



Article

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-57652024v29id29313125>

## ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACTS OF TEACHING PRACTICES AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS BASED ON A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Avaliação no ensino superior: um panorama dos impactos das práticas docentes e das percepções dos estudantes a partir de uma revisão sistemática da literatura

La evaluación en la enseñanza superior: una visión general de las repercusiones de las prácticas docentes y las percepciones de los estudiantes basada en una revisión bibliográfica sistemática

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**Resumo:** O artigo apresenta uma revisão sistemática de literatura (RSL) com vistas a identificar as principais perspectivas teóricas e práticas mobilizadas na produção do conhecimento sobre avaliação no ensino superior. Metodologicamente, a pesquisa foi realizada em bases de dados online, sem limitação temporal e dos 206 artigos identificados, 52 constituíram o corpus empírico. A análise foi estruturada em quatro principais dimensões, algumas das quais incluindo várias categorias: i) natureza dos estudos; ii) centralidade da avaliação; iii) práticas avaliativas de professores e iv) percepções de estudantes sobre práticas avaliativas. Os resultados indicam uma predominância de estudos empíricos e revelam que, apesar da resistência à adoção de práticas inovadoras, as abordagens formativas e participativas têm ganhado destaque. A revisão também aponta que, enquanto muitos estudantes percebem as avaliações como desconectadas da realidade cotidiana, práticas avaliativas mais contextualizadas e com feedback contínuo são vistas de forma positiva, promovendo maior engajamento e aprendizado significativo. A pesquisa sugere a necessidade de superar práticas tradicionais e adotar modelos avaliativos que favoreçam a

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autonomia, a reflexão crítica e a aplicabilidade do conhecimento no contexto profissional, contribuindo para uma educação superior mais inclusiva e transformadora.

**Palavras-chave:** ensino superior; percepção dos estudantes; práticas avaliativas.

**Abstract:** The article presents a systematic literature review (SLR) with a view to understanding the main theoretical and practical perspectives mobilized in the production of knowledge on assessment in higher education. Methodologically, the search was conducted in online databases without time restrictions. Of the 206 articles identified, 52 formed the empirical corpus. The analysis was structured into four main dimensions, some of which included several categories: i) nature of the studies; ii) centrality of assessment; iii) teachers' assessment practices; and iv) students' perceptions of assessment practices. The results indicate a predominance of empirical studies and reveal that, despite resistance to the adoption of innovative practices, formative and participatory approaches have gained prominence. The review also points out that while many students perceive assessments as disconnected from everyday reality, those assessment practices that are more contextualized and accompanied by continuous feedback are viewed positively, promoting greater engagement and meaningful learning. The research suggests the need to overcome traditional practices and adopt assessment models that favor autonomy, critical reflection, and the applicability of knowledge in professional contexts, contributing to a more inclusive and transformative higher education.

**Keywords:** higher education; students perception; assessment practices.

**Resumen:** El artículo presenta una revisión sistemática de la literatura (RSL) con el objetivo de comprender las principales perspectivas teóricas y prácticas movilizadas en la producción de conocimiento sobre la evaluación en la enseñanza superior. Metodológicamente, la búsqueda se realizó en bases de datos en línea sin restricciones temporales, y de los 206 artículos identificados, 52 conformaron el corpus empírico. El análisis se estructuró en cuatro dimensiones principales, algunas de las cuales incluían varias categorías: i) naturaleza de los estudios; ii) centralidad de la evaluación; iii) prácticas de evaluación de los profesores y; iv) percepciones de los estudiantes sobre las prácticas de evaluación. Los resultados indican un predominio de los estudios empíricos y revelan que, a pesar de la resistencia a la adopción de prácticas innovadoras, los enfoques formativos y participativos han ganado protagonismo. La revisión también señala que, mientras que muchos estudiantes perciben las evaluaciones como desconectadas de la realidad cotidiana, aquellas prácticas de evaluación más contextualizadas y acompañadas de retroalimentación continua son vistas de forma positiva, promoviendo un mayor compromiso y un aprendizaje significativo. La investigación sugiere la necesidad de superar las prácticas tradicionales y adoptar modelos de evaluación que favorezcan la autonomía, la reflexión crítica y la aplicabilidad de los conocimientos en el contexto profesional, contribuyendo a una enseñanza superior más integradora y transformadora.

**Palabras clave:** enseñanza superior; percepción de los estudiantes; prácticas de evaluación.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Learning assessment in higher education is a complex and dynamic field of knowledge, permeated by diverse theoretical perspectives and fundamental principles (Barboza & Nunes, 2019; Di Stasio et al., 2019; Luitel, 2022; Matos, 2010; Pereira et al., 2017; Rawlusyk, 2018). Over time, assessment has been recognized as a social, cultural, and historical practice, collectively produced and interconnected with symbols (Orlandi, 2005; Teles, 2017) and meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1985). Authors such as Hadji (1994), Perrenoud (1999), and Barreira (2019) emphasize the polysemous nature of assessment, which can lead to a lack of consensus and hinder the implementation of effective and consistent evaluative practices.

Studies by Silva and Mendes (2017), Barboza and Nunes (2019), and Mello and Costa Neto (2020) point to a resistance among some education professionals to abandon traditional assessment conceptions, primarily based on written tests and summative evaluation, which may prevent them from adopting more innovative and formative approaches. At the same time, the importance of diversifying practices, valuing constructive feedback, promoting active student participation, and contextualizing assessments has increasingly been highlighted as fundamental aspects of effective and meaningful evaluation (Batistti et al., 2017; Mellado-Moreno et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2017; Souza, 2012).

It is within the framework of trends identified in the reviewed studies, which reveal a lack of consensus on approaches to learning assessment, resistance to more contemporary assessment conceptions, and difficulties in implementing differentiated practices, that the continued investigation in the field of higher education assessment is recognized as pertinent. This is the context to which the present systematic literature review refers. In this regard, identifying the main theoretical and practical perspectives mobilized in the production of knowledge on higher education assessment constituted the guiding research question and objective of this SLR.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The SLR is a relevant research approach that helps identify, interpret, and evaluate the academic production on a given topic published within a specific time frame (García-Peñalvo, 2022). In the specific case of the SLR presented in this article, the methodology followed was based on the proposals of Vilela et al. (2017), Xiao and Watson (2019), and Alves et al. (2022), with the necessary adaptations. These adaptations were made according to the variability of steps suggested by Ramos et al. (2014), considering the specific scope of this study.

The online databases used were Scopus, EbscoHost, Scielo, and CAPES Journals, as they are repositories whose publications are recognized as scientifically high-quality.

Considering the topic under study, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established for the selection of articles. Table 1 summarizes these criteria:

Table 1 – Inclusion Criteria

<b>A</b>	Empirical studies
<b>B</b>	Higher education context
<b>C</b>	Published in peer-reviewed journals
<b>D</b>	Fully available online
<b>E</b>	No time frame limitation
<b>F</b>	Published in Portuguese or English

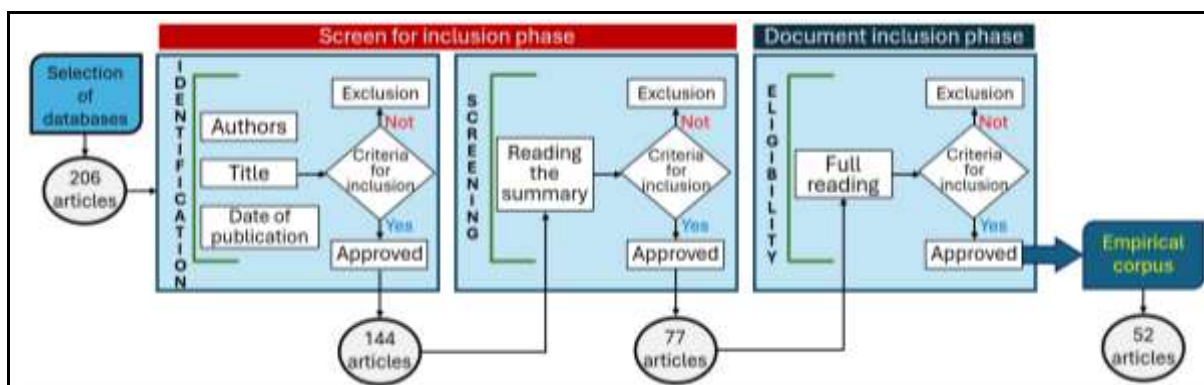
Source: Authors' elaboration (2024).

Data collection was conducted in Portuguese and English, using the keywords "avaliação" (as well as its variants "da/de aprendizagem" and "para a aprendizagem"), "práticas avaliativas," and "ensino superior," and "assessment," "assessment practice," "higher education," and "learning assessment" or "assessment of learning," with no temporal restriction.

In the first stage, 206 articles were identified through the reading of titles, publication years, and authors' names. The reading/analysis of the titles, their lack of relevance to the topic, and the repetition of some articles led to the elimination of 62 articles at this stage. In the second stage, a more in-depth reading of the abstracts was conducted to select those that met the inclusion criteria, resulting in the elimination of 67 articles. In the final stage, the full texts of the articles were read, and 25 articles were eliminated because their focus diverged from the objectives of this SLR. Following this procedure (illustrated in Figure 1) and respecting the identification, selection, and final selection process, 52 articles were considered for the empirical corpus.



Figure 1 – Procedures used for conducting the SLR



Source: Author's elaboration (2024).

### 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Based on the research question and objective that guided this study, the data analysis relied, as previously mentioned, on four main dimensions: (i) the nature of the studies; (ii) the centrality of assessment; (iii) professors' assessment practices; and (iv) students' perceptions of assessment practices.

#### 3.1 Nature of the Studies

The nature of the studies was analyzed according to the following criteria: author and year of publication; country of origin of the study; language used; type of study; and data collection and analysis methodologies. Table 2 presents this information.

Quadro 2 – Natureza dos estudos incluídos na RSL

AUTHOR/YEAR	COUNTRY	LANGUAGE	TYPE OF STUDY	METHODOLOGY
Biggs (1998)	Australia	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Luckesi (2002)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Harlen (2005)	England	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Gurgel; Leite (2006)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Interview; questionnaire
Fernandes (2008)	Portugal	Portuguese	Theoretical	Exploratory
Kalz <i>et al</i> (2008)	Netherlands	English	Empirical	Not indicated
Mahboob (2008)	Australia	English	Empirical	Not indicated
Garcia (2009)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Mourão <i>et al</i> (2009)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Black <i>et al</i> (2010)	England	English	Empirical	Classroom observation; focus group

Marques; Nunes (2011)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Interview; content analysis
Pereira; Flores (2012)	Portugal	Portuguese	Empirical	Questionnaire survey
Souza (2012)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Silva <i>et al</i> (2013)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Qualitative and participatory research
Ferreira (2013)	Portugal	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
William (2013)	England	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Nunes; Neira (2015)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Not applicable
Lucena <i>et al</i> (2016)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Quantitative and interviews
Batista; Ibiapina (2016)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Qualitative and interview
Fernandes (2016)	Portugal	Portuguese	Empirical	Class observations and interviews
Dixson; Worrell (2016)	United States	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Santos (2016)	Portugal	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Barreira <i>et al</i> (2017)	Portugal	Portuguese	Empirical	Questionnaire survey
Batistti <i>et al</i> (2017)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Qualitative, documentary and content analysis
Bule <i>et al</i> (2017)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Descriptive and essayistic conceptual analysis
Galocha <i>et al</i> (2017)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Bibliographic study with emphasis on grey literature
Oliveira; Flores (2017)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Questionnaire survey
Pereira <i>et al</i> (2017)	Portugal	English	Empirical	Questionnaire survey
Silva; Mendes (2017)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Bibliographic analysis and professor interviews
Alzate (2018)	Colombia	Portuguese	Empirical	Focus group
Brito <i>et al</i> (2018)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Black; William (2018)	England	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Pinho <i>et al</i> (2018)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Kitula; Koda (2018)	Tanzania	English	Empirical	Quantitative and questionnaire
Quansah (2018)	Ghana	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Rawlusk (2018)	Canada	English	Empirical	Quantitative and questionnaire
Bolzan <i>et al</i> (2019)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Qualitative, focus group and interviews; discourse analysis

Barboza; Nunes (2019)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Exploratory, quali-quantitative and questionnaire
Efu (2019)	Canada	English	Theoretical	Not applicable
Zimmermann <i>et al</i> (2019)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Exploratory, qualitative, interview and content analysis
Di Stasio <i>et al</i> (2019)	Italy	English	Empirical	Quali-quantitative and questionnaire
Sales; Viana (2020)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Not applicable
Mello; Costa Neto (2020)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Document analysis, questionnaire and content analysis
Nugba; Quansah (2020)	Ghana	English	Empirical	Questionnaire, interview and discourse analysis
Maceno; Giordan (2021)	Brazil	Portuguese	Theoretical	Document analysis and discourse analysis
Silva <i>et al</i> (2021)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Exploratory, questionnaire and content analysis
Ibarra-Saiz <i>et al</i> (2021)	Spain	English	Empirical	Quali-quantitative and questionnaire
Castilho <i>et al</i> (2022)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Qualitative and interview
Mellado-Moreno <i>et al</i> (2022)	Spain and Portugal	Portuguese	Empirical	Quali-quantitative, questionnaire and document analysis
Santos <i>et al</i> (2022)	Brazil	Portuguese	Empirical	Spontaneous reports
Lei (2022)	China	English	Empirical	Questionnaire survey
Luitel (2022)	Nepal	English	Empirical	Qualitative, participant observation and interview

Source: Author's elaboration (2023).

Based on the keywords used for the database search, articles published between 1998 and 2022 were identified (the data collection was carried out in 2022). The years with the highest number of publications were 2017 and 2018 (7 publications each), followed by 2016, 2019, and 2022 (5 publications each). These results highlight the relevance of the topic within the field of academic research, a point corroborated by the findings of several studies, such as Souza (2012), Pereira *et al.* (2017), Rawlusk (2018), and Barboza and Nunes (2019).

Of the articles analyzed, 65% were written in Portuguese and 35% in English, originating from Brazil, Portugal, Colombia, Italy, Ghana, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Nepal, China, Spain, Pakistan, and Tanzania. This indicates that the SLR transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, while also underscoring the importance of the transnational dimension of assessment as a topic of academic, political, and educational relevance. According to Santos (2016) and Black and Wiliam

(2018), assessment should be conceived within a wider social, cultural, political, and educational context.

Regarding the type of study, the results drawn from the corpus show a predominance (60%) of methodologies grounded in empirical studies, that is, research based on the analysis of data concerning concrete assessment practices, supported by data collection and analysis. This may suggest a trend in research oriented toward the production of more solid, practical, and applicable knowledge.

Concerning data collection and analysis methodologies, 32% of the articles are based on surveys, justified by their capacity to encompass broader samples (Pereira & Flores, 2012). Of the remaining studies, 23% relied on interviews, and around 7% combined both techniques, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of interviews demonstrates the value placed on obtaining deeper insights (Bolzan et al., 2019), which could not, in some cases, be achieved through the use of questionnaires alone.

Other approaches, such as document analysis, classroom observation, focus groups, and participatory research, were also identified in the studies analyzed. In the case of document analysis, it was applied to the examination of lesson plans, political-pedagogical projects, and other documents considered relevant for understanding the topic within specific educational settings.

The diversity of methods identified in the studies under review seems to reinforce the idea that, in order to be solid and comprehensive, research must rely on a multireferential set of information, in this case, concerning assessment of learning.

## 3.2 Centrality of assessment

The dimension of *assessment centrality* was analyzed based on the following categories: Assessment characteristics; Assessment concepts and perspectives; professors' assessment practices; and Students' perceptions of assessment practices.

### 3.2.1 Assessment characteristics

In general, the SLR made it possible to verify that the empirical articles in the corpus share common characteristics regarding the theoretical premises of assessment in higher education: (i) it is inseparable from professors' instructional practices, students' learning processes, and educational policies within the curriculum (Brito et al., 2018; Castilho et al., 2022; Maceno & Giordan, 2021); (ii) it is understood as a social, cultural, and historical practice, produced collectively and intertwined with symbols and meanings (Luckesi, 2002; Maceno & Giordan, 2021; Mourão et al., 2009); (iii) it is processual and ongoing, conducted throughout the duration of the course or curricular unit, rather than being punctual or momentary (Barreira et al., 2017; Mello & Costa



Neto, 2020; Santos et al., 2022); (iv) it allows the monitoring of the educational process and fosters conditions for improvements in learning (Harlen, 2005; Marques & Nunes, 2011; Sales & Viana, 2020); (v) it has a certifying, controlling, and judgmental nature, with value judgments made by the professor based on their culture, feelings, ideology, and personal biases (Brito et al., 2018; Harlen, 2005; Silva et al., 2021); (vi) it promotes autonomy, self-criticism, and reflective action by both students and professors through self-assessment (Fernandes, 2008; Silva & Mendes, 2017); and (vii) it enhances feedback and dialogue among participants as essential conditions for progress in this domain (Castilho et al., 2022; Silva & Mendes, 2017).

Although it is acknowledged that there are advances and setbacks in assessment thinking, the analysis revealed that the use of dialogue (feedback) between assessors and assessed individuals is essential to make assessment an integrated part of the curriculum development process. When understood as an integrated and integral component of the curriculum, assessment assumes a unifying role in the teaching-learning process, while also providing transparency, thereby making it fairer and transformative for educational and assessment practices.

Indeed, a significant body of studies highlights the idea that assessment is a judgment process (Alzate, 2018; Brito et al., 2018) and therefore needs to be based on diverse and well-founded information (Barreira et al., 2017; Marques & Nunes, 2011) that allows for the evaluation of students' progress in relation to the intended learning outcomes as solidly and transparently as possible (Castilho et al., 2022; Maceno & Giordan, 2021), always aiming to foster improvements in these learning outcomes.

### **3.2.2 Concepts and perspectives on assessment**

Within this dimension, the main concepts and perspectives mobilized in studies on assessment in higher education were extracted from the empirical corpus. Among the 52 articles examined, only two did not present a clear concept of assessment. In the remaining works, however, a variety of conceptions and perspectives of and on assessment were identified.

The study by Pinho et al. (2018) mobilizes essential perspectives to ground the notion of assessment, addressing its meanings and purposes. The authors emphasize that a clear understanding of these aspects is crucial for proposing meaningful and transformative actions in the field of assessment. In line with this reading, the analysis revealed the use of various terminologies to define the concept of assessment, such as: to verify, to judge, to estimate, to situate, to represent, to determine, and to advise, which, as highlighted by Bule et al. (2017), point to a polysemic understanding of assessment. Converging with this perspective, the study by Barboza and Nunes (2019) warns of the wide range of terminologies employed to discuss assessment and stresses the need to safeguard this aspect in debates on the subject.

In summary, the studies analyzed highlight as a prevailing conception that assessment is always permeated by a subjective dimension, rooted in human and social characteristics and perceptions. Alongside this perspective, the analysis also revealed that, although grounded in assumptions, instruments, and procedures that support the act of assessing, this process is invariably accompanied by judgments linked to certain norms, namely, policies established within the curriculum and the culture associated with the assessment process, as well as to the procedures and forms of communication employed by professors (Luckesi, 2002; Maceno; Giordan, 2021; Mello; Costa Neto, 2020; Santos et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2021).

### 3.2.2.1 Types and purposes of assessment

The SLR made it possible to identify three main types of assessment that have been used in the context of higher education: diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment (Batistti et al., 2017; Castilho et al., 2022; Galocha et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2021).

Diagnostic assessment is indicated as being carried out with the purpose of obtaining a set of information that identifies difficulties, obstacles, potentialities, and other aspects that need improvement in the teaching–learning processes (Bule et al., 2017; Castilho et al., 2022; Ferreira, 2013; Sales & Viana, 2020). Its aim is to guide professors' planning and enable effective pedagogical interventions (Marques & Nunes, 2011; Mourão et al., 2009; Silva et al., 2013).

Formative assessment, as highlighted by the analysis, is associated with regulation, feedback, and self-regulation during the teaching process (Barreira, 2019). It serves to support both professors in reconfiguring learning objectives and strategies (Fernandes, 2008) and students in learning more effectively (Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Fernandes, 2008), being recognized as inclusive rather than selective in nature (Luckesi, 2002). The continuous character that defines formative assessment helps to promote learning and to establish objectives aligned with the curriculum that is expected to be developed (Silva et al., 2013). Several studies further emphasize that even when students face difficulties, this type of assessment contributes to their development in multiple areas (Silva & Mendes, 2017), since professors can become more aware of their didactic process (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Formative assessment has therefore been associated with the idea of assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Fernandes, 2008; Mellado-Moreno et al., 2022; Rawlusyk, 2018), due to the opportunities it provides both professors and students to regulate the teaching–learning process, identify their own difficulties, and foster the adoption of new pedagogical practices that enable all students to make progress in their learning. Despite these favorable aspects, Silva and Mendes (2017) indicate that assessment for learning will only be effective if there is a genuine interest in what students are learning, and not merely in their approval, thereby avoiding a shift toward assessment of learning (with a more

classificatory and summative nature). Formative assessment, therefore, aims to enhance the teaching–learning process by identifying difficulties and adjusting strategies so that educational objectives can be effectively achieved (Bolzan et al., 2019).

Summative assessment, as the analysis shows, makes it possible to evaluate the knowledge acquired at the end of a curricular unit, activity, or teaching–learning period (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Its purpose, therefore, is twofold: on the one hand, to verify the level of learning achieved by students (Galocha et al., 2017), and on the other, to contribute to examining the effectiveness of curriculum development (Black & Wiliam, 2018). This is generally done through grading, which certifies whether the student advances to the next level (Silva et al., 2021). According to Barboza and Nunes (2019, p. 154), summative assessment “still relies at times on a classificatory and authoritarian perspective of evaluation, and at other times on a subjective perspective, often grounded in a diffuse logic without pedagogical support.” Overall, summative assessment is associated with the idea of assessment of learning (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Castilho et al., 2022; Mellado-Moreno et al., 2022; Rawlusk, 2018), whose primary aim is to measure students’ achievement in relation to predefined learning objectives. It is usually carried out through tests and exams that assess how well students have mastered the taught content or skills. Its purpose is to assign grades, provide feedback, and evaluate the success of the educational program (Bule et al., 2017; Castilho et al., 2022; Fernandes, 2008; Rawlusk, 2018). From a critical perspective, Garcia (2009) warns that the classificatory attribute of summative assessment should be avoided, as it may become essentially selective and exclusionary, leading students to focus on reproducing content rather than on its appropriation and development (Batista & Ibiapina, 2016; Santos et al., 2022).

Following the analysis conducted and invoking the viewpoint of Castilho et al. (2022, p. 2), it seems possible to conclude that diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are valuable for learning. It can also be concluded, based on the reflections of Brito et al. (2018, p. 5), that although a certain resistance and even rejection of the idea of summative assessment persists, it continues to be an object of study—perhaps due to the “reserved place” and the “importance that (...) it still holds (...) in some teaching projects and in courses at all levels.” In agreement with these latter authors, Harlen (2005) argues that there is some value in maintaining the distinction between formative and summative types of assessment, seeking synergy in each of them, since the same assessment can be used for different purposes. Thus, this still appears to be an open debate.

Although the analysis highlights a certain persistence of perspectives oriented toward the purposes of assessment as a process of determining outcomes (summative assessment), or as a means of regulating, by professors and students, the teaching and learning process (formative assessment), critical perspectives have emerged. Among

these is assessment as learning (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2021; Luitel, 2022). Assessment as learning is based on the principles that students are protagonists in the educational process (Black & Wiliam, 2018), participating in the design (how, when, and with what) that guides assessment, thereby promoting the quality of the evaluative process (Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2021). These actions are conceived as challenges that encourage students to engage in motivating and complex activities, fostering the development of high-level skills and meaningful performances (Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2021), directly impacting their self-regulation and the transfer of learning beyond immediate tasks (Black & Wiliam, 2018). This type of assessment aims at the autonomy and emancipation of students in their learning and evaluation processes, presupposing, therefore, the use of strategies of negotiation, dialogue, and mediation between professors and students, in a dialectical-liberatory and democratic logic (Souza, 2012). Although these perspectives bring a new outlook to the assessment process, according to Souza (2012, p. 235), they still need to be “recognized as alternatives by critical educators, (also taking into account that) research findings in the field have shown that in practice these principles are rarely implemented, especially in higher education.”

In summary, the analysis allowed us to infer that assessment of and for learning aims to diagnose and monitor the teaching–learning process by identifying difficulties and/or the need to reconfigure strategies in order to achieve the intended objectives of the teaching process, not necessarily incorporating the active participation of students in the evaluative process. On the other hand, assessment as learning aims for the student to assume a central role in the development of the learning process and in their self-regulation, with a view to preparing them for the challenges of the labor market (Luitel, 2022).

### **3.3 Professors’ assessment practices**

Regarding this dimension, the analysis revealed that studies based on data about concrete assessment practices in higher education are still scarce, and this remains a highly controversial topic (Barboza & Nunes, 2019). In this regard, the study by Santos et al. (2022, p. 587) warns that “there is not much understanding about what higher education should be, its functions, its forms, its objectives and philosophies, nor about how to assess it.”

Based on the authors listed in the SLR, it is possible to state that assessment instruments are part of the concept of assessment practices, although they are not synonymous. Assessment practices encompass not only the application of instruments, but also the criteria of analysis, the planning of activities, and the decisions made based on the results obtained (Luckesi, 2002). Instruments, in turn, are described as tools or resources that operationalize assessment practices, but do not exhaust them. They are used to identify and qualify learning, constituting only one stage within the broader evaluation process. In this sense, these instruments are understood through different



terms such as assessment method (Cordeiro & Della Justina, 2013), assessment procedure (Silva & Mendes, 2017), or assessment activity (Oliveira & Flores, 2017), and they are often used interchangeably with assessment practice, which may reflect the lack of pedagogical training of professors in higher education.

The SLR made it possible to identify a set of studies that denounce the use of tests, examinations, and other assessment instruments associated with traditional teaching models and evaluation practices (Batista & Ibiapina, 2016; Black et al., 2010; Garcia, 2009; Luckesi, 2002; Mourão et al., 2009; Pereira & Flores, 2012; Santos, 2016). The excessive use of test-based assessment practices has long been recognized as a practice that does not promote effective learning, as it emphasizes low-level cognitive activities, warns Biggs (1998). In this regard, Luckesi (2002) suggests that professors may adopt assessment practices automatically, without reflecting on their true meaning, due to ingrained habits that become unconscious. Garcia (2009) and Mello & Costa Neto (2020) emphasize that assessment practices in higher education are often limited to summative procedures, reflecting an entrenched traditional assessment culture (Garcia, 2009; Luitel, 2022), lacking formative approaches that neither address contemporary educational challenges nor reflect the desired quality criteria (Barboza & Nunes, 2019). Both Batista & Ibiapina (2016, p. 1997) and Silva & Mendes (2017) state that the traditional perspective of assessment, although combined with other procedures, still serves as a mechanism for measuring results in higher education. However, this perspective does not keep pace with pedagogical innovations, prioritizing the transmission of knowledge rather than the promotion of learning (Sales & Viana, 2020). Beyond these limitations of traditional practice, its excessive use provokes in students reactions described by Souza (2012) as discriminatory, selective, pressuring, and fear-inducing—feelings often generated by the control and power exercised by the professor. Pereira et al. (2017, p. 14) point out that students feel less confident when assessed by traditional methods and that these practices impact both their performance and their attitudes toward learning. Likewise, Silva & Mendes (2017, p. 285) indicate that “a climate of tension is often created around the administration of the exam, which can emotionally destabilize the student and negatively affect their results.” In this sense, it is recommended that professors use traditional methods consciously, recognizing their limitations, and not as “the result of ignorance of other possibilities, the pursuit of practicality, or distrust regarding students’ work” (Silva & Mendes, 2017, p. 287).

Other studies reveal the use of written assignments carried out individually or in groups (Fernandes, 2016; Gurgel & Leite, 2006; Mourão et al., 2009; Pereira & Flores, 2012; Rawlusk, 2018). Another set of studies highlights the use of more participatory assessment practices, such as debates, problem-solving exercises in the classroom context, and group activities (Batista & Ibiapina, 2016; Fernandes, 2016; Gurgel & Leite, 2006; Nunes & Neira, 2015; Rawlusk, 2018).

There are also studies that refer to more formative/transformative/alternative assessment practices, involving, for example, the development of portfolios, simulations, reports, and projects (Barreira et al., 2017; Gurgel & Leite, 2006; Kalz et al., 2008; Mahboob, 2008; Pereira & Flores, 2012; Zimmermann et al., 2019). Some other studies address personalized assessment, represented by self-assessment, peer assessment, and collaborative assessment (Bolzan et al., 2019; Fernandes, 2016; Garcia, 2009; Mellado-Moreno et al., 2022; Rawlusyk, 2018), as well as assessments conducted through the production of reviews, article writing and/or reviewing, summaries, monographs, short investigations, poster presentations, and seminars (Barreira et al., 2017; Batistti et al., 2017; Gurgel & Leite, 2006; Mahboob, 2008; Zimmermann et al., 2019).

Formative/alternative practices are recognized as enabling students to collaborate and solve problems, taking on an active role in the training/assessment process (Di Stasio et al., 2019; Efu, 2019; Luitel, 2022). Presentations of assignments and simulations (Batistti et al., 2017; Oliveira & Flores, 2017; Zimmermann et al., 2019) are some examples of formative/alternative practices, which not only positively impact learning but also promote the socialization and humanization of assessment (Santos et al., 2022).

The choice of assessment instrument by the professor plays a crucial role in students' performance and in their learning strategies, argues Mahboob (2008). Nevertheless, as highlighted by Santos (2016), it is important to recognize that no single instrument is capable of fully encompassing all dimensions of learning. Mourão et al. (2009) emphasize that each instrument has its own merit depending on the objectives of the assessment, and that their diversified use allows professors to develop assessment practices more closely aligned with students' learning processes (Brito et al., 2018).

Within the scope of studies that point to formative/alternative assessment practices, the importance of providing feedback to students is highlighted. Bolzan et al. (2019, p. 388) conclude that "professors do not provide students with the feedback that assessment [...] requires." Although there is an inseparability between feedback and the regulation of learning (Fernandes, 2016), some assessment practices may make this possibility more or less restrictive, observes Garcia (2009). Along the same lines are the studies by Pereira & Flores (2012) and Silva et al. (2013), for whom feedback represents an opportunity for students to develop a more accurate critical sense through self-assessment, while also offering professors insights into their own performance, granting them the opportunity to self-assess and encouraging them to improve their teaching process.

### 3.4 Students' perceptions of assessment practices

The analysis made it possible to develop the overarching idea that taking students' perceptions of assessment practices into account is essential for a deeper understanding of teaching and learning methods (Nugba & Quansah, 2020) and for adequately preparing students for their professional careers (Garcia, 2009).

Studies by Pereira and Flores (2012), Barboza and Nunes (2019), Bolzan et al. (2019), Pereira et al. (2017), Nugba and Quansah (2020), and Santos et al. (2022) highlighted that one of the students' perceptions is that assessment practices lack relevance and meaningfulness in relation to their objectives; in other words, they are mere formalities, disconnected from the practical application of knowledge acquired during the teaching-learning process, emphasizing the reproduction of theoretical content rather than its real-world application.

The lack of real-world application, relying instead on instruments that merely replicate knowledge, leads students to perceive assessments as ineffective in providing relevant information, rendering the process shallow, flawed, repetitive, outdated, and of limited usefulness (Bolzan et al., 2019; Nugba & Quansah, 2020). On the other hand, students may exhibit positive attitudes when they perceive assessments as fair, which is reflected in their learning and motivation (Pereira et al., 2017), challenging them to apply knowledge in practical contexts and promoting the development of technical and scientific skills (Nugba & Quansah, 2020).

Another perception relates to the assessment of students' attitudes in the classroom. For students, professor assessments are incomplete because they overlook an important aspect of education, focusing instead on evaluating cognitive abilities and technical skills rather than attitudinal aspects (such as engagement with learning, participation in activities, interest, and commitment) (Barreira et al., 2017; Batista & Ibiapina, 2016; Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Fernandes, 2008; Maceno & Giordan, 2021; Marques & Nunes, 2011; Mellado-Moreno et al., 2022; Mourão et al., 2009; Sales & Viana, 2020; Santos, 2016; Silva et al., 2013), and thus fail to serve any role in guiding students toward improving their learning path (Bolzan et al., 2019).

Other perceptions indicate that students understand that the established criteria should help clarify the objectives of assessment, ensuring greater objectivity and more precise monitoring of learning progress (Mellado-Moreno et al., 2022; Pereira & Flores, 2012). Ibarra-Sáiz et al. (2021) emphasize that assessments are meaningful to students only when they are consistent with what will be assessed and how they will be evaluated.

The analysis also highlighted the perception that assessment is a process aimed at grading, intended for assigning marks, and when associated with tests and exams, results in unfair evaluations that rank students hierarchically (Bolzan et al., 2019; Mello & Costa Neto, 2020; Oliveira & Flores, 2017; Pereira & Flores, 2012; Santos et al., 2022).

Added to this is a conservative perspective among professors and institutions, which grants assessment an authoritarian and primarily classificatory character, aiming to measure the capacity for memorizing information or the content presented (Luckesi, 2002; Pereira & Flores, 2012).

Classificatory instruments are seen as objectionable resources by students (Pereira & Flores, 2012), reducing the learning perspective to categorization, with classifications recorded and converted into numbers that can be added and averaged (Luckesi, 2002). This type of grading simplifies all the information obtained during assessment into a numerical or verbal symbol without providing insights into the reasons underlying that classification (Bule et al., 2017; Oliveira & Flores, 2017). This focus on the value scale hinders professors' ability to identify and correct errors and establishes a ranking, culminating in a final selection where only those who achieve the expected averages are included (Oliveira & Flores, 2017).

In this regard, the study by Silva and Mendes (2017, p. 292) warns that some professors "believe that grades are important for establishing a ranking among students, according to each one's dedication and merit." This same perspective is equally shared by Santos et al. (2022), who concluded that higher education professors still use tools to verify whether students can achieve the expected outcome and, in a classificatory manner, determine whether they pass or fail.

According to Souza (2012, p. 233), "most of the time, pressure, fear, control, and power, dictated and expressed in assessment practices" represent for students "a highly critical process [...] because they provoke situations of anxiety and stress; lead to injustices [...]; and are carried out with a high degree of subjectivity" (Lucena et al., 2016, p. 18). "Often, a tense environment is created around the administration of exams, which can emotionally destabilize the student and negatively impact their results," warn Silva and Mendes (2017, p. 285). From the perspective of Nugba and Quansah (2020), environments that may generate moments of tension do not foster knowledge development. Students prefer to be in an environment that promotes fair assessment, involves a reasonable workload, and relates to the real world and professional practice, note Barreira et al. (2017).

However, the data indicate that students' perceptions of the environment are not always negative; in some cases, they are associated with moments of success and reflection, promoting discoveries and new concepts for the development of technical skills (Pereira et al., 2017). In line with this focus, Ferreira (2013) recommends creating a classroom environment in which students are not afraid to express their doubts, uncertainties, and difficulties. Silva et al. (2021, p. 8) advise that the "assessment process should no longer be seen as arduous, rigid, and negative, but rather as a continuous process of development."

Continuous assessment is perceived by students as "an important practice to be adopted by professors" (Lucena et al., 2016, p. 23). If applied "only at the end of the



teaching-learning process, it may present an authoritarian perspective [...], given submission to a single assessment" (Galocha et al., 2017, p. 31), failing to cover all the content studied, and if it does, the volume of information is so large that recalling it makes the assessment unfair and, once again, purposeless. When assessment is not process-oriented, students exhibit behaviors such as "cramming at the last minute before the exam" or "studying solely for the exam" (Silva & Mendes, 2017, p. 287). In this context, assessment gains priority over learning, leading students to focus only on the content that will be tested, limiting their study to a short period before the assessment instead of distributing it throughout the course (Pereira et al., 2017).

## 4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reflections developed here remain open, unfinished, and challenging. Despite advances in understanding assessment in higher education, there is still a need for further research to explore professors' practices and perspectives, as well as students' perceptions, particularly within this context.

In terms of the nature of the studies, the records analyzed in the SLR indicate a significant predominance of empirical research, representing 60% of the total analyzed and published mostly in Portuguese. This trend suggests a growing movement toward the production of applicable and contextualized knowledge. Moreover, the observed methodological diversity, which includes questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, highlights the need for a multi-referential approach, helping to capture the complexity of assessment in higher education and allowing different voices and perspectives to be heard.

The studies also demonstrated, through geographic distribution, that the topic is of global interest and applies to diverse contexts, each with its own cultural and political issues, playing a fundamental role in how assessment is approached.

The centrality of assessment reveals that the act of evaluating is characterized as a continuous process, marked by symbols and meanings that go beyond mere judgment of results to measure students' learning. It is intrinsically linked to cultural, social, and historical factors that influence pedagogical practices, students' ways of learning, and educational policies. This perspective reflects the authors' concern that assessment should be seen not only as a tool to certify learning progress but also as an opportunity to create conditions for meaningful improvements. On the other hand, challenges persist, such as the predominance of practices that reinforce control and certification, often associated with traditional and subjective views of the act of evaluating.

It became evident from the SLR that there is a multiplicity of concepts and terminologies associated with assessment, which may reflect the polysemy of the concept and the complexity of the act of evaluating, but also highlights the need for

greater clarity in defining assessment criteria and procedures. The results reveal three main types of assessment: diagnostic assessment is valued for its ability to identify needs and guide pedagogical planning; formative assessment is recognized as an essential tool for regulating learning and promoting inclusive strategies; and summative assessment, although widely used, is criticized for its classificatory nature, which can reinforce exclusionary practices focused on content reproduction.

The analysis reaffirms feedback as a transformative element in assessment, as the dialogue between evaluators and students not only enhances learning but also promotes important reflections on pedagogical practices. On the other hand, the review also indicates that this practice is still underutilized in many contexts, limiting its positive impact on academic development.

The professors' assessment practices are a strategic component for the quality of teaching and learning in the context under study, but they still reveal an imbalance between the predominance of traditional methods and the adoption of innovative approaches. The data indicate that the use of traditional methods remains widely applied as the main form of assessment. These practices, often associated with summative evaluation, have been criticized for emphasizing lower-level cognitive skills, frequently failing to foster meaningful learning, and perpetuating an exclusionary and mechanistic assessment culture, even though they may be useful in specific contexts.

On the other hand, the review highlights a set of assessment practices that move away from the traditional model, proposing more participatory, innovative, and inclusive approaches, usually associated with formative evaluation (e.g., self-assessment, collaborative or peer assessment, systematic observation, portfolios, field activities, laboratory essays). This practice, in turn, has shown potential to engage students in a more meaningful way, promoting the development of critical and reflective skills, emphasizing continuous feedback and active student involvement in the assessment process, and contributing to deeper and more contextualized learning.

Finally, students' perceptions of assessment practices are a crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked, as they are central participants in the educational process and provide valuable insights into the impact of these practices on their learning, motivation, and academic experience. One of the main perceptions highlighted in the reviewed literature is the lack of perceived relevance of assessment practices in relation to the real demands of the workplace and everyday life. Many students consider that assessments, often based on content reproduction, have little practical application. These assessments, focused exclusively on assigning grades, frequently create environments of tension and anxiety, which compromise students' performance and well-being. Such practices, by prioritizing quantification, discourage continuous and meaningful learning.

In contrast, practices that promote the development of technical and scientific skills and challenge students to solve problems are viewed more positively. Assessments perceived as fair and transparent foster trust and contribute to a more positive learning environment. When students understand the objectives of assessment and the criteria used, they feel more confident and engaged in the process.

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## Authorship contribution

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- a) Formulation of research ideas and objectives.
- b) Responsibility for planning, organizing, and conducting research activities.
- c) Data collection and analysis, drafting the text, and final review.

### Amélia Veiga

- a) Supervision of the research.
- b) Active contributions in the theoretical-conceptual field.
- c) Verification of the consistency and results of data analysis.
- d) Critical review, final text revision, and approval of the final version of the work.

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- c) Verification of the consistency and results of data analysis.
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## Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the article "Assessment in Higher Education: An Overview of the Impacts of Teaching Practices and Students' Perceptions Based on a Systematic Literature Review".

## Data availability

The data underlying this research are contained within the article.

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