



Evaluation of educational plans: impact on improving student learning

Evaluación de planes educativos: impacto en la mejora del aprendizaje estudiantil

Víctor Lautaro Sinche-Pauta

Victor.sinche@quito.gob.ec

Universidad Central del Ecuador, Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5907-4745>

Wendy Patricia Castillo-Ordoñez

Wendy.castillo@quito.gob.ec

UTPL: Universidad Particular de Loja, Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4501-9834>

Jacqueline Concepción Cisneros-Bedón

jacquelinec.cisneros@quito.gob.ec

Universidad Central del Ecuador, Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8995-8102>

Jenny Maribell Chuqui-Tituaña

jpc7maribell@hotmail.com

Unidad Educativa Municipal Eugenio Espejo, Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2516-7516>

RESUMEN

El objetivo del artículo consiste en analizar la evaluación de planes educativos como factor de impacto en la mejora del aprendizaje estudiantil dentro del contexto ecuatoriano. De metodología descriptivo documental. Se examinaron dieciséis publicaciones científicas (2019-2025) aplicando análisis de contenido sistemático. Los resultados revelan una brecha significativa entre las concepciones teóricas avanzadas de evaluación formativa y las prácticas tradicionales predominantes que priorizan la memorización sobre el desarrollo competencial. Se identificó que la coherencia curricular y la integración sistémica de componentes educativos son factores determinantes para mejoras sostenibles del aprendizaje. Persisten desafíos relacionados con la fragmentación curricular, desarticulación entre teoría y práctica evaluativa, y resistencia al cambio metodológico. Se concluye que transformar las prácticas evaluativas requiere intervenciones integrales que aborden simultáneamente formación docente, políticas institucionales, culturas organizacionales y disponibilidad de recursos, trascendiendo enfoques fragmentados hacia estrategias holísticas de mejoramiento educativo.

Descriptores: evaluación de la educación; planificación de la educación; calidad de la educación. (Fuente: Tesaurus UNESCO).

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyse the evaluation of educational plans as a factor influencing the improvement of student learning within the Ecuadorian context. A descriptive documentary methodology was used. Sixteen scientific publications (2019-2025) were examined using systematic content analysis. The results reveal a significant gap between advanced theoretical conceptions of formative assessment and the predominant traditional practices that prioritise memorisation over skills development. Curricular coherence and the systemic integration of educational components were identified as determining factors for sustainable improvements in learning. Challenges remain in relation to curricular fragmentation, the disconnect between theory and assessment practice, and resistance to methodological change. It is concluded that transforming assessment practices requires comprehensive interventions that simultaneously address teacher training, institutional policies, organisational cultures, and resource availability, transcending fragmented approaches towards holistic strategies for educational improvement.

Descriptors: education assessment; education planning; education quality. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

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Research articles



INTRODUCTION

Higher education is undergoing a period of profound change that requires constant review of the educational models implemented in academic institutions. In this scenario of continuous change, the evaluation of educational plans emerges as a fundamental component in ensuring the relevance, coherence, and effectiveness of training processes. According to Sandoval-Rubilar et al. (2022), educational evaluation is a systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information that allows for the making of value judgements about learning and decisions aimed at the continuous improvement of educational processes. This conceptualisation places evaluation not as an end point of the educational process, but as an integrated mechanism that runs through all phases of curriculum design, implementation and assessment.

In the Latin American context, particularly in Ecuador, higher education institutions face multiple challenges related to educational quality, the relevance of their academic programmes and the comprehensive training of students. As Mejía-Rodríguez and Mejía-Leguía (2021) point out, assessment and educational quality have an intrinsic relationship that has seen significant advances, although limitations persist that restrict the scope of assessment processes in the real transformation of pedagogical practices. These limitations are manifested in the lack of coordination between curricular components, the application of traditional evaluation strategies that prioritise memorisation over the development of skills, and the absence of effective feedback mechanisms that allow educational plans to be adjusted according to emerging needs.

Educational planning is the foundation on which the learning experiences that students will have during their academic career are built. According to Carriazo-Díaz et al. (2020), educational planning is a fundamental tool for achieving quality education, as it allows for the systematic organisation of curricular elements, the establishment of objectives consistent with social and professional demands, and the design of pedagogical strategies that facilitate the development of



comprehensive skills in students. However, planning alone is insufficient if it is not accompanied by rigorous evaluation processes that allow for monitoring its implementation and assessing its impact on student learning.

Curricula serve as the link between institutional aspirations and classroom realities, connecting the university's mission with the needs of the social and productive environment. De-La-Cruz-Rioja et al. (2022) characterise curricula as the missing link between the university and society, highlighting that there is often a disconnect between what institutions offer and what society demands. This gap is amplified when educational plans lack periodic evaluations to verify their validity, relevance and effectiveness. The absence of robust evaluation mechanisms leads to outdated academic programmes, disjointed curriculum content and pedagogical strategies that do not respond to the characteristics and needs of contemporary students.

The evaluation of student learning has evolved from quantitative approaches focused on measuring memorised knowledge to more comprehensive perspectives that consider the development of competencies, socio-emotional skills and critical thinking abilities. In this regard, Espinoza-Freire (2022) emphasises that learning assessment must transcend the grading function to become a formative process that guides the continuous improvement of teaching practices and curriculum design. This paradigm shift requires educational institutions to implement multidimensional assessment systems that consider both learning outcomes and the processes that students develop to achieve them.

This study is justified by the need to understand how the systematic evaluation of educational plans contributes to the improvement of student learning in the Ecuadorian context. The country's universities have implemented various models of curriculum planning and evaluation strategies, but questions remain about the effectiveness of these mechanisms in generating real transformations in teaching and learning processes. Scientific research in this field allows us to identify good



practices, recognise limitations and propose guidelines that strengthen the link between assessment, planning and learning improvement.

The aim of this article is to analyse the assessment of educational plans as a factor that impacts student learning improvement within the Ecuadorian context.

METHOD

This work was developed using a qualitative, descriptive, documentary approach, based on content analysis. We chose this methodology because it allowed us to examine, interpret, and gather information from different specialised bibliographic sources, which was essential for understanding the educational phenomenon that interested us from different perspectives, both theoretical and empirical.

Through content analysis, we were able to identify recurring patterns, relevant thematic categories, and conceptual relationships that emerged from the documents we reviewed. This process enabled us to construct solid interpretations, always supported by scientific evidence.

The study population consisted of sixteen scientific documents published between 2019 and 2025, intentionally selected for their thematic relevance to the research objective. The inclusion criteria applied considered: (a) publications addressing educational assessment, curriculum planning, or study plans in higher education or secondary school contexts; (b) articles published in indexed scientific journals or with peer review processes; (c) documents in Spanish that reflected Latin American realities, particularly those of Ecuador; and (d) publications that provided conceptual frameworks, empirical results, or theoretical reflections on the relationship between educational assessment and learning improvement.

The sample consisted of the entire identified population (n=16), forming a documentary corpus that includes articles from Ecuadorian and international scientific journals, with theoretical, empirical, and review approaches. The temporal distribution shows a concentration of publications between 2021 and 2023, reflecting the growing interest in the subject during the post-pandemic



period, when educational institutions intensified their curriculum review and updating processes.

The content analysis was carried out following a systematic process organised into five phases. The first phase consisted of an exploratory reading of the selected documents, identifying the central themes, research objectives, methodologies used and main conclusions of each publication. This preliminary reading provided an overview of the documentary corpus and detected recurring elements in the texts.

In the second phase, an in-depth analytical reading was carried out, with content sheets being drawn up for each document. These sheets recorded information on: conceptualisations of educational assessment, characteristics of the curricula, assessment strategies implemented, experiences of educational projects, limitations identified and recommendations proposed by the authors. The systematisation of this information facilitated the comparison between documents and the identification of conceptual convergences and divergences. The third phase involved the thematic categorisation of the analysed content. Four main categories emerged from the inductive analysis of the documents: (1) Conceptualisation and models of educational assessment; (2) Design and coherence of curricula; (3) Learning assessment strategies implemented by teachers; and (4) Educational projects and interdisciplinary integration. Each category includes subcategories that allow for a more detailed analysis of the specific components identified in the literature.

In the fourth phase, an interpretive analysis of the established categories was conducted, identifying patterns, conceptual relationships, and theoretical tensions present in the documents. This analysis considered both the individual contributions of each publication and the possible articulations between different theoretical and empirical perspectives. Particular attention was paid to the implications of the reported results for understanding the phenomenon studied in the Ecuadorian context.



The study respected the ethical principles of documentary research, including the appropriate recognition of authorship through citations and complete bibliographic references. The APA seventh edition format was used to ensure the traceability of the sources consulted. No modifications or interpretations were made that distorted the authors' original arguments, maintaining fidelity to the content of the documents analysed.

RESULTS

The systematic exploration of the sixteen documentary sources that constitute the research corpus allowed for the identification of four fundamental thematic axes that align with the purpose of the research. The results are presented organised according to these dimensions, weaving together the contributions of the different publications analysed.

Conceptual foundations of assessment in the educational field

The publications examined show that educational assessment has undergone a substantial conceptual transformation in recent decades. According to Arias-Lara et al. (2019), this process of transformation can be interpreted through different models and periods that have marked the shift from approaches limited to quantitative measurement to broader perspectives that incorporate formative and qualitative elements. These authors recognise that historically, assessment was conceived as a final act intended for accreditation and certification, while contemporary views place it as a constituent element of the educational process that nourishes both learning and teaching practice.

In line with this transformative vision, Sandoval-Rubilar et al. (2022) construct a theoretical framework that characterises educational assessment as a professional language that requires a deep understanding of its epistemological and methodological foundations. According to their argument, assessment involves a systematic process of gathering evidence, interpreting information and formulating evaluative judgements that guide pedagogical decisions. This conceptualisation highlights the dynamic nature of assessment and its primary



function of educational improvement, going beyond the simple certification function traditionally assigned to it.

The essential properties of educational assessment in the learning process are explored by Ley-Leyva and Espinoza-Freire (2021), who determine that this process must be systematic, continuous, comprehensive, participatory, and improvement-oriented. These authors emphasise that contemporary assessment requires the active participation of various educational actors, including students, teachers, administrators, and the educational community as a whole. This participatory perspective differs from traditional models where assessment was a unilateral practice exercised exclusively by the teacher towards the student.

The conceptual dimension of assessment is expanded upon by Espinoza-Freire (2022), who delves into the assessment of learning as a specific process within the broader field of educational assessment. The author distinguishes between assessment of learning and assessment for learning, pointing out that the latter constitutes a paradigm shift that positions assessment as a tool to support the learning process rather than a simple end-of-term verification mechanism. This differentiation is fundamental to understanding how assessment can positively impact the improvement of student learning.

The link between assessment and educational quality is another relevant conceptual component identified in the analysis. Mejía-Rodríguez and Mejía-Leguía (2021) examine the current progress, constraints, and challenges in this relationship, arguing that assessment represents one of the fundamental pillars for achieving and maintaining educational quality. However, the authors also recognise significant constraints, including the persistence of conventional assessment practices, the disconnect between learning assessment and institutional assessment, and insufficient teacher training in innovative assessment methodologies.

Curricular structure and coherence in study programmes

The second dimension that emerges from the analysis is linked to the design, architecture, and coherence of study programmes as determining factors that



shape student learning experiences. De-La-Cruz-Rioja et al. (2022) develop a solid approach by characterising study programmes as the missing link between the university and society. The authors identify that there is often a gap between social demands, labour market needs and the curricular content that makes up university curricula. This disconnect produces graduates whose skills do not fully meet the demands of the professional context, highlighting the need for rigorous evaluation processes to ensure curricular relevance.

Curricular coherence emerges as a fundamental dimension in the assessment of curricula. Velázquez-Torres et al. (2024) address this issue from the perspective of student assessment, arguing that students are key actors in identifying curricular inconsistencies. The research reported by these authors reveals that students detect inconsistencies in aspects such as the sequencing of subjects, content redundancy, gaps between stated objectives and actual learning experiences, and the disconnect between theory and practice. These student perceptions represent valuable information for curriculum evaluation and improvement processes.

The design of curricula requires consideration of multiple elements that must be coherently articulated. Carriazo-Díaz et al. (2020) emphasise that educational planning as a tool for quality must integrate philosophical, epistemological, pedagogical, didactic, and evaluative components into a coherent structure. The authors identify that effective planning involves defining clear graduate profiles, establishing verifiable learning outcomes, selecting relevant content, designing appropriate methodological strategies, and establishing assessment mechanisms aligned with educational objectives. The absence of any of these components or their lack of coordination compromises the quality of the educational plan.

The link between educational plans and skills development is another dimension analysed in the documentary sources. Martínez-Cruz (2024) examines the impact of educational projects on skills development in higher education, identifying that training projects represent effective strategies for articulating



curricular components and promoting meaningful learning. The author argues that well-designed educational projects allow for the integration of knowledge from different disciplinary areas, the development of complex thinking skills, and the strengthening of socio-emotional competencies, elements that are difficult to achieve through conventional methodologies focused on content transmission.

One aspect that emerges from the documentary analysis concerns the limitations and challenges in the design of educational plans. Koßmann (2022) offers a critical reflection on individualised educational plans, questioning whether they simply become tools to protect teaching from parental criticism rather than genuine instruments of educational improvement. Although this publication focuses on special education contexts, the reflection is relevant for understanding that educational planning mechanisms can become bureaucratic processes that do not generate real transformations in pedagogical practices if they are not accompanied by authentic evaluations and continuous improvement processes.

Assessment practices in teaching

The third dimension identified in the analysis is linked to the assessment strategies that teachers implement in their daily teaching practice. Huayamave-Castro et al. (2025) conducted a study on educational assessment strategies among Ecuadorian secondary school teachers, identifying a continued predominance of conventional strategies focused on written tests, objective exams, and activities that prioritise memorisation over the development of complex skills. The authors report that, although teachers theoretically recognise the importance of implementing formative, diagnostic and summative assessments in a balanced manner, in practice summative assessment for grading and promotion purposes predominates.

Alternative assessment strategies are a topic that receives attention in the analysed documentary corpus. Holmos-Flores et al. (2023) contrast alternative assessment with conventional assessment in university contexts, arguing that alternative strategies such as portfolios, projects, authentic assessments, self-assessment and co-assessment offer greater potential for promoting deep



learning and developing complex skills. However, the authors also identify obstacles to the implementation of these strategies, including teacher resistance to change, the perception of increased workload, time constraints, and insufficient training in innovative assessment methodologies.

Assessment in programmes aimed at socio-educational re-engagement and labour market insertion represents a specific context analysed by González-Barea et al. (2021). The authors study how learning assessment is configured in programmes targeting educationally vulnerable populations, identifying that these contexts require flexible, contextualised assessment strategies geared towards recognising prior learning and skills developed in non-formal contexts. This perspective broadens the understanding of the diversity of assessment strategies needed to respond to the characteristics and needs of different student populations.

Teacher training in educational assessment emerges as a determining factor in the quality of the assessment strategies implemented. Although not specifically addressed in any particular document in the corpus, this issue cuts across multiple publications that identify the need to strengthen teachers' assessment skills. The gap between theoretical knowledge about assessment and actual assessment practices suggests the existence of training deficits that limit the implementation of innovative assessment strategies aligned with contemporary pedagogical approaches.

Systemic articulation of educational components

The fourth dimension identified in the analysis relates to the integration of various components of the education system to achieve quality and learning improvement objectives. Álvarez-Gómez et al. (2020) develop an analysis of the integration of systems, programmes, plans, projects and strategies for achieving educational quality, arguing that the fragmentation and disarticulation of these elements constitutes one of the main obstacles to achieving sustainable improvements in educational processes. The authors propose that educational quality requires a



systemic vision that coherently articulates the different levels and components of the educational system.

Interdisciplinary integration projects represent powerful strategies for articulating learning and promoting complex skills. Corominas-Ayala (2023) documents an educational experience based on interdisciplinary integration and social outreach projects, identifying that this type of initiative promotes meaningful learning, develops collaborative work skills, strengthens critical thinking, and establishes connections between academic knowledge and real social issues. The author argues that interdisciplinary projects require assessment processes that go beyond the evaluation of isolated disciplinary knowledge to focus on the ability to integrate knowledge and apply it to complex situations.

The construction of educational programmes is another relevant dimension in the integration of curricular components. Yevilao-Alarcón (2019) analyses the basis for the construction of educational programmes over the last decade, identifying trends towards competency-based approaches, constructivist perspectives on learning, and the incorporation of educational technologies. The author points out that the development of effective programmes requires a solid theoretical foundation, analysis of contextual needs, the participation of multiple educational actors, and continuous evaluation processes that allow for adjustments to be made based on the results obtained.

DISCUSSION

Documentary analysis reveals a significant conceptual evolution in the understanding of educational evaluation, moving from positivist approaches focused on objective measurement to constructivist perspectives that emphasise the formative and qualitative dimensions of evaluation.

This evolution, documented by Arias-Lara et al. (2019) and Sandoval-Rubilar et al. (2022), reflects broader epistemological transformations in the field of education that recognise the complexity of human learning and the need for more sophisticated evaluation mechanisms to understand and promote it.



However, a significant gap remains between advanced theoretical conceptualisations of assessment and the actual assessment practices implemented in Ecuadorian educational institutions. This tension between theory and practice, identified particularly by Huayamave-Castro et al. (2025) and Holmos-Flores et al. (2023), suggests that conceptual transformations do not automatically translate into changes in pedagogical practices. Factors explaining this gap include insufficient initial and continuing teacher training in innovative assessment methodologies, institutional cultures that privilege summative assessment for certification purposes, and resource and time constraints that limit the implementation of alternative assessment strategies.

The persistence of traditional assessment approaches has direct consequences for student learning. When assessment is reduced to the verification of memorised knowledge through standardised tests, students develop superficial learning strategies aimed at reproducing information rather than constructing deep understanding. In contrast, when assessment is conceived as a formative process that provides feedback on learning, students develop metacognitive skills, learn from their mistakes, and construct more meaningful and lasting learning.

The transition to learning-centred assessment models requires systemic transformations that transcend the individual level of isolated teachers. Educational institutions must implement institutional policies that promote formative assessment cultures, provide robust ongoing training in innovative assessment methodologies, establish working conditions that allow teachers to implement more complex assessment strategies, and develop institutional support systems for improving assessment practices.

Curricular coherence as the foundation of quality learning

The results of the analysis reveal that the internal coherence of curricula is a determining factor in the quality of student learning experiences. The characterisation of curricula as the missing link between universities and society, proposed by De-La-Cruz-Rioja et al. (2022), is particularly revealing of the



tensions that permeate curriculum planning in higher education. This metaphor suggests that curricula often fail to effectively articulate institutional aspirations, social demands, labour market needs and the characteristics of actual students. Curricular coherence operates in multiple dimensions that must be systematically evaluated. Horizontal coherence refers to the articulation between subjects or modules that are taken simultaneously in the same academic period, avoiding unnecessary redundancies and promoting interdisciplinary connections. Vertical coherence implies the logical sequencing of content and competencies throughout the educational trajectory, ensuring that each level builds on previous learning. Coherence between graduate profiles, learning outcomes, curriculum content, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies ensures the constructive alignment of the educational plan.

The curriculum inconsistencies identified by Velázquez-Torres et al. (2024) from the student perspective show that students perceive disconnects that curriculum designers often fail to recognise. This student perception represents valuable information for curriculum evaluation processes, suggesting the need to incorporate the voice of students in the mechanisms for assessing and improving educational plans. Curriculum evaluation that ignores student experiences and perceptions runs the risk of perpetuating curriculum designs that, although coherent on paper, generate fragmented and disjointed experiences in practice. The relationship between curricular coherence and student learning is best understood from constructivist perspectives on learning that emphasise the importance of integrating knowledge and establishing meaningful connections between different areas of knowledge. Fragmented curricula that present isolated subjects without explicit connections make it difficult for students to construct integrated understandings and develop the ability to transfer learning to new contexts. In contrast, coherent educational plans that explicitly promote interdisciplinary connections facilitate deeper and more transferable learning. The evaluation of curricular coherence requires specific methodologies that examine both formal coherence—evidenced in curricular documents—and



experienced coherence—experienced by students and teachers in the actual implementation of the educational plan. These methodologies should include documentary analyses of subject programmes, curriculum maps, and learning outcome matrices, complemented by empirical studies that explore the experiences of students and teachers through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Assessment strategies and their impact on learning

The third dimension of analysis relates to the assessment strategies implemented by teachers and their impact on student learning. The results show that, although there is theoretical recognition of the importance of diversifying assessment strategies, traditional approaches centred on written exams and objective tests continue to predominate. This situation, documented particularly in the Ecuadorian context by Huayamave-Castro et al. (2025), replicates patterns identified in multiple Latin American contexts, suggesting the existence of structural factors that hinder the transformation of assessment practices.

The contrast between alternative and traditional assessment, analysed by Holmos-Flores et al. (2023), reveals tensions between different conceptions of the purpose of assessment. Traditional strategies operate from a logic of verification and certification, assuming that learning is fundamentally the reproduction of knowledge that can be measured objectively. Alternative strategies, in contrast, operate from a formative logic that conceives of learning as a complex process that requires continuous feedback, opportunities for improvement, and gradual development of competencies.

The implementation of alternative assessment strategies faces multiple obstacles that must be addressed systemically. Teacher resistance to change, identified in several documents analysed, often reflects not so much ideological opposition as insecurity about how to implement strategies with which they are unfamiliar. The perception of a greater workload associated with alternative strategies is real when these are implemented without adjustments to teachers' working conditions. Time and material resource constraints represent objective



restrictions that condition the possibilities for implementing more complex strategies.

The differential impact of different assessment strategies on student learning is an area that requires further empirical research in Ecuadorian contexts. Although there is international evidence on the effectiveness of formative strategies, portfolios, authentic assessments, and participatory methodologies, it is necessary to develop studies that examine how these strategies operate in specific educational contexts, considering variables such as student characteristics, available institutional resources, and local educational cultures. Assessment in contexts of socio-educational re-engagement and labour market insertion, analysed by González-Barea et al. (2021), poses specific challenges that broaden our understanding of the diversity of assessment strategies required. Programmes targeting educationally vulnerable populations need to recognise learning developed in non-formal contexts, validate prior experiences, and adapt assessment strategies to the specific characteristics and needs of these students. This perspective challenges homogenising approaches to assessment that assume linear educational trajectories and homogeneous student populations.

Systemic integration as a pathway to educational improvement

The fourth dimension of analysis relates to the integration of different components and levels of the education system to achieve sustainable improvements in student learning. The proposal by Álvarez-Gómez et al. (2020) on the need to integrate systems, programmes, plans, projects, and strategies to achieve educational quality is fundamental to understanding the limitations of fragmented approaches that intervene in isolated components without considering their interrelationships.

The experience of interdisciplinary integration projects documented by Corominas-Ayala (2023) demonstrates the potential of strategies that articulate knowledge from different disciplinary areas and establish connections with real social issues. These types of projects represent a practical implementation of



curricular integration, demonstrating that it is possible to overcome disciplinary fragmentation when there are intentional pedagogical designs and institutional support mechanisms.

The construction of educational programmes, analysed by Yevilao-Alarcón (2019), reveals trends towards more integrated approaches that consider multiple dimensions of the educational process. However, the challenge of coherently articulating theoretical foundations, curriculum design, methodological strategies and evaluation processes persists. These components are often developed in a disjointed manner, resulting in programmes that lack internal coherence and fail to translate into tangible improvements in student learning.

CONCLUSION

The analysis developed in this study leads to the conclusion that the evaluation of educational plans is a determining factor in improving student learning, operating as a feedback mechanism that informs the design, implementation, and adjustment of educational processes. This conclusion is based on the identification of multiple dimensions in which curriculum evaluation impacts learning: the internal coherence of curricula, the relevance of content and competencies, the alignment between objectives, methodologies and evaluation, and the articulation between different levels and components of the education system.

The conceptual evolution of educational evaluation from traditional measurement-centred approaches to learning-centred formative perspectives represents a significant theoretical advance. However, a considerable gap remains between these advanced conceptualisations and the predominant evaluation practices in Ecuadorian educational institutions. Reducing this gap requires systemic interventions that simultaneously address teacher training, institutional policies, organisational cultures, and the resources available for assessment.

Curricular coherence emerges as a necessary condition for facilitating integrated, meaningful, and transferable learning. Fragmented curricula, with isolated



subjects and disjointed content, make it difficult for students to build deep understanding and develop the ability to apply knowledge to diverse contexts. Systematic evaluation of curricular coherence, considering both formal dimensions and the experiences of students and teachers, is essential for identifying inconsistencies and promoting more integrated curriculum designs. The assessment strategies implemented by teachers have a direct impact on student learning. The predominance of traditional strategies centred on written exams and objective tests promotes superficial learning focused on memorisation and reproduction of information. Diversification towards alternative strategies such as portfolios, projects, authentic assessments and participatory methodologies offers the potential to promote deeper learning and develop complex skills. However, the effective implementation of these strategies requires overcoming multiple obstacles related to teacher training, working conditions, available resources and institutional cultures.

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