Course: Foundations of teaching for learning 6: Introduction to student assessment
Assignment 2: Objectively scored test items
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Introduction

Objectively scored test are part of each school systems. However, the way in which they are used varies greatly between countries. This essay will look at objectively scored test items and their use in the Dutch educational context. Besides merely describing its use it will also look at the information these tests give and how the test aligns with the standards advocated in this course.

Objectively scored test items in the Dutch school system

As the Dutch educational system is highly decentralized, the use of objectively scored test items does vary a lot between schools, subjects and teachers. If a teacher likes their use, he or she is free to use them as often as he or she wants. Regardless of their benefits, I only use these tests sparsly when developing my own test. As a physics teacher I am more interested in the thought process required to reach the final answer than the answer itself. Objectively scores are not able to capture the thought process as opposed to open ended questions (which still can be scored quite objectively). Nevertheless, the overall use of objectively scored tests is on the rise in the Netherlands. Especially in the primary education the use of nationwide standardized test is already a common practice. The final test primary school students has been a standardized one for many years. Developed by a independent organization (on behalf of the government), this test determines for a great deal what type of secondary education a student will go to.

Information provided by the objectively scored test

As objectively scored tests are most common in primary education this section will primary aim at this type of education. With the exception of the final test in primary education, students tend not to get any information on how they performed. This is not a problem as these tests do not count for a grade nor influence pass/fail decisions. Teachers on the other hand gain a wealth of knowledge which they can use to improve their teaching. Besides the raw results, teachers are able to see how well each individual student is doing compared to the expected progression of a student in that grade. This data is quite detailed as information is provided for each subject but also for the different domains that make up each subject. As a result, teachers can see what each of their students are good at and where they need to put some more practice in. As a result of this teachers can really differentiate their teaching to make it fitting for the individual student, even though they can stay together as a group.

With the final test primary school students make students (and their parents) do get some feedback. Besides a calculated score (between 500 and 550) they do get an overview of their percentile score. Besides their overall position compared to all the other examinees, this percentile score also gives them insight regarding their choice of type of secondary education. This is done by comparing their scores to

the distribution of scores that is present at each of the types of secondary education. Based on this students and parents can decide which type is best for them.

Differences and similarities with the standards advocated in the course

As the standardized tests are developed by a independent organization (the CITO institute[1]), the quality of the test items is good. Practices overlap with those advocated in the course. A typical development cycle of a question takes several years (from the determining of the content to the actual use on a test) and is tested several times in real classroom settings before it is used on the actual tests. Furthermore, the institute works closely with the University of Twente to include the latest insights in test development in their procedures.

[1] See www.cito.nl