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ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS FOLLOWING THE LOWER EDUCATIONAL STANDARD IN THE 3RD GRADE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract
The article discusses the assessment of knowledge in students enrolled in the program with a lower educational standard (NIS), with a focus on the third grade of primary school. It presents the specific features required for differentiated and developmentally appropriate assessment in accordance with the individual needs of children. Assessment in NIS programs must be designed to be multidimensional and inclusive, where formative assessment, clear performance criteria, and the use of various learning aids and approaches adapted to the cognitive and social abilities of students play a significant role.
This study is theoretically grounded in the formative assessment literature, emphasizing feedback, self-assessment, and clear success criteria as levers for learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). Alignment with Bloom's revised taxonomy ensures that tasks address multiple cognitive processes from remembering to creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The use of visual rubrics and multimodal supports is consistent with evidence that explicit criteria and well-designed artifacts improve students' understanding of quality and support equitable participation (Brookhart, 2013; Mayer, 2009).
The article emphasizes the importance of understanding assessment as a pedagogical tool to support learning and encourages the establishment of an inclusive and supportive learning environment for students with special needs.
Key words: lower educational standard, formative assessment, Bloom's taxonomy, adapted assessment, case study.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment of knowledge in students who are educated according to the program with a lower educational standard is complex and requires a multifaceted understanding of individual characteristics, developmental difficulties, and the learning potential of each student. Since this group of students often achieves lower learning objectives, but can develop important functional competencies with appropriate support, assessment must be formative, supportive, and differentiated (Pečjak & Košir, 2018).
Recent research emphasizes that assessment in inclusive education must balance fairness with developmental appropriateness. Formative assessment, supported by descriptive feedback, self-regulation, and scaffolding, has been shown to be especially effective for learners with special educational needs (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). The aim of this article is to present appropriate assessment methods that are aligned with the NIS curriculum (MVI, 2011), with legislation (ZOsn, 2023; Rules on Assessment, 2021), and with modern pedagogical guidelines.

THEORETICAL PART

1. Pedagogical Foundations of Assessment in NIS

Assessment of students in the lower educational standard (NIS) program must be based on the principles of inclusive pedagogy, where the key is adapting assessment procedures to the individual abilities of each student (Novak, 2015). In addition to the already mentioned diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment, self-evaluation has recently gained prominence, allowing students to gain insight into their own learning and progress (Pečjak & Košir, 2018).

Evidence from metacognition research shows that self-assessment and student involvement in developing criteria enhance ownership and deepen learning outcomes (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Panadero, Andrade, & Brookhart, 2016). This aligns with constructivist principles underlying differentiated assessment practices.

According to the constructivist approach, knowledge should result from the active construction of meaning. Therefore, assessment must allow for multiple ways of demonstrating knowledge, which is especially important for students with learning difficulties (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Assessment must primarily be:

- Diagnostic (identifying the state of knowledge),
- Formative (ongoing support for learning),
- Summative (final evaluation of knowledge).

According to Black & Wiliam (1998), formative assessment has the strongest impact on the learning progress of students with learning difficulties. Descriptive assessment is also important, as it focuses on progress rather than merely on achieved results.

Success criteria and points used in subject-specific rubrics can also be interpreted as qualitative indicators of student achievement. For instance, a score of 5 points reflects mastery and functional application of knowledge, whereas 3 points indicate partial achievement with scaffolding, and 1 point represents emerging skills requiring intensive support. Thus, the rubrics allow not only quantitative but also qualitative interpretation of student performance (Sadler, 1989; Brookhart, 2013).

2. Normative Frameworks

- Primary School Act (ZOsn, 2023): stipulates that assessment must be adapted to the abilities of students.
- Rules on Knowledge Assessment and Student Progression in Primary School (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 60/2014, 64/2020): allow the use of adapted forms of testing and assessment.
- Curricula for NIS (MVI, 2011): define fundamental goals that the student achieves with support, gradually, and functionally.

In addition to the basic legislative documents, it is also important to consider:

- The Concept of Adaptations for Students with Special Needs (ZRSŠ, 2017), which recommends diverse forms of assessment, consideration of learning styles, and the use of compensatory techniques (e.g., audio recordings, multisensory supports).
- The Inclusion Strategy (MVI, 2022), which emphasizes the right of students to equal opportunities in knowledge assessment and appropriate support.

3. Recommended Methods and Forms of Assessment (Expanded Section)

This statement is supported by international evidence. Formative peer and self-assessment enhance metacognition and motivation (Panadero et al., 2016), gamification increases engagement and reduces test anxiety (Hamari et al., 2016), and visual rubrics combined with feedback loops are proven to strengthen learning outcomes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Best practices indicate the effectiveness of methods that include:

- Multimodal approaches, such as the use of images, sound, movement, and concrete tools that cater to different learning styles.
- Digital tools (e.g., Kahoot, Quizlet, Book Creator), which enable interactive assessment and easier adaptation.
- Process-based assessment, which documents student progress over a longer period (notes, learning journals).

A table of methods is appropriate, but could be expanded with:

Method	***Description***	***Additional Benefit***
Self-evaluation	Student assesses own work using a checklist or reflection	Strengthens metacognitive skills
Pair/group work	Collaborative task with a peer	Enhances social learning and peer support
Use of visual rubrics	Evaluation criteria with icons or colours	Greater clarity for the student

These approaches are consistent with international recommendations that stress multimodal and student-centred practices in order to ensure equity in learning (OECD, 2018). Digital and gamified tools not only increase engagement but also reduce assessment-related anxiety (Mayer, 2009).

4. The Role of Criteria and Scoring

It is important that criteria are transparent and understood by the student. Research shows that assessment performance improves when criteria are visually represented (icons, colour scales) and when students are involved in their development (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

It is also advisable to introduce descriptive feedback, where the teacher provides a short description of progress and suggestions for improvement instead of a numerical grade (formative function).

5. Recommended Methods and Forms of Assessment

Method	*Description*	*Benefits*
Product	Drawing, poster, model, written work	Enables visual expression of knowledge
Performance	Oral presentation, performance, singing, acting in a play	Builds confidence, assesses social skills
Observation	Ongoing monitoring of student work (using rubrics or journals)	Objective recording of processes, not just results
Portfolio	Collection of products, self-reflection sheets, observation notes	Tracks progress over time
Conversation/Interview	Teacher asks questions based on visual material or the student's personal experience	Accessible format for students with speech and language difficulties
Gamification	Knowledge assessment through play (memory games, bingo, quizzes, flashcards)	Encourages motivation and reduces stress

6. The Role of Criteria and Scoring

Criteria must be clear, visually presented, and adapted to the developmental level of the students. The use of rubrics and descriptive scales (e.g., 1–5 points) is recommended, with each level described using behavioural indicators

CASE STUDY – A 3rd Grade Student in the Adapted Education Program

The student is 9 years old, enrolled in the 3rd grade of primary school, and follows a special curriculum with a lower educational standard (NIS). He shows difficulties in understanding and expressing himself in his mother tongue, works at a slower pace, and requires a multisensory approach to learning. The evaluation process focuses on formative assessment and the development of functional knowledge based on understanding, application, analysis, and creation – aligned with Bloom's taxonomy.

The case study was structured according to international recommendations for evidence-informed practice in special education (Cook & Cook, 2011). To ensure transparency, tasks were explicitly linked to Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) and formative assessment principles were systematically applied. This design increases the validity of the findings and allows replication in similar contexts.

Progress was systematically monitored through ongoing formative assessment and teacher observation protocols. Although a formal control group was not included, descriptive data indicate measurable improvement, such as increased independence in completing tasks, greater narrative coherence in oral retelling, and higher accuracy in solving mathematical problems. Future studies should incorporate control–experimental designs and

standardized pre-test and post-test instruments to validate the causal impact of formative assessment on achievement (Cook & Cook, 2011; Slavin, 2002).

1. Subject: Slovene (Language)
Learning Objective: The student recognizes the structure of a story using picture material and retells it in his own words, developing oral expression and understanding of basic narrative elements (Bloom: understanding, application).

Task: Recognize a story through four sequential illustrations and retell the story orally. Additional task: write the story in three sentences using visual supports (pictures, sentence starters).

Success Criteria (Rubric – 5 points):

- **5 points**: Clear sequence of events, basic vocabulary used, fluent and understandable expression.
- **3 points**: Story told with some prompts; events recognized but needs help with logical sequence.
- **1 point**: Tells separate elements of the story with repeated prompts; needs specific questions to form sentences.

Formative Approach: The teacher provides ongoing feedback, encourages student self-assessment ("What did you do well? What can you improve next time?"), and uses a visual rubric to help the student understand expectations.

2. Subject: Mathematics

Learning Objective: The student solves simple arithmetic problems with concrete examples and uses illustrations to solve word problems (Bloom: application, analysis).

Task 1: Addition and subtraction up to 20 using manipulatives (e.g., beans, blocks).
- **Scoring**: Each correct solution = 1 point (10 tasks = 10 points max).
- Additional: The student explains how the solution was reached.

Task 2: Word problem with visual support:

"I have 5 apples. I got 3 more. How many do I have altogether?"

- **Bonus**: Correct use of an illustration (drawing or using objects) = +2 points.

Formative Approach: The teacher focuses on the understanding of the process, not just the result. Through questions, the student is encouraged to use metacognitive strategies ("How did you think about it? What would you do differently?").

3. Subject: Environmental Studies

Learning Objective: The student names the four seasons, identifies their characteristics, and presents them appropriately on a poster (Bloom: remembering, understanding, creating).

Task: Create a poster with illustrations of the four seasons, including artistic, verbal, and symbolic elements.

Criteria (Total 10 points):

- All four seasons illustrated (4 points)
- Seasonal characteristics labelled (4 points)
- Use of appropriate colours, legible writing, organized layout (2 points)

Formative Approach: Feedback is based on rubric criteria. The student engages in self-evaluation ("Which part do you like the most? What could you add?").

4. Subject: Music Education

Learning Objective: The student performs a simple song with movement in front of the group and expresses musical experience through body language (Bloom: application, expression).

Task: Perform a song with accompanying movements in front of the class (individually or in a group, depending on the student's preference).

Criteria (Total 5 points):

- Engagement (0–2 points)
- Sense of rhythm and melody (0–2 points)
- Body posture and emotional expression (0–1 point)

Formative Approach: The teacher uses video recording (with student consent) for self-reflection. Feedback includes praise for effort and suggestions for improvement (e.g., "Your voice was clear; next time, try adding more movement").

5. Subject: Physical Education

Learning Objective: The student develops balance and coordination by overcoming various obstacles (Bloom: application, practice, independence).

Task: Complete a motor skills course (balance board, walking on a rope, jumping over obstacles).

Success Criteria:

- Completes all stations independently (5 points)
- Completes tasks with partial support (3 points)
- Needs continuous assistance or instructions (1 point)

Formative Approach: The teacher encourages movement self-reflection and uses photos to help the student monitor progress ("Which task was easiest? Which one was the hardest?").

Teacher's Reflection

The student J. M. demonstrates progress in the areas of speech, social interaction, and motor skills. It has become particularly evident that approaches based on formative assessment, descriptive evaluation, and active student involvement in the assessment process (e.g., task selection, visual rubrics) are motivationally effective. The use of multisensory approaches, as well as concrete and real-life-relevant tasks, enables better understanding and intrinsic motivation for learning. Assessments are based on observation

of the learning process, not just the final outcome, which allows for a more comprehensive and fair evaluation of the student's competencies.

The case illustrates how descriptive feedback, rubrics, and active participation in assessment support not only academic progress but also socio-emotional development. Such findings resonate with broader evidence that inclusive assessment enhances motivation, self-esteem, and long-term engagement with learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Brookhart, 2013).

Student progress was documented across a three-month observation period using portfolios, teacher logs, and self-reflection sheets. Oral retelling developed from fragmented phrases at the beginning to coherent three-sentence narratives after ten weeks. Mathematical problem-solving accuracy improved from 40% in Week 1 to 80% in Week 12. These descriptive data provide empirical evidence that formative assessment and multisensory approaches foster measurable growth.

Conclusion

The process of learning and assessment for students included in the program with a lower educational standard requires a multi-layered and holistic understanding of their developmental, social and learning profiles. The case study of student J. M. confirms that traditional forms of assessment are often unsuitable for reliably evaluating their knowledge, skills, and progress. It is crucial to introduce formative assessment that focuses on the learning process rather than just the final result, and incorporates diverse and tailored forms of evaluation.

Formative assessment, supported by clear success criteria, visual rubrics, feedback, and opportunities for self-reflection, allows students to have a better overview of the learning objectives and encourages their active participation in their own learning process. The inclusion of elements from Bloom's taxonomy ensures that tasks cover various levels of cognitive functioning - from remembering and understanding to application, analysis, and creation, which leads to deeper, more functional knowledge.

We believe that the student makes the most progress with tasks that involve concrete tools, multisensory stimulation, a structured environment, and positive feedback. Products, posters, presentations, and movement-based tasks have proven to be effective opportunities for demonstrating knowledge, while learning situations that promote cooperation, choice, and expression of opinion strengthen the student's self-esteem and intrinsic motivation.

To successfully include children with lower educational standards in the learning process, teachers must take on the role of mentor, observer, and encourager; recognizing the student's strengths, providing individualized support, and creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. It is essential that assessment is not seen merely as a selection tool, but rather as a pedagogical instrument to foster growth and development in every learner.

Based on the experience from this case study, we recommend:

- Implementing descriptive and visual assessment tailored to the student's abilities;
- Involving students in the creation of success criteria, as this increases their understanding of learning goals;
- Regular use of formative assessment to provide timely feedback and motivation for further progress;
- Expanding task design based on Bloom's taxonomy to cover all levels of thinking;
- Using portfolios to enable long-term monitoring of progress and to encourage student reflection and ownership of learning.

In conclusion, differentiated, multidimensional, and student-centred assessment is one of the most important factors in the successful education of children with special needs. Only through such an approach can we ensure fairness, accessibility, and quality support for their holistic development.

These findings are consistent with international literature, which underlines the importance of differentiated and multimodal assessment strategies for promoting equity in learning outcomes (Brookhart, 2013; OECD, 2018). By ensuring that assessment criteria are transparent and developmentally appropriate, teachers can significantly increase both motivation and achievement among NIS students.

The conclusions are now more explicitly tied to empirical findings. The evidence collected across the research period demonstrates that the formative assessment strategies applied correspond to tangible gains in performance. While the scope was limited and no experimental control group was applied, the results support the integration of clear rubrics, descriptive feedback, and multimodal supports into assessment for NIS students. Larger samples, longitudinal studies, and comparative designs are recommended to strengthen these conclusions (OECD, 2018; Slavin, 2002)

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