focusing on engineering aspects of the environment and they are 75 students. The courses in this module, that consists in lectures, exercises, assignments and discussions were in a period of 10 to 12 weeks and related to the learning and understanding of innovation and design methods. The objectives of the module is to build the capacities of the students in innovation and creativity for their final engineering project, their on-going higher education and their future jobs.

The module assessment system is including three types of important grading elements that are a mid-term exam, group and individuals exercises and course works – written exercises and software-based simulations and practical experiments, and final projects. With the administration and the students, the mid-term exam was agreed on to be on the middle of the 10-12 weeks and at this time the necessary information about the date, time, and room for the examination was provided to the students and the type of examination as well. This latter is a multiple-choice questions exam of 1h50min with the answers corresponding to the choice of some specific words or sentences and the development of two or three short essays. Also, there are two exam sheets because the examination is on the two courses in the module; innovation management and design methodologies.

5.2 The problem of the exam: resistance to examination

The exam was scheduled on a wednesday from 8h to 10h in a large auditorium to fit the number of the module students and thus it provides them with enough space for concentration and orientation. After the organization of the auditorium classroom tables and desks, the teacher started distributing the exam copies to the students and then provided some final explanations about the exam as the time allowed for exam fill-in and she also answered the general students' questions about the exam (Figure 4); For instance, one student mentioned that one multiple-choice question was repeated and thus she informed all the students about this or another student required explanations about a question and the teacher clarified it.

- As another first reaction to the exam copies, the students were surprised by the type of exam eventhough they were already informed about the multiple choice questions type of exam; at the beginning of the module, the program was stating that there would be three types of assessment: courseworks, MC and short essays exam and a final project.

The teacher also reminded the students , during various class meetings, about the assessment system since some students were starting to ask for more details about it. After a while during the examination process, some started literally shouting about their incapacity to answer the questions for the following reasons (Figure 2; 4):The exam is too long; The time for assesement is too short.

- The exam is too difficult; The studentsdo not understand the questions.
- There is too many noise, we cannot write; he shouting of the students is disruptive for everyone.

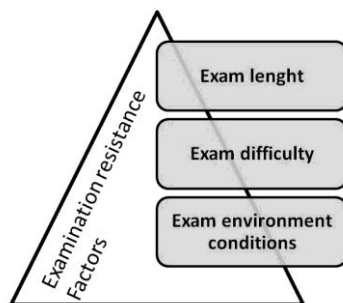


Figure 2: The factor leading to examination resistance

The teacher remembered that during the courses’ classes, there were delays in doing the courseworks and practical experimnts which affect the students’ learning process level and can lead to a lack of knowledge assimilation. The main reason for this was that the students were either absent from class or that they did not have computers –various courseworks was on the computer.

At a certain point during examination process, the students decided to stop fill-in the exam and about half of them wanted to leavethe classroom. The teacher used some arguments to convince them to finish the exam(Figure 3; 4):

- The questions are related to the classroom course only; There is no out of course topics in the exam sheet
- Multiple choice questions are a method of examination that facilitates to students and teachers the evaluation process.
- The students are allowed to have more than 1h50 min to fill-in the questionnaire.

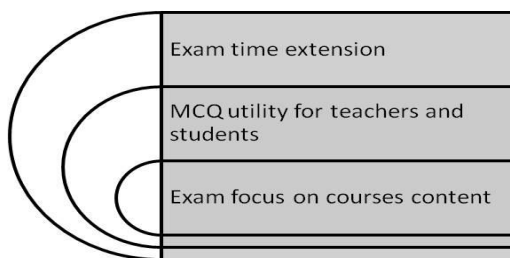


Figure 3: Factors for overcoming examination resistance

Some of the students were convinced to continue fill-in the multiple choice exam, but some continued shouting because they lost the exam sheet in the crowding situation. Fortunately, the teacher had additional exam sheets and re-distributed them to these students. At the same time, hearing the shouting, some other teachers entered the exam auditorium and attempted to quiten the students. ; This process of additional teachers helped in the examination process development After a while, the supporting teachers left the auditorium and the students’ protest started again. The teacher proceeded with the same arguments to convince the students to finish the exam (Figure 3).

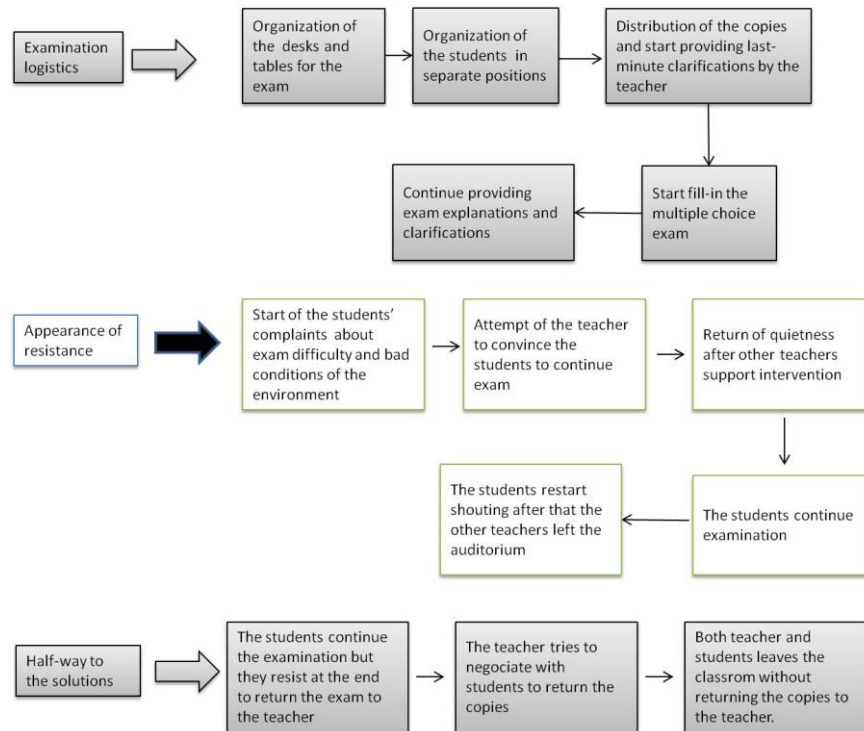


Figure 4: Examination resistance process

5.3 Half-way to the solution: completing the exam

After 1h50 min, most of the students completed the exam but they refused to return the exam to the teacher. The students were frightened again worried about teachers exam marks because of the factors of examination resistance (Figure 2) The most important statement of the students was: ‘We would like the teacher to consider this evaluation as an exercise or practical experiment and to consider the final project as the only major evaluation method.’. The teacher responded that: ‘the syllabus explicitly mention the share of each of the three parts of the courses’. Nevertheless, the students did not return the exam sheets to the teacher and left the classroom. (Figure 4).

At the administration office, on the one hand, the teacher required a sanction and the recovery of the exam sheets. And on the other hand, the students required to cancel the exam and to consider only the final project as the major evaluation. The administration contacted the responsible of the class asking for a report about the situation and also to return the exam sheets. The responsible of class promised to convince the students to return all exam sheets by next week; The responsible of the class is one of the students elected each year by all the students in order to represent them in front of the administration and the teachers. For this latter, this was not very ethical but still acceptable. In the meantime, the teacher continued the classes courses with the students and tried various times to have other explanations and reasons for this resistance. The students were still giving the same explanations (Figure 2).

5.4 The final solution to the problem

The classes last after the exam about 4-5 weeks and the discussion about the final project was starting. And during one of the classes course, the teacher mentioned again the exam issue:

- The teacher has confidence in the capacities of the students in answering the questions; This is an argument to lower the students’ worry about the teachers exam marks.
- The multiple choice questions is not difficult as the students have started understanding more deeply the subject matter of the entire module; This is confirming that the exam content is not out of courses’ topics.
- The grading systems require to have an evaluation assessment of the exam; This is to remind again about the rules of the syllabus.

Finally, after two weeks from the exam, one student decided to return the exam sheet to the teacher. The other students also started consecutively and progressively to return the exam sheets. The responsible of the class was in charge of collecting and giving back the exam sheets to the teacher. The teacher concluded that this exam sheet recovery was thank to the administration authority and self-regulation of the students.

6. DISCUSSION

The results of this case study show that through a long-term negotiation among the administration, teacher, and students, these latter finally decided to return the exam sheets to the teacher. This case study of resistance to examination shows that various factors can be considered to overcome this scenario of resistance. These latter can also be defined as the obstacles occurring during an examination process and their solutions. In this case, it is interesting to see the different factors of resistance:

- First, the students' perception of the multiple choice question. The students considered the type of questions as difficult; they considered they have a lack of capacities in answering the questions.
- Second, they did not consider the conditions in which the exam is taking place as satisfying; the noise of other students and the auditorium. It is to mention that the lack of quality in the examination method as for instance the lack of electronic evaluation tools that can be one of the important conditions for a good quality examination process.
- Third, they considered that there was not enough time for the length of the exam.
- Fourth, in order to resolve their own disappointing situation, they agreed to identify the exam as a coursework instead. That is, to consider the exam as a coursework and to include it in the coursework mark.

From another side, the teacher's perception of the resistance to examination was also interesting. The teacher through discussions and dialogue, with the students and the administration, attempted to overcome the resistance process:

- First, the teacher insisted on the exam validation through negotiation because of the grading systems in the syllabus; the teacher considers this system as fair and contributing to the development of the capacities of the students.
- Second, the teacher considered various factors for to negotiate with the students to increase their perception of the benefits of the exam. They mentioned the easiness of the exam because it is only courses content, the increasing capacities of the students during course period to understand the content of the exam, and the importance of self-confidence of the students.
- Third, the teacher decision to provide more time for the examination process was also a strategic element, considered at that moment as more appropriate, to further slow-down learning process evaluation of the students, to decrease stress related behaviors of the students and to allow them to provide less efforts in examination.

6.1 Implication to higher education examination

The results and discussion of the study highlights an important issue during examination process and provide a derived solution so to resolve the problem. The paper thus derives from the case study several implications to higher education examination as follows:

- First, it is important to take into consideration the resources put in place for the organization of the examinations periods; This can affect the concentration of the students during exams and the evaluation of their learning process. It is to mention that computer-based simulations can be a strategic tool for the improvement of examination process and assessment methods.
- Second, it is not to deny or neglect the opinion of the students' on the examination process in order to resolve the problem occurring at that stage. In fact, the students' assessment of the learning and examination process can lead to the identification of new ideas and to the improvement of the teachers' and students' self-assessments methods. The engineering of high technological-based systems and techniques for both assessment and examination can play a strategic role in the development of higher education.
- Third, it is to consider the continuous devotion of the teachers and administration for the problem-solving in the examination process; The assessment and evaluation process is a part of the education engineering and development and thus have a share in the education reforms. The engineering of advanced methodologies of assessment and examination is a strategic plan to adopt for the development of higher education in which the focus is on people, organizations and technologies.
- Fourth, it is to take into consideration the education program and module under which the examination process is taking place. The learning process and learning approaches used by the students in the different contexts can impact the behavior of students in examination and assessment process.

6.2 A model of processes of examination and assessments in higher education

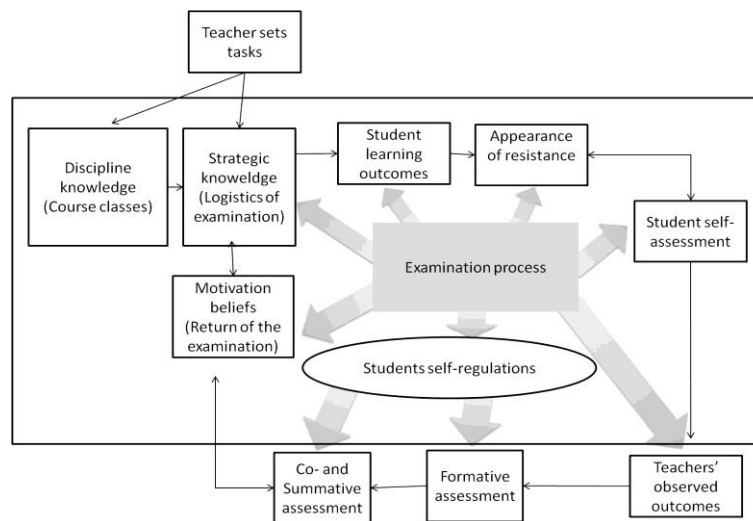


Figure 5: A model of examination of learning processes and principles that develop in students self-regulations and self-assessment

The results of the study lead to the development of a model of examination of learning process and principles that develop in students self-regulations and assessment capacities (Figure 5). In this model, everything starts with:

- The academic tasks set by the teacher during the module classes that consists of courses, courseworks, and examinations. The students assist to the module based on the education program set by the administration and of course supported by the motivation of the students to learn new information and knowledge, based on the thinking capacities of the students to enter into a new learning process that has tasks as the assignments and examinations.
- Then, in the examination process, strategic knowledge –logistics of examination- is used by the teacher in order to organize the event and fill-in the gap of objectives of assessment among the students and the teachers. It is not easy to determine explicitly from the beginning the objectives of an education programs even through the elaboration and explanation of the curriculum and syllabus. Thus, various types of knowledge from tacit to explicit knowledge need to be used progressively. Following the student learning outcomes during examination, there might be some differences in objectives among teachers and students. The students goals might be unclear at the beginning of the examination because of the level of strategic knowledge used but still clearly to pass the exam. The gap between the teachers objectives and the students objectives might be very low; the teachers would like to get back the exams at the end of the examination.
- If there is appearance of resistance among students on examination process (Figure 5), this means that there is a large gap among the objectives of the teacher and the students and that students started a self-assessment process during examination because of their level of learning process and approaches.
- These changes in examination process lead from another side to observed outcomes of the teacher. These outcomes can be related to the students' level of motivation and learning process or level of perception of importance of the examination process and are the first teacher diagnosis of resistance to examination.
- Then, based on the self-assessment and teachers' outcomes, the formative assessment is leading to the modifications of the examination process in order to fill-in the gap among the objectives of the students and teachers; not enough time so time extension, no out of course topics and utility of MC questions so easiness to complete the exam and enough capacities to complete the exam
- And in order to further align the objectives of the students and the teachers, the students can decide to increase their motivation and their perception of the importance of examination during examination process and reduce resistance through self-regulation; to consider the exam as a course work, then to accept rules of the syllabus. .
- Thus, at this stage, the formative assessment and self-regulations of the students lead to changes in the strategies of the examination process and now this strategy is based on both the objectives of students and teachers that are encouraging the examination process achievement; these combined efforts can be considered as a co-assessment of the examination process; involvement of administration, teacher sanction requirement, involvement of the students' responsible .

- Finally, the co-assessment of the students result in a summative assessment leading to the final accomplishment of the examination process; return of the examination and ethical issue of the exam return time.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Following on this research, the focus of the paper is to further develop on the behavior of the students and teachers during the examination process, the factors leading to their performance in examination and the impact of learning process during examination. The research results show that there are some challenges appearing during examination process that can be considered as a start of an assessment of the examination method, the learning method, the teaching method and the resources put in place for the learning process, and that teachers and students interactions during this process lead to the resolution of these challenges through the creation of other assessment processes. The interactive assessments and their analysis lead to problem-solving and improvement of the examination process. The research concludes that the assessment processes is a complex strategic practice in which various assessment methods can be intertwined, occurring at the same time and impacting one on the other even at the same time (Figure 5;6);The assessment of students, teachers and learning methods can occur and impact on each other at the same time. These concurrent aspects of assessments has the objective of continuous improvement of the learning process of the students from one side and the teaching capacities from the other side, and the resources put in place for both of them.

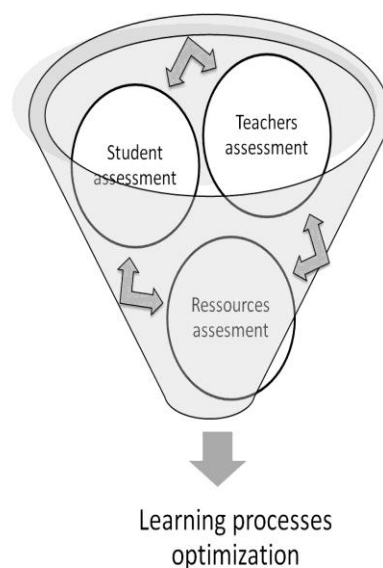


Figure 6: The concurrent role of different types of assessment methods

As a future research, there can be first a more detailed research on the challenges in the examination process in other contexts of learning in higher education in order to compare them with the actual research. The future research can be on the analysis of other practices in examination process and compare their principles with the results derived from the actual research. Second, as a future research, there can be a more focused research on the quantitative aspects of the factors and principles of the assessments and examination process to gather more evidence and to show the different levels of significance of the various challenges and obstacles occurring at the students' assessment process. Third, there can be a future research and development of new trends in examination processes and assessments as the development and engineering of information and technologies-based systems and methodologies for the examination processes and the assessments in these contexts of higher education.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank the students' of the examination and module's courses of this academic year 2012-2013 and the civil engineering department, its administration and the teachers that were the major actors of this scenario of resistance to examination process and its resolution.

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