

An Appraisal of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny Less Senior Teachers' Prior-knowledge in Students' Learning Assessment.

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PS: This research is a personal initiative of its authors.

Abstract:

This research aimed at analyzing Université Félix Houphouët Boigny (UFHB) less senior teachers' prior-knowledge in students' learning assessment. To attain this goal, we put out the following research hypothesis: "A great number of teachers at UFHB need training in assessment." To test this hypothesis we collected data from a sample comprising less senior teachers of UFHB. Our investigation revealed that the majority of these teachers have a vague knowledge of what assessment really is. Besides, they have no knowledge at all in formative assessment and therefore they never use this important assessment mode. We tried to explain that teaching and assessing formatively and summatively are the components of the same activity named "teaching". We proposed the creation of the conditions for the systematic training of new teachers in order to provide them with the tools for this demanding teaching profession which requests a sound training in assessment.

Key words: Appraisal, teacher-researchers, summative, formative assessment

Résumé:

Cette étude vise à évaluer les prérequis en évaluation des enseignants de rang B de l'Université Félix Houphouët Boigny (UFHB). Pour ce faire nous avons entrepris de vérifier l'hypothèse suivante: "de nombreux enseignants de l'UFHB ont besoin de formation en évaluation". Pour tester cette hypothèse, nous avons recueilli des données à partir d'un échantillon comprenant des enseignants de l'UFHB.

Il ressort de nos enquêtes que de nombreux enseignants n'ont qu'une idée vague de l'évaluation. En plus, ils n'ont aucune connaissance sur l'évaluation formative qu'ils n'utilisent jamais. Nous avons alors entrepris d'expliquer qu'enseigner et évaluer de façon sommative et formative constituent les éléments d'une même activité appelée «l'enseignement». Aussi, avons-nous proposé de créer les conditions pour la formation systématique des nouveaux enseignants en vue de leur donner les outils de cette éprouvante profession enseignante qui exige une formation solide en évaluation.

Mots clés : Analyse, enseignants-chercheurs, évaluation sommative, formative

INTRODUCTION**1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT**

As true as nobody will ever send his car to a dentist for repair, but rather to a trained and experienced mechanic, parents and students should be interested in the professionalism of those who are in charge of education. The same way, schools and universities should devote budget and energy for the training of their personnel.

The authorities of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny seem conscious of the importance of teacher training. That is why they founded IREEP (Institut pour la Recherche, l'Expérimentation et l'Enseignement en Pédagogie (Institute for Research, Experimentation and Education in Pedagogy)).

However, the lack of a compulsory decree for all new teachers to be trained at IREEP makes most new lecturers behave as if training is not important for university educators. Furthermore, most of the few who accept to visit IREEP for training assert to know how to teach and how to assess their students. Consequently, their presence at IREEP is to improve this knowledge in the art of teaching.

Such an assertion generates the following research questions: Do they really know how to teach? Assuming that they know how to teach since they are already teaching, but what do they know about assessment? Do they know all about assessment?

1.2 Purpose of the Study

We assigned to this study the following objectives:

1.2.1 General Objective

The present investigation aims at understanding if less senior teacher-researchers at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny need to be trained in assessment. This general objective can be divided into the following specific objectives.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

Three specific objectives were identified:

- Test teachers' prior-knowledge in summative assessment
- Test teachers' prior-knowledge in formative assessment

2. HYPOTHESES

Our hypotheses consist of a general hypothesis and specific hypotheses.

2.1 General Hypothesis

This research is justified by the following general hypothesis: "A great number of less senior teachers at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny need to be trained in assessment." This general hypothesis generates the following specific hypotheses.

2.2 Specific Hypothesis

The above general hypothesis engendered the following specific hypotheses:

- Less senior teacher-researchers have a poor prior-knowledge about summative assessment
- Less senior teachers-researchers have a poor prior-knowledge about formative-assessment

3. SHORT LITERATURE REVIEW

Instead of a classic literature review, here we will present what scholars call assessment of learning. In another word, we will try to answer the question "what is assessment of learning?" For Black & William (1998), assessment refers to what he calls "**All activities undertaken by teachers -- and by their students in**

assessing themselves -- that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities."

As for Dietel, Herman & all (1991), **"while assessment has the potential to improve learning for all students, historically it has acted as a barrier rather than as a bridge to educational opportunity. Assessments have been used to label students and put them in dead end tracks"**. Here Dietel and his group attract our attention on the importance of a good mastery of assessment by teachers if they really want to help students learn. Likewise, a badly implemented assessment can lead to failure and frustrations. Consequently, what to do for assessment to serve as learning tool rather than its contrary? This question serves as an introduction to present the different assessment functions.

Four common functions can be listed. They are formative assessment, summative assessment, evaluative assessment and educative assessment. Greater attention will be given to the first two which are not only the most used, but also those we need for this piece of work.

3.1 Formative Assessment

Gipps (1994) presents formative assessment as the assessment which encourages the use of information deriving from assessment to improve the teaching/learning process. For him truly formative assessment is the one which involves the learner and the teacher, the latter being the one who **"feeds back into curriculum planning."** As we can see, formative assessment should induce changes and improvements in the teaching/learning process. Similarly, Tunstall & Gipps (1996) describe formative assessment as **"a process of appraising, judging or evaluating students' work or performance and using this to shape and improve their competence."** Likewise, Sadler (1989) advises that **"Teachers use feedback to make programmatic decisions with respect to readiness, diagnosis and remediation"**. As for students, still according to Sadler (1989), they should use feedback to **"monitor the strengths and weaknesses of their performances, so that aspects associated with success or high quality can be 'recognized' and reinforced and unsatisfactory aspects modified or improved."** However, Crooks (1988) recommends the parsimonious use of praise and its opponent criticism. The reason is that he finds them counterproductive. The recommended feedback in formative assessment is of two kinds according to Wiggins (1998). The first one is provided after the performance, and the second one is delivered during the assessment activities. As for (Sutton 2000), he advises to teach less in order to find time to discuss with our students. This will give way **"to clarify the purpose and expected outcomes of the tasks we design"** for learners, and **"give them specific, clear and constructive feedback, and the chance to use that feedback to improve their own work."** Finally, Easley & Zwoyer (1975) summarize this point on formative assessment in the following words:

"If you can both listen to children and accept their answers not as things to just be judged right or wrong but as pieces of information which may reveal what the child is thinking, you will have taken a giant step toward becoming a master teacher, rather than merely a disseminator of information."

If it is true that formative assessment does not consist in differentiating the right answers from the wrong ones, but pieces of information to be interpreted and used for learning improvement, then what is summative assessment?

3.2 Summative Assessment

To show the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment after defining the first one becomes an easy task. It just consists in showing what formative assessment is not. For this purpose we are going to use the following analogy borrowed from Stake, R. cited in Earl, L. (2004) and which is the following: ***“When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative; when the guests taste the soup, that’s summative”***. Summative assessment is consequently the final judgment that separates learners into two distinctive groups: those who have learnt and those who have not learnt, or the good ones, and the bad ones. Sometimes, the way it judges is frustrating and therefore counterproductive, especially when it uses harsh criticism for the bad ones. It can also use abundant praise for the good ones. This is why Crooks (1998) advocates the parsimonious use of praise and criticism in the following terms: ***“Praise should be used sparingly and where used, should be task-specific, whereas criticism (other than simply identifying deficiencies) is usually counterproductive.”***

Summative assessment is also what enables students to pass or fail. This explains why Ettien Assoa (August 2014 page 5) qualifies it as ***“an anti-democratic and an anti-andragogic assessment comparable to a court decision which offers no appeal”***. To close definitely on this point, Harlen (1998) has been chosen to share his description of summative assessment with us. For him summative assessment is characterized by the fact that it ***“simply adds procedures or tests to existing work”***, it ***“involves only marking and feeding back grades or marks to students”***, it ***“implicitly labels students and reduces their self-esteem”*** and finally, summative assessment is ***“separated from teaching”***.

There are other assessment functions such as evaluative assessment, educative assessment etc., but this study, being conducted on teachers who are not specialized in Education, therefore, who are not expected to have a profound knowledge of these teaching matters, we will limit our investigation on the above most common assessment functions: formative assessment and summative assessment. Hence, what are in short the different points covered in this short literature review?

Partial Conclusion:

In short, we can memorize that formative assessment helps teachers and administrations make pragmatic decisions. It also helps students improve their performance (Sadler, 1989). The third point is that formative assessment helps to involve students in their own learning.” (Sutton 2000). Moreover, formative assessment helps teachers and administration to make curriculum changes (Gipps, 1996).

As for summative assessment, it was said to separate learners into two main groups: the good ones and the bad ones Earl, L. (2004). It is mostly used to give grades and marks to students. These grades or marks are used for academic and administrative decisions which are rigorously applied to students and are generally comparable to a court decision which offers no appeal (Ettien Assoa, August 2014).

4. METHODOLOGY

Our methodology consists in presenting first our research site, then the population and afterwards our sampling and analysis method.

4.1 Research Site

Our research site was that of the different Units for Research and Training (U.F.R.) of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny. This survey took place in the teacher training room of the Institute for Research, Experimentation and Education in Pedagogy (IREEP).

4.2 Research Population

Our research population consists of all less senior teachers-researchers of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny. However, due to the great number of those teacher-researchers and the great difficulties in contacting all of them, we decided to base this research on a sample population. All our respondents are teachers of both sexes and they are currently hired by the national commission in charge of university teachers' recruitment.

a) Sample

Our sample was made of 76 teachers regularly recruited and assigned to teach at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny. The questionnaire relative to this sample population will be kept permanently in the records of IREEP for consultation.

b) Data Collection Instruments

Besides, prior to analyzing less senior teacher-researchers' assessment practices, we found it more interesting to verify whether our colleagues have some basic knowledge on assessment or not. The reason is that in case the respondents have no clear idea of the topic, here assessment, the result of their assessment practices may be hindered. The results will serve our institution (IREEP) for the improvement of the training program

4.3 Sampling and Analysis Method

Our exploratory option was that of convenience sampling since our survey was based on teachers who came to our institute for training. Besides, our research question was oriented to identify whether our colleagues have a clear idea of what assessment really is and if yes, the function of each assessment type. We remain convinced that the most convenient way to grasp a gross estimate is to use the available population of teachers.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

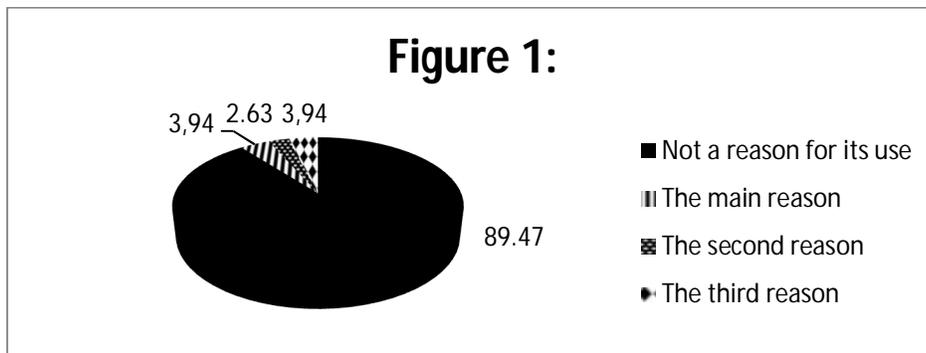
Here, we will present the results of the present research and then, we will discuss these results.

5.1 Results

This result presentation consists in revealing the answers of our research questions one after another.

5.1.1 Does Assessment Help Teachers to Make Decisions?

To the question "Does Assessment Help Teachers to Make Decisions?" 89.47 per cent of our respondents answered no. For them, assessment does not enable instructors to make decisions. In another word, decision making is not one of the reasons for which assessment is used. (Figure 1)

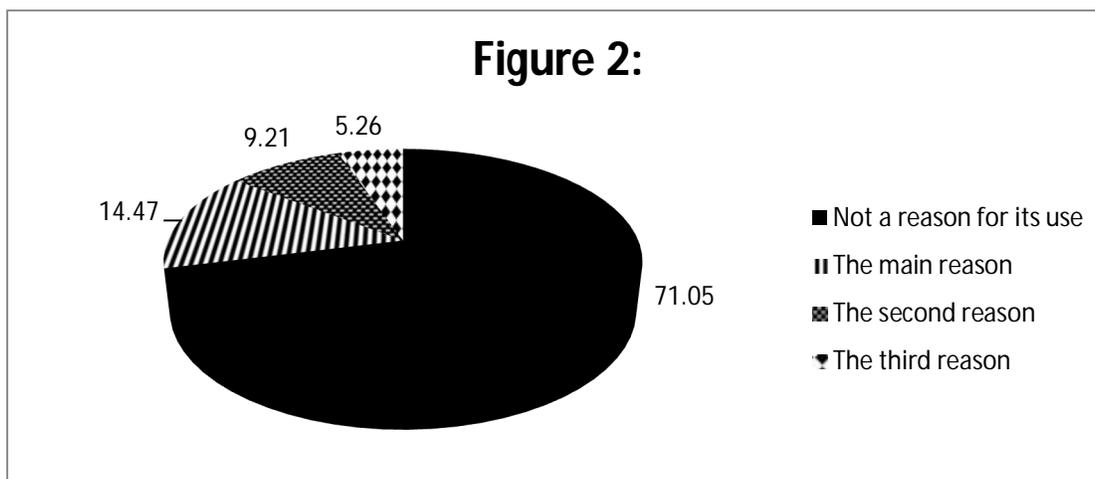


This also implies that assessment cannot enable teachers to make decisions regarding the teaching learning process. However, less than 10 per cent of our young colleagues asserted to find a link between assessment and decision making. Among them, 3.94 per cent believe that helping teachers make decisions is the main reason for assessing learners. Besides, for 2.6 per cent of young teachers, helping teachers make decisions is seen as the second reason for assessing learners, whereas 3.9 per cent of them view it as the third reason.

To summarize this point, we must admit that the greatest majority of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny less senior teachers ignores the assessment function according to which formative assessment enables teachers and the administration to make decisions regarding the teaching/learning process. What to say about such results? Are we talking about the same assessment? These few questions will be answered during the discussion section.

5.1.2 Does Assessment Help Students to Improve their Performance?

As for the question “does assessment help students to improve their performance?” teachers’ answers are almost as surprising as the first question. Indeed, 71.05 per cent of them asserted that assessment cannot be used to help learners improve their performance. Hence, a total of 23.68 per cent of our respondents find a link between assessment and the improvement of students’ performance. (Figure 2)

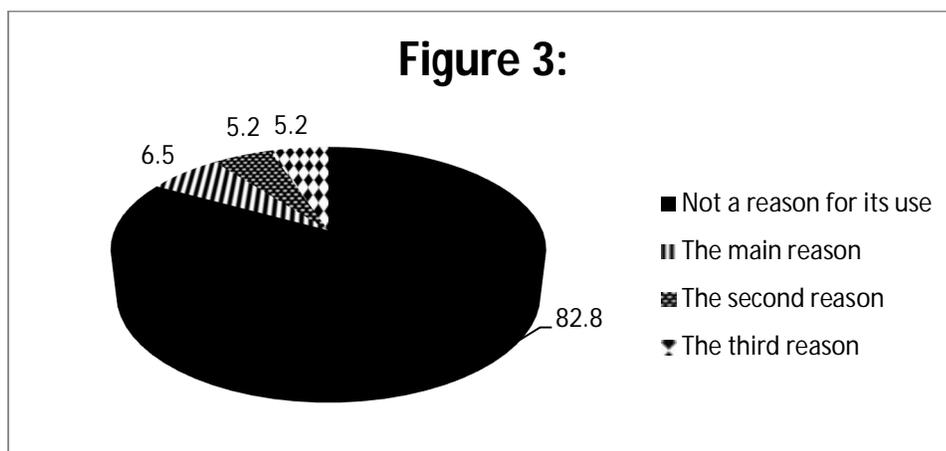


Among them, 14.47 per cent identified the improvement of students' performance as the first reason for which assessments are organized, whereas respectively for 9.21 and 5.26 per cent of them, helping students to improve their performance is the second and the third reason for which assessment is initiated.

Briefly speaking, most of the less senior teacher-researchers at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny are not aware of the fact that assessment, particularly formative assessment can very well be used to improve students' performance. Only less than 25 per cent of them perceive the possibility to use assessment for the purpose to improve students' performance.

5.1.3 Does Assessment Help to Involve Students in their Learning?

Equally, to the question "Does Assessment Help to Involve Students in their Learning?", 82.8 per cent of our defendants answered no. Indeed, the majority of our less senior teacher-researchers do not perceive how assessment could help to involve students in their own learning (Figure 3).



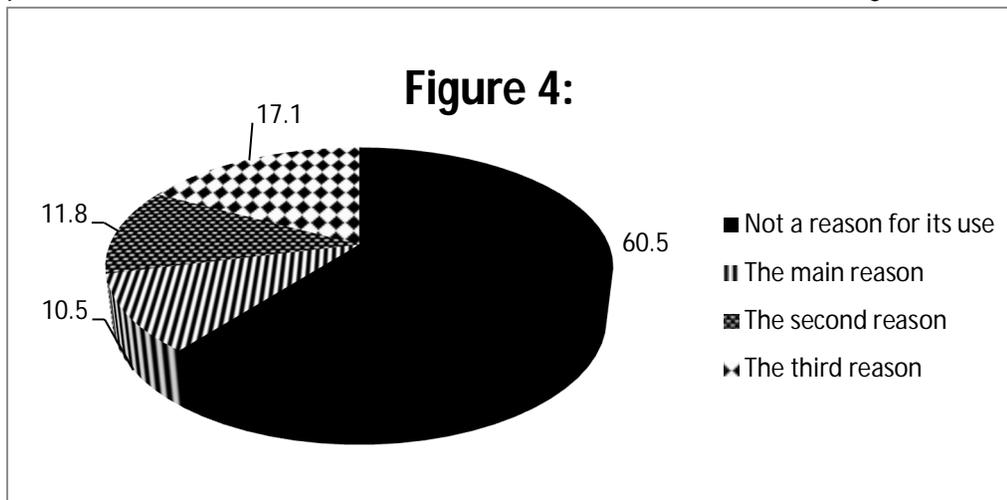
However, 16.9 per cent of them clearly identified a link between assessment and students' involvement in their own learning. More specifically, for 6.5 per cent of them, involving learners in their own learning constitutes the main reason for assessment. As well, 5.2 per cent of our new teachers assert that involving students in their own learning is the second reason for assessment. Finally, for 5.3 per cent of them, assessment serves to involve students in their learning process but as the third reason.

The conclusion on this point is that the great majority of less senior teacher-researchers at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny disregard assessment as a mean to involve students in their own learning. Such a result implies that those teachers never use assessment for this purpose. Such a revelation just means that they need to be informed better on assessment functions.

5.1.4 Does Assessment Help to Make Curriculum Changes?

The question "does assessment help to make curriculum changes?" offers the following results; indeed, 60.5 per cent of our respondents think that making curriculum changes is not among the reasons for which assessments are initiated in our universities. However, 39.4 per cent of them suspect curriculum changes as

part of the reasons for which teacher-researchers assess their students (Figure 4).

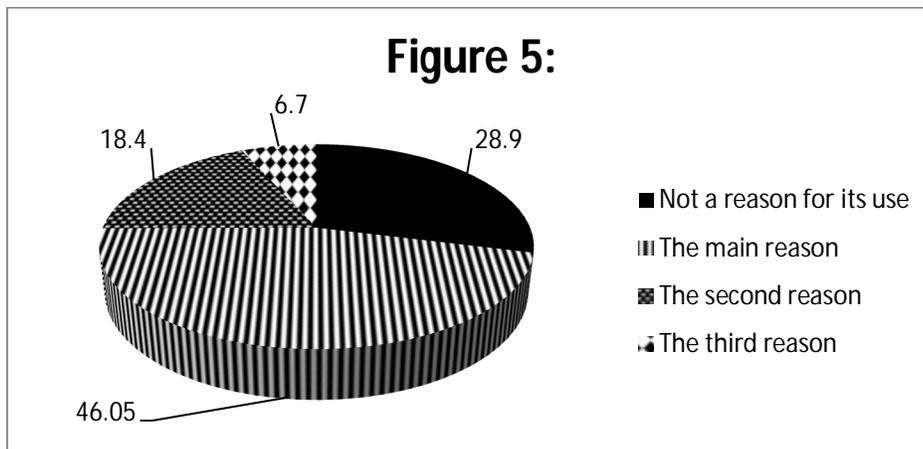


Among them, 10.5 per cent identified curriculum changes as the main reason for assessment when respectively, 11.8 and 17.3 per cent of them have identified curriculum changes as the second and the third reason.

In short, these results enable us to assert that the majority (60.5 %) of less senior teacher-researchers at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny ignore that formative assessment can induce curriculum changes. This implies that, either they do not use formative assessment or they use it without having a clear idea of how to interpret its results for their students to learn better.

5.1.5 Does Assessment Serve to Classify Students?

It is a secret for nobody in our education system that assessment leads to marks and marks are used to judge who should either pass or fail. Consequently the question "does assessment serve to classify students?" is free of any ambiguity. It was so obvious for us that we expected all our respondents to answer affirmatively to this question. Nonetheless, we received the following results. The majority of our respondents identified students' classification as the main reason for assessing learners. They are 46.05 per cent of our less senior teacher-researchers. To this figure we must add those for whom classifying students is the second reason and also the third reason for assessment. (Figure 5)

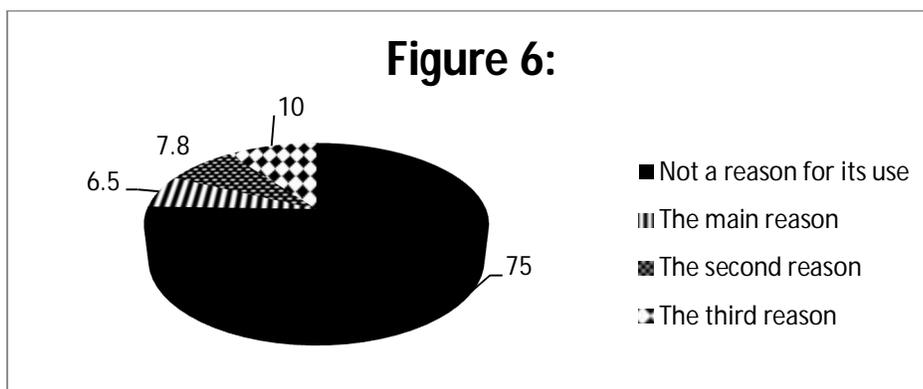


This means that at least 71 per cent of our respondents acknowledge that assessment is used to classify students. Only 28.9 per cent of them answered that classifying students is not a reason for assessment.

The conclusion of this point is that for the majority of less senior teachers assessment is used to classify students. However 29.9 per cent of them think that classifying students is not a reason for assessment. What are all the implications of this result?

5.1.6 Does Assessment Help to Give Marks to Students?

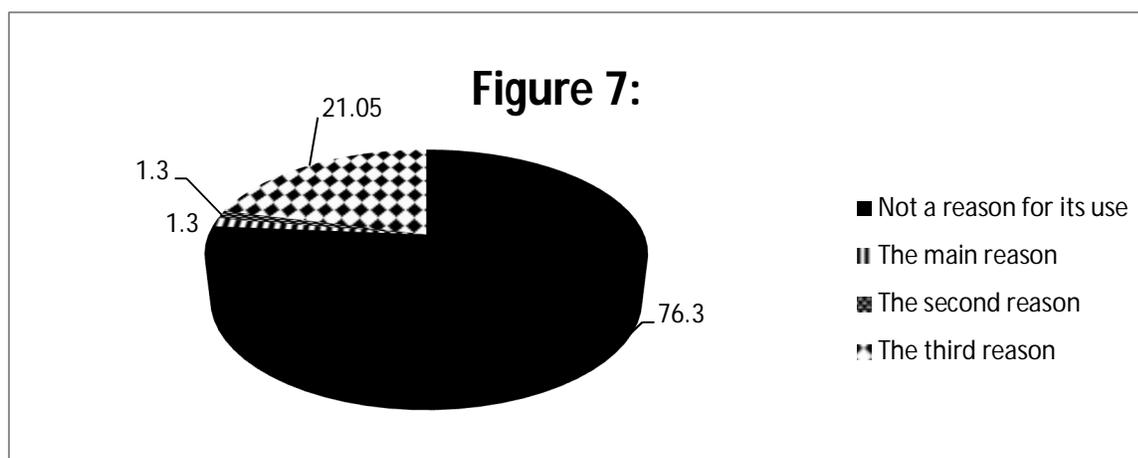
The most surprising part in this research is the result deriving from this question: "does assessment help to give marks to students?" (Figure 6)



Indeed, all students and teachers know that the fundamental aim of assessment, particularly summative assessment, is to grant marks to students and summative assessment is the most common assessment function in our University. It is with the greatest surprise that we noticed that only less than 25 per cent of less senior teachers know what should be obvious for all of us, that is to say that assessment is used to give marks to students. What really happened in their mind while filling the questionnaire? Is this not the proof of the great confusion in this matter?

5.1.7 Does Assessment Help to Meet Administrative Requirements

The last question of the series is the following: "does assessment help to meet administrative requirements?" To this question, 76.3 per cent of teacher -researchers answered no. For them, meeting administrative requirements are not a reason for students' assessment. Only less than 25 per cent of junior teachers asserted that assessment can be used to meet administrative requirements. This simply means that the majority of teachers ignore the administrative function of assessment. (Figure 7)



5.2 Discussion

The first four questions of this research concern formative assessment and can be shortened as follow: does formative assessment help teachers make decisions? Does it help students improve their performance? Does it serve to involve students in their own learning? Does it provide data for curriculum changes? When, to those questions we record that 89.42 per cent of less senior teachers ignore that formative assessment can be used by teachers and the administration to make decisions regarding the teaching/learning process, when 71.05 per cent of the same teachers ignore that assessment can contribute to improve students' performance, and when furthermore, 82.8 per cent ignore that assessment can be used to involve students in their own learning and when finally 60,5 per cent of them ignore that assessment can provide data that can be used for curriculum changes, there is no doubt, teacher training has become an urgent need.

Concerning the summative assessment, the last three questions of our survey aimed at appraising teachers' awareness on the matter. Thus, the results are slightly better than those of formative assessment. Indeed, question five reveals that 71 per cent of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny less senior teachers know that summative assessment helps to classify students. However, as for the questions to know whether summative assessment serves to give marks to students and meet administrative requirements, our investigations reveal that only less than 25 per cent of Université Félix Houphouët Boigny less senior teacher -researchers know these functions. The great majority, that is to say respectively 75 per cent and 76.3 per cent ignore that summative assessment serves to give marks to students and meet administrative requirements. How do we understand these results?

It appears perceptibly that less senior teachers have a vague idea of what assessment really is. Indeed, none of our respondents is a graduate in Education. Furthermore, apart from the training seminar during which these data were collected, most of them received no professional training. Consequently, their present knowledge in assessment derives from their experience as former students. Relying on one's experience as a student to teach and assess refers to "teach and assess the way one was taught and assessed". This might work perfectly when one's former teachers were experts and real professionals, but what happens when those former teachers were not experts?

Teaching is a demanding profession that requests an adequate training! Furthermore, assessment should not be separated from teaching, but should rather be considered as a component of the same thing. Teaching is not just revealing information to students and check later how much information is memorized. As Dylan William (2011) points out:

"When a teacher teaches, no matter how well he or she might design a lesson, what a child learns is unpredictable. Children do not always learn what we teach. That is why the most important assessment does not happen at the end of learning – it happens during the learning, when there is still time to do something with the information".

Accordingly, teaching and assessing formatively and summatively should work together because they are the components of the same thing leading to the same target called learning. Stiggins (2002) seems to express this idea in the following terms:

"Assessment for learning can contribute to the development of effective schools. If assessments of learning provide evidence of achievement for public reporting, then assessments for learning serve to help students learn more. The crucial distinction is between assessment to determine the status of learning and assessment to promote greater learning".

The problem in our universities is how to use assessment to promote greater learning if almost nothing compels new teachers to training?

Besides, since for us teaching and learning assessment should not be separated, such a training should be as complete as possible to produce real professional teachers, similar to those that Demos (2004) call the best teachers, able to ***"constantly monitor what is happening to students as they set about learning and investigate when things do not proceed as planned or expected. They also enquire their own practice so they might get better at ensuring that their students learn successfully."***

The same way, it clearly appears that equal importance should be given to teaching and assessment (formative and summative assessment) if teachers' target is real learning. This point is so real that (Sutton 2000) advises to teach less so as our students can learn more in the following terms:

"Teach less more carefully, and discuss it with our students. We need to clarify the purpose and expected outcomes of the tasks we design for students, and give them specific, clear and constructive feedback, and the chance to use that feedback to improve their own work."

As for (Black and William(1998), who seem to share the above view, teaching and learning need formative assessment to be effective. These are their own terms: **"For assessment to function formatively, the results have to be used to adjust teaching and learning."**

Partial Conclusion

What derives from the above discussion points is that acquiring the competence to teach and assess formatively and summatively is difficult without a sound training or a policy that incite to self training in the art of teaching, particularly the art of teaching adults.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This appraisal enabled us to understand that the majority of less senior teachers at Université Félix Houphouët Boigny have a vague prior-knowledge of what assessment really is. They seem to have no knowledge at all as far as formative assessment is concerned and therefore they never use this assessment mode. We have tried to explain that teaching and assessing both formatively and summatively are the components of the same complex entity called "teaching". Teaching should not therefore be separated from formative and summative assessment. As a matter of fact, acquiring the competence to teach and assess formatively and summatively is difficult without a sound training or a policy that incite to self-training in the art of teaching, particularly the art of teaching adults. The researcher's role is only to determine the problem. It is therefore the authorities' role (CAMES, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Université Félix Houphouët Boigny) to create the conditions for the systematic training of all those who engage in teaching. Teaching is a complex profession which requests a sound training and as teaching, summative and formative assessment are the components of the same entity called teaching, then it requests a thorough training in summative and formative assessment as well.

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