

Formative Assessment in Teaching the Macedonian Language (Primary Education in R. Macedonia)

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Abstract

In the Republic of Macedonia, the formative assessment represents a new assessment paradigm that focuses on students as active participants during the teaching process. This paradigm was established in 2007 as part of the Primary Education Project (PEP) by USAID (United States Agency for International Development). This research is focused on the analysis of Macedonian language teaching curriculum from first to ninth grade of primary education in the Republic of Macedonia, on the analysis of the suitability of the tasks for formative assessment in one Macedonian language textbook, as well as on the examination of students’ and teachers’ viewpoints, concerning various aspects of formative assessment in Bitola, a region in the Republic of Macedonia. From the analysis it could be seen that there is strong support of formative assessment by the authorized structures, and that there are many positive and negative aspects of the use of formative assessment in the Macedonian language teaching process. The research has qualitative and quantitative paradigm. The methods for collecting and processing the data, and for gaining scientific conclusion are analysis, synthesis and comparison. The instrument consists of two questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

An important segment of the entire reforms in education is the improvement of the system of assessment regarding students’ achievements. The assessment contributes to the improvement of the quality of education and its development to a great extent. The formative assessment in primary education in the Republic of Macedonia was implemented for the first time, in structural and systematic manner, in 2007 as part of the Primary Education Project (PEP) by USAID (United States Agency for International Development). That project comprised of 433 primary and secondary schools, and over 17 523 teachers, school and community representatives, (Almanah, 2011; Almanac, 2011). The project activities contributed significantly to the improvement of

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teachers' capacities in the Republic of Macedonia by encouraging them to implement qualitative manners for realization of formative assessment and to focus on the needs of the students.

As a continuous process of observation and evaluation of students' activities in the teaching process, the formative assessment provides information for student's achievements. This information serves as a basis for summative assessment, (Brookhart and Nitko, 2014; Poposki, 2005). The formative assessment is done throughout the entire teaching process and has preventive and corrective character. It motivates and directs the future performance of students and teachers. It has an influence on the flow of the teaching process and on the students' achievements. Formative assessment has a direct influence on the processes of teaching and learning, as well as on the entire students' development. It is directed towards modeling of the teaching process so that the established goals and standards could be achieved. During the formative assessment, teachers and students receive feedback for the quality and the effects of their activities. Teachers acquire information about the manner of teaching, and students about the process of learning, (Black and William, 2001; Black, 2007; Gojkov, 2003: 149). The formative assessment does not emphasize the result of the achievements, i.e. the grade, but it refers to the facilitation of the process of assimilating knowledge. As such, it is a manner which leads to achieving higher standards in learning, (Black and William, 1998; Wiggins, 2012).

The objective of the research is to provide information that concerns the use of formative assessment in the Macedonian language teaching process in Bitola, a region in the Republic of Macedonia. This information could be used as a certain indicator of the effects of its use on a national level. The analyses of the literature for formative assessment in the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian language teaching curriculum from first to ninth grade for primary education, the four tasks in the Curriculum (one task) and the Textbook (three tasks), as well as the viewpoints of Macedonian language teachers and students display strong institutional support of the concept of formative assessment. Additionally, the analysed materials demonstrate the contributions but also the difficulties in its realization in the Macedonian language teaching process. The analysis further demonstrates the estimation of teachers and students concerning the suitability of the tasks for realization of formative assessment (in the Curriculum and in the Textbook). Moreover, the analysis indicates the extent to which the tasks activate the higher cognitive processes of the students.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE FOR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The characteristics and specificities of formative assessment in the Republic of Macedonia were initially analyzed by Poposki. He includes the formative assessment in the group of the summative and diagnostic assessment, according to the time period of its realization. He describes formative assessment as a continuous process that has formative function and preventive character, and he provides detailed analysis of the characteristics of formative assessment (continuity, differentiation, prevention, etc.). Further, he gives special attention to the feedback, emphasizing its importance in teaching and future activities of teachers, as well as in learning and progress of students, (Poposki, 2005: 170–180).

A great number of handbooks for training teachers for implementation of formative assessment in the teaching practice were written, as a result of the project activities from 2007. For example, there is the Handbook: "Vrednuvanje na znaenjata na postiganjata na ucenicite" [Assessment of the knowledge and achievements of students, 2007] written by a group of authors.

This Handbook significantly relies on the book “Učilišna dokimologija” [School dokimology, 2005] by Poposki. Further, in the Handbook “Unapreduvanje na ocenuvanjeto vo učilištata” [Enhancement of School Based Assessment, 2007] the authors emphasize the difference between the formative and summative assessment, the importance of Bloom’s Taxonomy, and they provide essay questions, tests, and other kinds of questions intended for realization of formative assessment, (Schiel and Kitching, 2007). In addition, there is the Handbook “Ocenuvanje so testovi na znaenje” [Assessment with knowledge tests, 2007]. The author of this Handbook, Violeta Petroska-Beška, emphasizes the manner of creation and use of the essay questions, their advantages and disadvantages.

Further, in 2011 an International conference was held: “Ocenuvanje za učenje vo 21 vek” [Assessment for learning in the 21 century], as a result of the project activities. On the Conference a great number of foreign experts, teachers in primary, secondary and high education, and counselors from the Bureau for Development of Education in Republic of Macedonia, shared their viewpoints regarding the effects of the use of formative assessment in the teaching practice. Their viewpoints, i.e. papers were published in a Proceeding of the Conference. The analysis of the papers in the Proceeding demonstrates that the most common elaborated subjects are: the role of formative assessment in the teaching practice of teachers and the learning process of students; the characteristics of formative assessment; the different segments of formative assessment; the connection between formative assessment and teaching goals, standards and criteria for success; the character of the feedback, (Zbornik, “Ocenuvanje za učenje vo 21 vek” [Proceeding, Assessment for learning in the 21 century], 2011).

Moreover, the number of research studies in Macedonia, regarding the effects of the implementation of formative assessment in the teaching practice has increased as a result of the project activities. These studies indicate that teachers are getting familiar with the essential characteristics of formative assessment. Formative assessment is recognized by teachers as a developmental assessment that helps students’ progress. Teachers also believe that this assessment provides feedback for them and their students. These facts are indisputable indicators that there is a solid basis for implementation of formative assessment. They also demonstrate that the effects of its implementation provide quality of the teaching process, (Author and Pejchinovska, 2011; Talevski et al., 2014). Additionally, research studies, (Author and Pejchinovska, 2011; Pejchinovska and Author, 2014) indicate that almost all teachers plan the formative assessment in the yearly and thematic lesson plans. In these documents they note the techniques for assessment of students’ achievements. Teachers also prepare daily lesson plans where they provide more detailed description of the techniques and instruments for assessment of students’ achievements.

According to the results of the research studies, (Pejchinovska and Author, 2014; Talevski et al., 2014) it could be concluded that teachers pay attention to the connection between the formative assessment and the teaching goals. This is a significant indicator which demonstrates that teachers operationalize the teaching goals that are given in the teaching plans for all students. They also differentiate and individualize the approach in the realization of the tasks. Thus, in the range of the global teaching goals, teachers set more specific goals according to the needs and the abilities of each student. The individualization and differentiation of tasks as planned and systematic activity, indisputably speaks of the teachers’ competencies for implementation of formative assessment. The connection between the formative assessment and the teaching goals is a necessary prerequisite for effective and efficient implementation of formative assessment. Additionally, this is a condition for providing solid bases for promotion of the quality of teaching and learning, i.e. the quality of the teaching process in general.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

This research has qualitative and quantitative paradigm. The methods for collecting and processing the data, and for gaining scientific conclusion are analysis, synthesis and comparison. Data collection is done with questionnaires for students and teachers, prepared by the authors of this paper.

An analysis of the Macedonian language teaching curriculum from first to ninth grade for the nine-year primary education in Republic of Macedonia is done, in regard of the institutional support of the concept of formative assessment. This analysis is done in accordance with the directions for realization of formative assessment given by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education. The Teaching Curriculum is retrieved from the official website of the Bureau for Development of Education. Then, there are two separate analyses of questionnaires given to Macedonian language teachers and students. These questionnaires examine their viewpoint regarding the following: the contributions of formative assessment but also the difficulties in the daily Macedonian language teaching process; the extent to which the tasks in the Macedonian language textbooks are suitable for formative assessment in general; and especially, the extent to which one task given in the Teaching curriculum for sixth grade, and three tasks given in the Macedonian Language Textbook for sixth grade are suitable for formative assessment, i.e. for improvement of students' achievements and also for activation of their higher cognitive processes. The Textbook is retrieved from the official website for digital textbooks of the Ministry of Education and Science. Both documents (Curriculum and Textbook) are currently used in the teaching process in sixth grade of the nine-year primary education. The analysis, in fact, interprets the results from the questionnaires and makes a comparison between them. In the questionnaires, among the questions, four tasks have been used. These tasks are analysed regarding the Bloom's Taxonomy, i.e. the extent to which they activate the higher cognitive processes of the students. The four tasks from the Teaching Curriculum and the Textbook refer to the section "Language" for the teaching unit "Grammatical category mood of verbs". The tasks are:

1. Task from the Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for Sixth Grade, (Nastavna programa po makedonski jazik VI oddelenie, Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for sixth grade, 2008: 7): After an analysis of a text from a textbook, students have the task to underline all verbs in a given paragraph. Then, they should write the underlined verbs in their notebooks and determine the verb form regarding the person, number, aspect and mood.

2. Three tasks from the Macedonian Language Textbook for Sixth Grade, (Velkova, Jovanovska, 2011: 20): 2.1. Apply your knowledge – Write three sentences for each mood of the verbs; 2.2. Recognize the mood of the verbs in the following sentences: Toj vežba redovno (He exercises regularly); Goce, pišuvaj pobrzo (Goce, write faster); Jana bi peela postojano (Jana would sing constantly); Donesete voda, ve molam (Bring water, please); Jas bi jadela sladolen (I would eat ice-cream); Kalina redovno vežba (Calina regularly exercises); 2.3. Transform the verb form in the sentences, from indicative mood into imperative and subjunctive mood. (Example: Baba zboruva., Grandmother talks.; Babo, zboruvaj!, Grandmother, talk!; Baba bi zborovala., Grandmother would talk.) – 1. Tato odi brzo (Father goes fast); 2. Tanja gleda film. (Tanja watches a movie); 3. Ribarot fati riba (The fisherman caught a fish). The research includes 30 Macedonian language teachers who teach from fifth to ninth grade of the nine-year primary education, and 90 students who currently attended sixth grade, in the following primary schools in the municipality of Bitola and Novaci: "Kliment Ohridski", "Todor Angelevski", "Kiril i Metodij", "Elpida

Karamandi”, “Goce Delcev”, “Dame Gruev” (Bitola); “Slavko Lumbarkovski” – Bač (Novaci); “Brakja Miladinovci” – Dedebalci (Mogila).

4. RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Formative Assessment in the Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for Primary Education

In the Macedonian language teaching curriculum from first to ninth grade for the nine-year primary education there is a special section referring to assessment of students’ achievements. This section provides directions for the implementation of formative assessment.

In the Macedonian language teaching curriculum for first, second and third grade there is a recommendation for implementation of formative assessment during the teaching process. This includes creation of portfolio for the students that contains: collection of indicators such as students’ creations, products, statements, etc. for each student individually; current (formative) evaluation lists prepared in advance for each student that are filled in after every particular activity of the student; case study in which the teacher notes the actual state; instruments that refer to every particular teaching section (the teacher writes information about students’ achievements) and provide information of all aspects that are stimulated by the Macedonian language curriculum (the intellectual, socio-emotional and psychomotor aspect). It is also stated that the evaluation lists refer to the teaching goals that are completely achieved by the entire class. Further, it is stated that micro-summative assessment is provided at the end of the second trimester, on the basis of the information collected with the formative assessment, (Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for First grade, 2007: 22, 23; Second grade, 2007: 15,16; Third grade, 2007: 13, 14).

In the Macedonian language teaching curriculum from fourth to ninth grade there are more information regarding the formative assessment. Firstly, there is a recommendation for implementation of formative assessment during the teaching process. Further, it is said that teachers could realize the formative observation and assessment of students’ achievements by using various methods and procedures. Some of them are the following: conversations teacher – student, oral presentations, written exercises, tests, homework and portfolio – collection of indicators for the achievements of each student individually. According to the given directions, the portfolio should be accessible to the parents throughout the entire school year. In that way they could also contribute to the quality of the realization of the Macedonian language teaching process. In addition, it is stated that the portfolio of each student would continue to be used for the following grade with purified and selected information. Further, it is stated that the results of the observation of students’ achievements provide creation of planed oral and written feedbacks. These feedbacks (in form of descriptions) are intended for the students, the parents and the teachers. Finally, it is indicated that micro-summative assessment is provided at the end of every trimester on the basis of the information collected with the formative assessment. (Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for Fourth grade, 2009: 19; Fifth grade, 2008: 17; Sixth grade, 2008: 18; Seventh grade, 2008: 16, 17; Eighth grade, 2008: 15, 16; Ninth grade, 2009: 17, 18).

The Macedonian language teaching curriculum from sixth to ninth grade indicate that all of the methods for formative assessment could be evaluated by the teacher with a help of evaluation lists. This list should be prepared in advance for each student and it should be filled in after every particular activity of the student. (Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for Sixth grade, 2008: 18; Seventh grade, 2008: 16, 17; Eighth grade, 2008: 15, 16; Ninth grade, 2009: 17, 18).

From the analysis of the Macedonian language teaching curriculum it could be concluded that the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education provide strong institutional support of the concept of formative assessment. It is evident that there are directions and recommendations for realization of formative assessment. Those directions and recommendations could significantly contribute to the improvement of the quality of learning by the students and the education in general.

4.2 Analysis of the Results of the Questionnaire for Macedonian Language Teachers

The following are the results of the questionnaire for teachers, along with the analysis and the discussion. The result regarding the work experience of the teachers is presented in Figure 1. Namely, 47% of the teachers (14 respondents) have work experience of more than ten years, 30% of them (9 respondents) have work experience of five to ten years, and 23% (7 respondents) have work experience of one to five years. There are not teachers with work experience of less than a year.

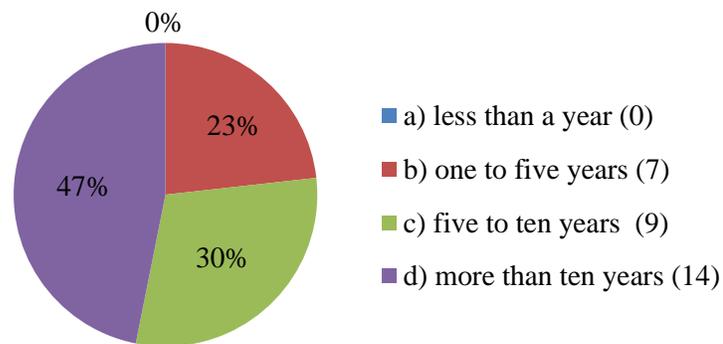


Figure 1. Question no.1. What's the length of your work experience?

The result of the first question is directly connected with the result of the second question. Figure 2 presented the results of the second question which refers to the participation of teachers in projects, seminars or trainings for formative assessment. Namely, 13 respondents (43%) have participated in these forms of professional development only once, the biggest part of the teachers, that is, 16 respondents (54%) have participated many times, and only one respondent has not participated in project, seminar or training of this kind. These results provide an illustration of the real situation regarding the participation of teachers in these forms of professional development. It is a fact that, after the implementation of formative assessment in the Republic of Macedonia, these forms of professional development about formative assessment are held continually. Nowadays, there is not a teacher who has not participated in one of these forms of professional development, organized mostly by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education.

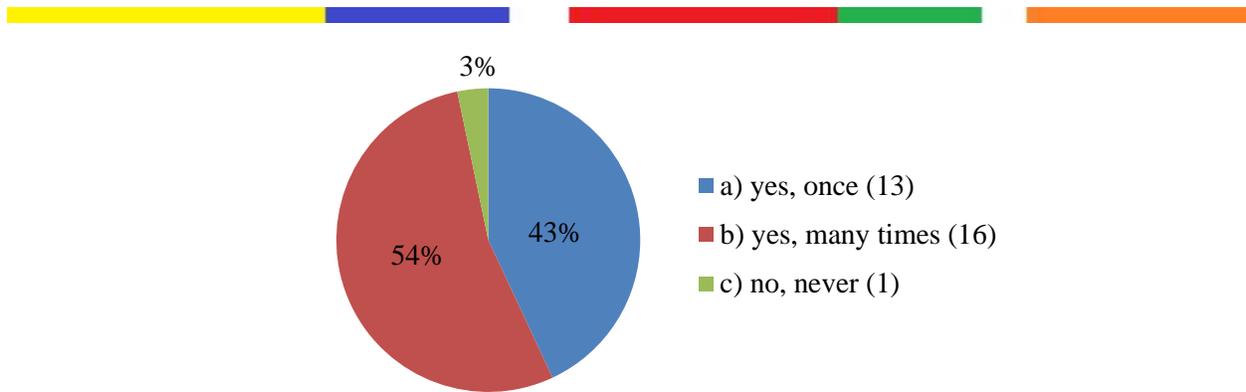


Figure 2. Question no.2. Have you even participated in projects, seminars or trainings for formative assessment?

Further, the result, presented in Figure 3, demonstrates that 83% of the teachers (25 respondents) correctly associate the formative assessment with the entire development of the student's personality, i.e. the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain, and 5 respondents (17%) associate the formative assessment only with the cognitive domain. This result is a clear indicator of the developed competencies of most teachers regarding the formative assessment. However, this result also indicates the need for their further professional development, so that the knowledge of all teachers could be improved.

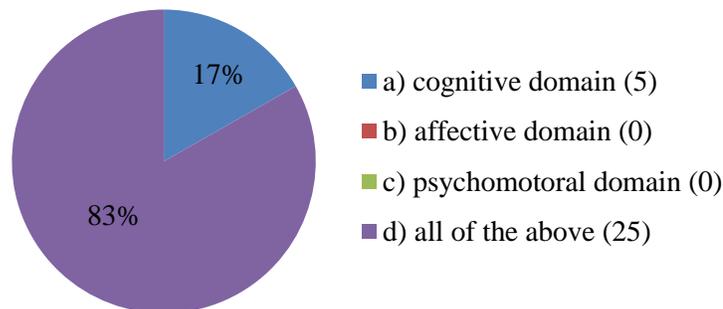


Figure 3. Question no.3. What does the term “formative assessment” refer to?

Moreover, from the result presented in Figure 4, it is evident that 27 respondents (90%) comprise the continuous observation and evaluation of students' activities in the formative assessment, and 20 respondents (67%) additionally comprise the process of providing constructive feedback. Only 12 respondents (40%) state that the effective formative assessment further comprises clearly defined goals in the teaching process. The teachers had the possibility to choose more than one answer, but it is evident that most of them consider that the formative assessment only includes the continuous observation and evaluation of students' activities. A small number of them additionally included the effective feedback and the goals of the teaching process. This information indicates the need for further development of teachers' competencies regarding the characteristics and specificities of the formative assessment. The constructive, constant, well-timed, individualized and, above all, corrective feedback, and the goals of the teaching process are closely related to the formative assessment, (Black and William, 1998; Brookhart, 2008; Wiggins, 2012).

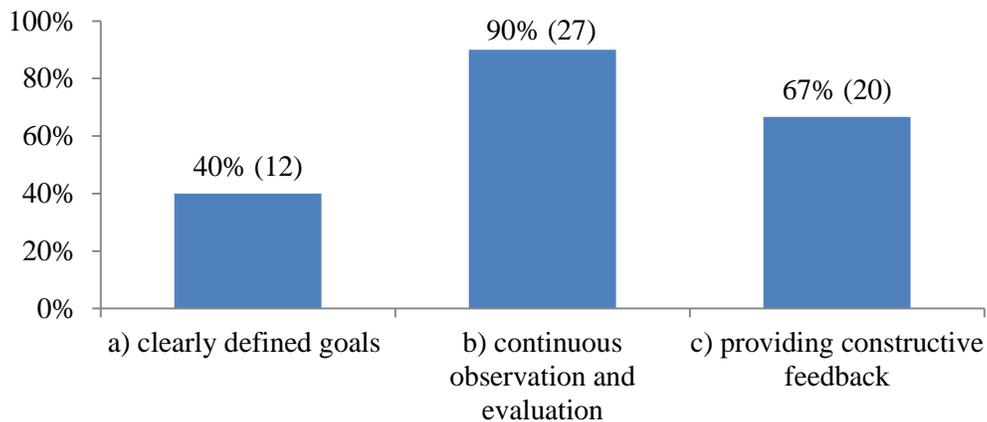


Figure 4. Question no.4. What does the formative assessment comprise?

The following result, presented in Figure 5, refers to the stability of formative assessment and its characteristic in the daily teaching practice of teachers. 87% (26 respondents) state that they constantly use formative assessment in their daily teaching practice, and 13% (4 respondents) use it occasionally. This result indicates the need for further research of the causes that evoke some teachers to employ formative assessment occasionally, and not constantly. However, it is also very important to emphasize that the number of those teachers is significantly smaller, and that there are not teachers who do not use formative assessment at all. Moreover, this information demonstrates that teachers employ formative assessment in their daily teaching practice and they understand the importance of formative assessment in the teaching process. A great number of studies connect the improvement of students' achievements with the use of formative assessment, (Black, 2007; Gojkov, 2003).

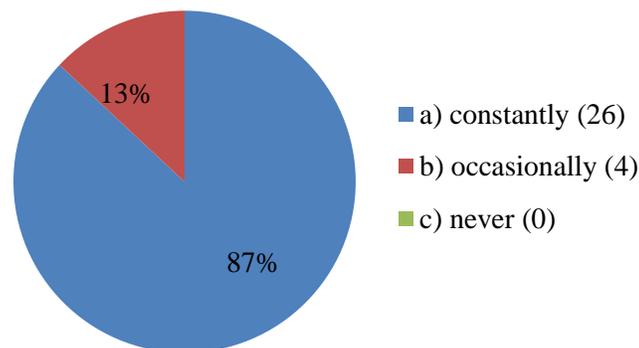


Figure 5. Question no.5. How often do you employ formative assessment in the classroom?

The above stated information could be further confirmed with the result presented in Figure 6. Namely, 87% of the teachers (26 respondents) reckon that formative assessment improves students' achievements to a great extent. Only 13% of them (4 respondents) respond that it has only a slight influence on the improvement. Again, this result indicates the need for further research of the causes that evoke some teachers to reckon that there is only a slight improvement in the students' achievements. The causes may have different character. However, it is very significant to emphasize that there are not teachers who reckon that this kind of assessment does not improve the achievements at all. This is an indisputable indicator of the direct connection of the improved students' achievements with the implementation of the formative assessment.

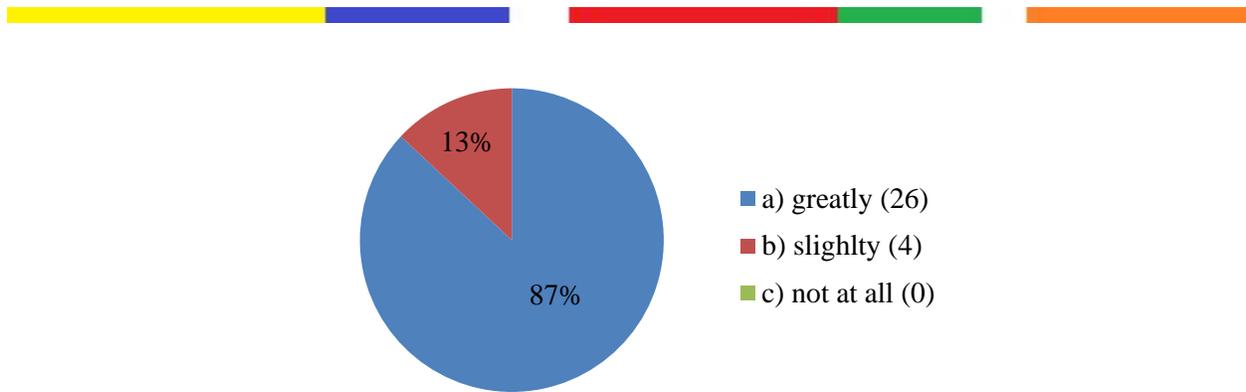


Figure 6. Question no.6. How much does the formative assessment improve student's achievements?

Further, a great number of studies also indicate the importance of incorporating the formative assessment in the yearly and developmental program of schools' work. Consequently, it is very important to incorporate the formative assessment in the yearly, thematic and daily lesson plans, (Black and William, 1998; Black, 2007; Standardi za ocenovanje na učenice vo osnovnoto obrazovanie, Nacrt, 2008 [Standards for assessment of students in primary education, Draft, 2008]; Wiggins, 2012). In this sense, the result, presented in Figure 7, confirms the importance of planning the formative assessment in the daily teaching practice. The teachers had the possibility to choose more than one answer. Consequently, 24 respondents (80%) state that they plan and integrate the formative assessment in the thematic and daily lesson plans, 18 respondents (60%) plan the formative assessment in the yearly lesson plans as well. This information depicts the developed competencies of teachers and their understanding that the planning of formative assessment is a very important segment of the teaching practice.

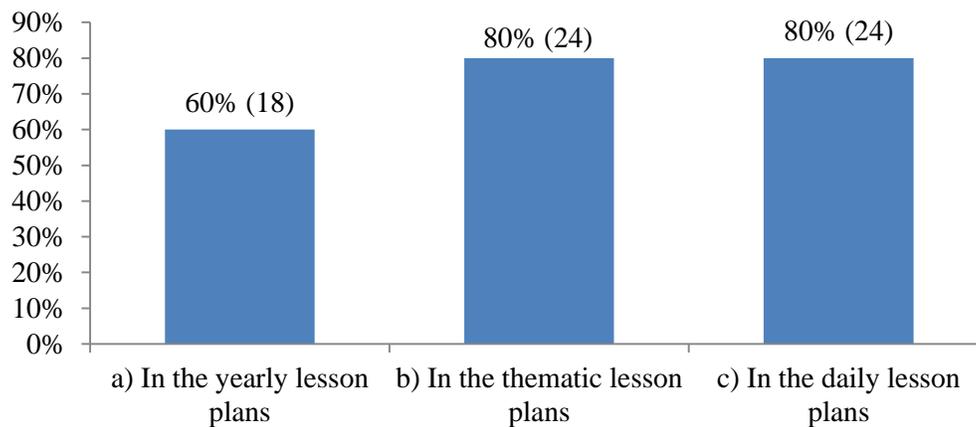


Figure 7. Question no.7. Where do you plan and integrate the formative assessment?

Formative assessment implies the use of various techniques and instruments for assessment of students' achievements. Namely, the use of different techniques provides more valid information about the achievement of each student. Consequently, the teacher could be more confident that the assigned grade is a reflection of the real achievement of the student, (Standardi za ocenovanje na učenice vo osnovnoto obrazovanie, Nacrt, 2008 [Standards for assessment of students in primary education, Draft, 2008]). Thus, the result, presented in Figure 8, demonstrates that the three most frequently used techniques and instruments for formative assessment are: check

list 77% (23 respondents); conversations teacher – student 67% (20 respondents); and written exercises 47% (14 respondents). Regarding the other techniques and instruments, the result indicates that equal number of respondents, that is 11, use oral presentation and test; 3 of them use homework as a technique for formative assessment; and 2 of them choose portfolio, self-assessment, mutual assessment and project for the mentioned purpose. None of the respondents uses quizzes, although other studies confirm that the quiz is powerful and creative tool for formative assessment. Consequently, it is evident that teachers use various techniques and instruments for implementing the formative assessment in the teaching practice. This provides more valid grades and allows the teacher to be more objective when assessing students' achievements.

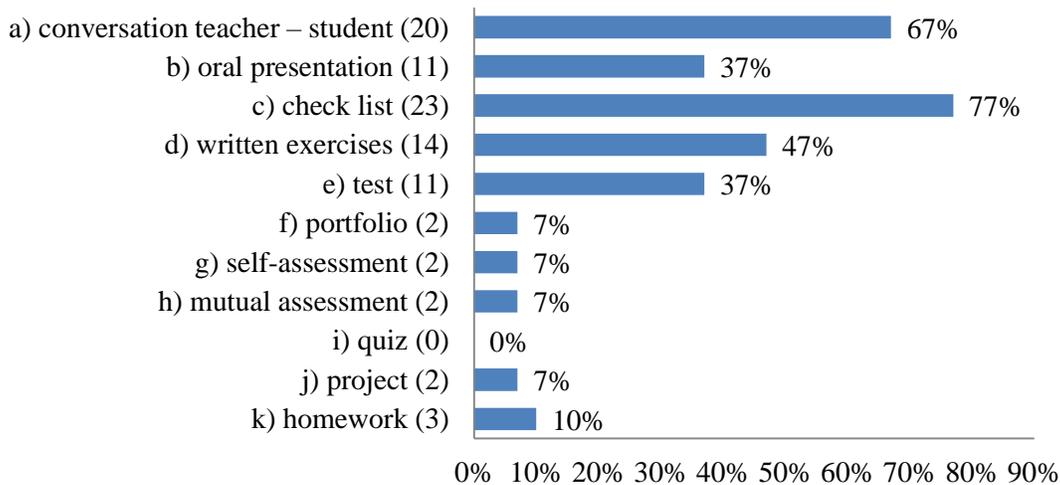


Figure 8. Question no.8. Which three of the following forms for formative assessment do you use most frequently?

It could be said that the techniques and instruments which are presented on workshops for formative assessment are not definite. Thus, it is very important for the teacher to use its creativity and to be in a continuous search of new techniques and instruments. The daily use of the same techniques and instruments could lead to monotony in the teaching process. The surprisingly small number of teachers who use the portfolio for formative assessment should be mentioned in this research. A great deal of attention is given to the portfolio in the analyzed teaching curriculum. That comes as a consequence to the fact that the portfolio is very convenient for students at a younger age. The result concerning the techniques and instruments also depicts the small number of teachers who use self-assessment, mutual assessment and project. Other studies identify them as powerful tools for formative assessment because of the following benefits: each student has a chance to solve authentic tasks related to those in the real world; they help the student to develop the potential for creative and critical thinking; they enable the student to work in team; they enable the student to evaluate his/her achievements independently by creating and implementing personal criteria, (Andrade and Valtcheva, 2009: 13; Black and William, 1998; Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002: 41; McMillan and Hearn 2008: 40–41). Some studies confirm that, in the teaching practice, teachers rarely use activities for self-assessment and mutual assessment. Their presence is more declarative than real because teachers reckon that students do not have developed competencies for these kinds of activities. Teachers believe that students should not interfere into their work as teachers, etc., without considering the fact that, with the participation in the activities for self-

assessment and mutual assessment, the assessment becomes shared partnership activity, and not only their own responsibility, (Talevski et al., 2014).

Further, the new paradigm in the teaching process and assessment indicates a new conceptual methodology for writing textbooks. The content of the textbooks should be suitable and should include the formative assessment. The exercises and tasks should be in correlation with the manner of teaching and assessment and should reflect the higher cognitive processes of thinking. Teachers often have an automatic approach regarding the use of the tasks in the textbooks. They do not take into consideration the cognitive processes which are developed by the task. For instance, regarding the task given in the directions in the Macedonian Language Teaching Curriculum for Sixth Grade, it could not be said that it requires application of verbs. Students should only underline the verbs in a given paragraph of a text and determine the verb form, regarding the person, number, aspect and mood. They should only recognize the indicative, imperative and subjunctive mood without defining them. This is a clear indicator that the task refers to the first two cognitive levels of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy – remembering and understanding. Regarding the applying of knowledge, the tasks given in the Macedonian Language Textbook of Sixth Grade are also questionable. It might be said that only the first task refers to the third level of the Taxonomy, because it requires the student to write sentences for each mood of the verbs. The second task requires identification of the mood of the verbs in the given sentences. The third requires transformation of the verb form from indicative mood into imperative and subjunctive mood. The dilemma refers to the following: To what extent does the student apply the knowledge if he/she is required to recognize the mood of the verbs in the given sentences and to transform the verb form from indicative mood into imperative and subjunctive mood on examples that are already given. The following result presented in Figure 9 refers to the frequency of use of the tasks in the Macedonian language textbooks in general. 70% of the teachers (21 respondents) use them occasionally, 20% (6 respondents) use them constantly, and the remaining 10% (3 respondents) never use them for formative assessment. Certainly, it is easier for teachers to use the already given tasks in the textbooks. They are released from the additional work of creating their own more creative tasks which would be more suitable for development of the higher cognitive processes of students. They are also released from additional expense for paper and photocopies.

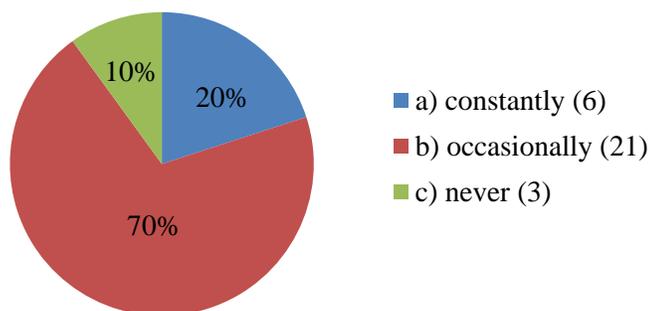


Figure 9. Question no.9. How often do you use the tasks in the textbooks for the purpose of performing formative assessment?

However, as Figure 10 demonstrates, 70% of the teachers (21 respondents) do not consider the tasks to be more practical nor more economical for use in comparison with the tasks that the teacher would create himself/herself. 30% of them (respondents) choose the opposite answer. They find the tasks in the textbooks more practical and more economical for use.

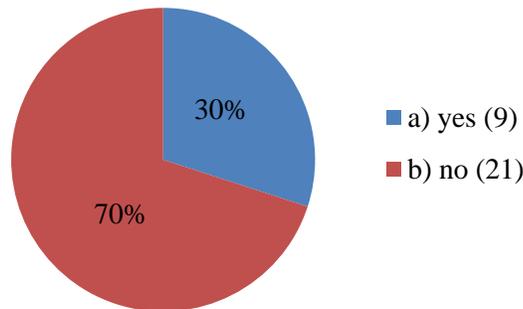


Figure 10. Question no.10. Do you find the use of the tasks in the textbooks more practical and more economical than the use of tasks that you create on your own?

A great number of teachers do not even consider the cognitive processes which the tasks in the textbooks develop. They believe that if the task is given in the textbook, then it must be in accordance with the teaching curriculum and the teaching goals. They also believe that the connection between the teaching goals in the curriculum and the content and tasks in the textbook is always taken into consideration by the authors of the textbooks. When considering the cognitive domain, the difficulty level of the tasks in the textbooks must depend on the age of the students and the teaching goals. Though there are differences, it is obvious that the teaching process, in a great part of its realization, is directed towards the lower (mostly the first two) levels of the Bloom's Taxonomy. The following result of the research, presented in Figure 1, confirms this statement. Namely, 93% (28 respondents) reckon that the tasks in the textbooks mostly refer to the first level – remembering, and about 90% (27 respondents) choose the second level – understanding. Further, the results demonstrate that a relatively small number of respondents, that is, 47% (14 respondents) choose the third level – applying, 37% (11 respondents) reckon that the tasks refer to the fourth level – analyzing, and 23% (7 respondents) choose the fifth level – evaluating. Only 10% (3 respondents) reckon that the tasks refer to the highest, sixth level, of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy which is creating. Regarding the three tasks from the Macedonian Language Textbook for Sixth Grade, as it has previously been stated, the first certainly refers to the third level – applying, but it is questionable whether the second and the third refer to the same level as well. It is evident that they do not refer to the levels analyzing, evaluating and creating in any case.

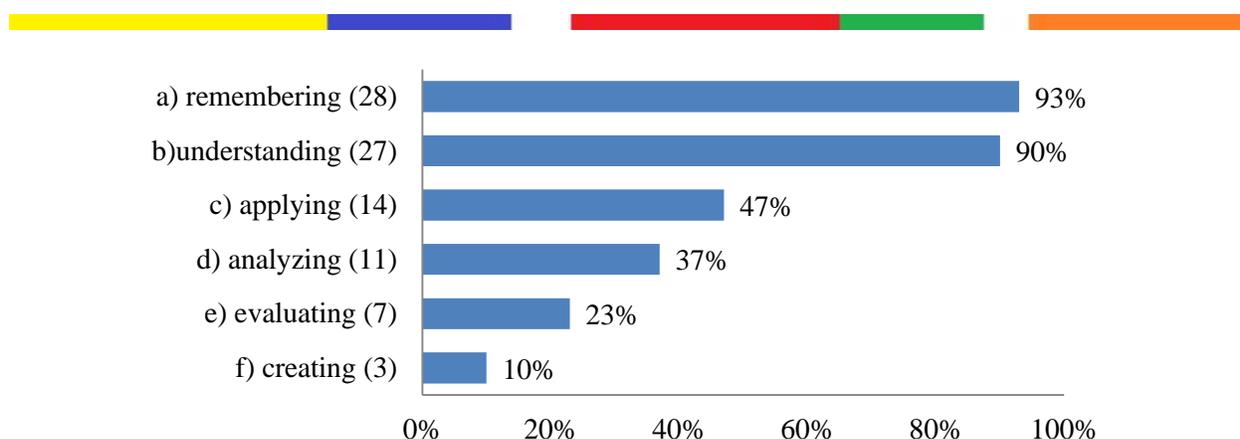


Figure 11. Question no.11. Which three levels of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy are the most prevalent in the tasks (for formative assessment) given in the textbooks?

This result indicates the need for further improvement of the teachers' competencies regarding the knowledge about the levels of the Bloom's Taxonomy. Also, there is a need for more in-depth consideration of the level applying. In the literature, this level is described in different manners. This gives to teachers' space for different interpretation according to their own understanding of the components that are included in the level applying. For instance, in the explanation about the Bloom's Taxonomy, (Clark, 2014; Huitt, 2011) concerning the level applying, it is said that this level refers to memorizing and applying principles, ideas or theories. The student uses the concept in a new situation, i.e. he/she applies the learned information from the classroom in new situations at the work place. This explanation could be interpreted in two manners, regarding the phrase *new situation*: the first one indicates that the student applies the concept in a new situation in the process of learning, that is, in other situation in the classroom; the second indicates that this level refers to applying the learned information from the classroom in new situations at the work place, that is, in a situation outside the classroom. In the Handbook "Unapreduvanje na ocenuvanje vo učilištata" [Enhancement of School Based Assessment, 2007: 64], regarding the level applying, the following example is given: Connect the manner of living of the characters in the novel with the manner of living in the reality. This indicates that the level applying is present when students have to connect the learned information from the classroom with authentic life situations. On the other hand, in the revised Bloom's Taxonomy, (Krathwohl, 2002) it is stated that the level applying is present when students have to use the information in other familiar context. Thus, it could be concluded that the context should be familiar, but the phrases *familiar context* and *given situation* might be interpreted differently as well. An illustration could be made with another example. For instance, we would assume that the student has assimilated the rules for correct use of the accent in the Macedonian standard language in a class at school. What if, later in class, the student is given several new words which have not been mentioned earlier in the exercises, and he/she is asked to determine the place of the accent in them. It is evident that the rule is not applied at the work place, instead it is only applied in the classroom and the context is familiar. Consequently, it is questionable what would be regarded as a new situation. Would the previously mentioned new words be regarded as a new situation? Or a new situation would be correct accenting of words in everyday life which would mean correct use of words regarding the place of the accent while speaking. On the other hand, if the student in class is given, for example, four words with only one of them correctly accented, (the other three words have an accent on incorrect syllable) again, we have double interpretation. It is questionable whether this task refers to the level applying or the level understanding, and whether this is a new situation or it is not,

although it is evident that the context is familiar. The final examination for the mandatory subject Macedonian language and literature, realized at the end of the fourth year of secondary education, imposes different demands on students. What if students are given four new words (one with an accent on the correct syllable and three with an accent on incorrect syllable) and they are asked to choose the word with an accent on the correct syllable? Does this mean that the final examination represents a new situation, an unfamiliar context or the context is familiar? Does the student apply the knowledge, or does he/she know the rule and understands which of them are the correct answer? This paper does not deal with more extensive analysis of the levels of the Bloom's Taxonomy. However, it suggests that there is a need for more precise explanation of the third level – applying, as well as of the other three levels (analyzing, evaluating and creating). In that way, the Bloom's Taxonomy could be used in a more beneficial manner in the teaching practice, i.e. in the process of writing teaching goals and for creation of tasks that would reflect the higher cognitive processes of students.

The following result from the research refers to the previously explained four tasks from the Teaching Curriculum (one task) and the Textbook (three tasks). Namely, 80% of the teachers (24 respondents) state that they would use these tasks. The 24 respondents who gave positive answer, had the opportunity to explain their reasons. Namely, 40% of them (12 respondents) state that the tasks are suitable for estimating whether the required knowledge is assimilated, 37% of them (11 respondents) reckon that they actively involve all students, and 23% of them (7 respondents) reckon that they are suitable for the individual needs of the students. The other 20% (6 respondents) gave negative answer, i.e. they stated that they would not use these four tasks. With regard of the reasons, the result demonstrates that 10% of them (3 respondents) reckon that the tasks are not suitable for estimating whether the required knowledge is assimilated, 7% (2 respondents) state that they do not actively involve all students, and 1 respondent reckons that the tasks do not reflect the individual needs of the students. Those 6 respondents who gave negative answer regarding the use of the four tasks, had an extra space to write what they would use instead. One respondent states that he/she would use tasks for group, individual and individualized work with different level of difficulty suitable for the individual needs of the students. Other respondent states that, apart from the four tasks, there is a necessity for additional assessment of the knowledge with other tasks. Third respondent states that he/she would use tasks which would enable the students to assimilate the material more easily. The fourth respondent states that he/she would use tasks for development of the higher cognitive processes of the students. This information provides evidence of the critical approach of the teachers in regard of the tasks from the Teaching Curriculum and the Textbook. In addition, it is also an indicator of their creativity and the readiness to create their own tasks which would be more suitable for formative assessment and which would enable the students to develop the higher cognitive processes.

4.3 Analysis of the Results of the Questionnaire for Students

The following are the results of the questionnaire for students, along with the analysis and the discussion. The first result, presented in Figure 12, indicates that 84% of the students (76 respondents) learn better when their knowledge is evaluated on a shorter period of time and for a shorter material with different exercises and tasks. On the other hand, 16% of them (14 respondents) learn better when their knowledge is evaluated with half-year tests. They prefer to be tested on an extensive material with one method of assessment. This result demonstrates the importance of formative assessment in the teaching practice and its connection with students' achievements, (Black, 2007; Gojkov, 2003). However, it also implies that students still use the

practice of studying only for tests, i.e. only to get the grade that they want. Therefore, this result suggests the need for change in the manner of studying of the students. That could be achieved by using continuous formative assessment that would significantly contribute to the improvement of their achievements.

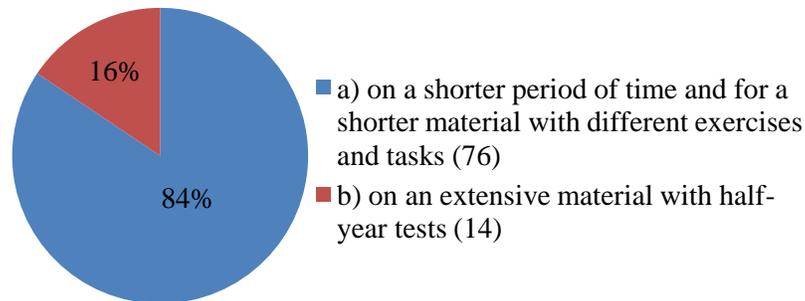


Figure 12. Question no.1. I learn better when my knowledge is evaluated...

The motivation is a key factor related to students' achievements. This means that the amount of development of the internal students' motivation is proportional with the quality of their achievements. The result, presented in Figure 13, confirms the connection between motivation, continuous feedback and numerical grade. 68% of the students (61 respondents) state that they are more motivated for studying, learning and participating in the school activities when they have continuous feedback. This leads to the conclusion that the continuous feedback provided by the teacher also has positive influence on students' achievements. This means that the qualitative, corrective, clear, understandable, indisputable and continuous feedback should be an imperative for every teacher, (Black and William, 1998; Brookhart, 2008; Wiggins, 2012). The remaining 32% of the students (29 respondents) state that they are more motivated by a numerical grade, which means that they prefer numerical grade rather than continuous feedback. This opinion requires further analysis and research regarding the reasons for this kind of motivation. Possibly, the reasons could be found in the present practice of conducting the assessment on a specially selected class for that purpose which is completed by assigning numeral grade. The grade is considered a final result of students' achievements. This practice could be surpassed with a continuous use of formative assessment and in that manner students would be more aware of the long-term effects of their studying.

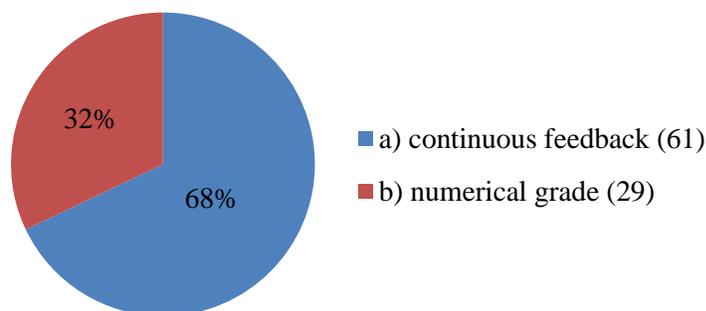


Figure 13. Question no.2. I am more motivated by...

Further, it has already been stated that the teaching goals are closely connected with the daily teaching practice. It is very important for the students to understand why they should assimilate certain material and for what that material would serve them in their future life. Regarding the teaching goals, Figure 14 demonstrates that 93% of the students (84 respondents) state that their Macedonian language teachers inform them about the goals of the lessons on each class. Only 7% (6 respondents) state the opposite, i.e. that the teacher does not inform them about the teaching goals. It is more than evident that the act of sharing the teaching goals with the students presents a positive practice because it is a prerequisite for improvement of students' achievements. The teaching goals along with their concretization and operationalization make a valuable contribution to the teaching process, because the teaching practice of the teachers and the learning of the students depend on them, (Author and Pejchinovska, 2011). However, it should also be stated that there have been and there would always be students who might not articulate the speech of the teacher in a correct manner. The negative practice of not sharing the goals with the students still exists apart from the already established positive effects. Thus, this possibility suggests the need for serious changes in the daily teaching practice of some teachers. Moreover, Figure 14 also demonstrates that 94% of the students (85 respondents) reckon that their Macedonian language teachers observe and note their answers, and only 5 of them, that is, 6% do not agree with it. This result suggests that students are aware that their activities are observed and noted. In other words, it contributes to the awareness of the students that the observed and noted activities would be used as elements for summative assessment of their achievements. Further, the result, also presented in Figure 14, confirms that feedback has very important significance in the teaching process. Namely, 88% of the students (79 respondents) state that they receive continuous feedback from their Macedonian language teacher. Thus, this result is also correlated with the results of the questionnaire for teachers, (see Figure 5, Figure 6). On one hand, it demonstrates the awareness of the teachers that the feedback has an influence on the students' achievements, and that it is very important to provide feedback in the teaching practice. On the other hand, it shows the readiness of the students to recognize the reactions of the teacher for different activities (verbal and non-verbal) as feedback. They should use them in a corrective sense, that is, for improvement of the process of learning. The remaining 12% of the students (11 students) state that they do not receive continuous feedback from their teacher. This might be understood as an indicator for the following aspects: the teacher does not provide continuous feedback; the student is not able to understand or correctly interpret certain reactions of the teacher, and so on. In either case, it is very important to emphasize the importance of corrective and constructive feedback in the teaching process and also to depict the need of its continuity. If the teacher provides feedback occasionally and not constantly, then there is a great possibility that students would not be able to recognize the teacher's reactions as feedback. This would have negative influence on the process of learning and also on the achievements. Further, the variety of techniques and instruments for formative assessment is a necessary imperative in the process of collecting information for students' achievements. Therefore, the result, presented in Figure 14, indicates that 89% of the students (80 respondents) state that their Macedonian language teachers use various techniques and instruments for formative assessment. According to them, they are in accordance with their cognitive individual needs. Only 11% of them (11 respondents) do not agree with the others. Moreover, the participation of students in the assessment is a very important aspect of formative assessment. The assessment becomes mutual activity of the teacher and the student and in that process they have a status of partners. Regarding this aspect of formative assessment, Figure 14 also demonstrates that 71% of the students (64 respondents) state that they are involved in the process of assessment. 29% of them (26 respondents) do not agree with it, because they state that they do not feel involved

in the process of assessment. This result is an illustration of the real situation in the teaching process, because informal conversations with teachers and students also suggest that a great number of teachers only formally include the students in the assessment. This means that they do not really take into consideration the viewpoint of the students. They reckon that the competencies of the students are not developed enough so that they could make realistic assessment of their achievements. It is necessary to indicate that there is a need for greater efforts by the teacher for involvement of the students in the assessment. The teacher could only accomplish this if he is really willing to take into consideration the viewpoint of the students. Only then it could be said that students seriously participate in the activities of this kind. Only then, the teacher would notice the real contributions of formative assessment in the teaching process: independent students who think critically and reconsider their achievements; students who evaluate their achievements properly; students who share the assessment with the teacher so that it becomes a partnership activity; and students who would develop into citizens who take an active responsibility for their community, (Schiel and Kitching, 2007).

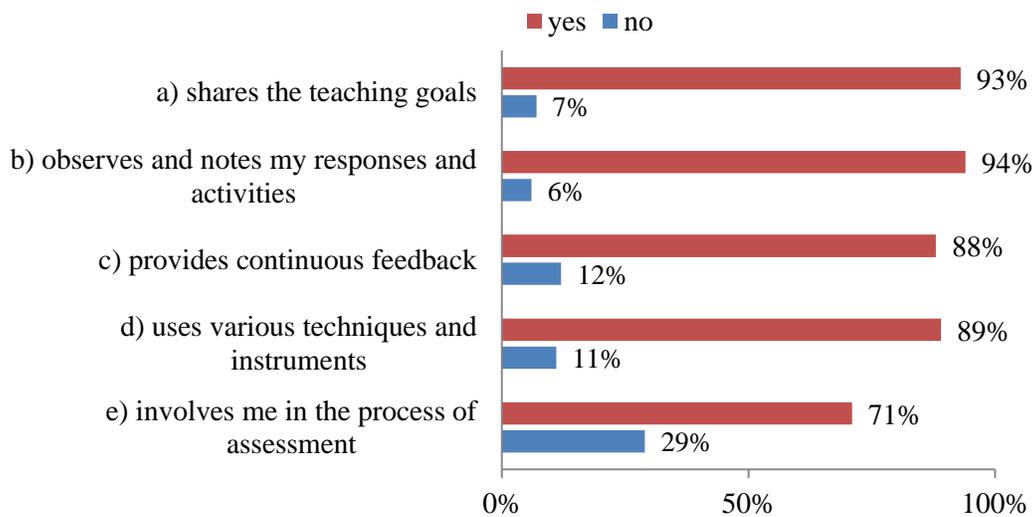


Figure 14. Question no.3. The teacher...

Regarding the techniques and instruments for formative assessment, the result, presented in Figure 15, demonstrates that the viewpoint of the students differs from that of the teachers, (see Figure 8). When asked about the three techniques that help them learn more easily and improve their knowledge, 61% of the students (55 respondents) choose conversation teacher – student, a technique which is ranked second by the teachers. The oral presentation and homework are chosen by 46% of the students (41 respondents) and they are ranked second. In third position is the test with 33% (30 respondents). The result of the questionnaire for teachers demonstrates that these techniques are not among the three most frequently used by the teachers. In fourth position with 28% (25 respondents) are the written exercises (ranked third by the teachers) and the project. On fifth position with 18% (16 respondents) is the quiz, a technique which is not used by any of the teachers. Then there is the self-assessment with 14% (13 respondents); the check list (ranked on first position by the teachers) with 13% (12 respondents); the mutual assessment with 8% (7 respondents) and in last position is the portfolio with 6% (5 respondents). The result indicates that teachers certainly use various techniques and instruments for formative assessment. This practice

has an influence on students' achievements and it also contributes to the objectiveness of the assessment, (Standardi za ocenivanje na učenice vo osnovnoto obrazovanie, Nacrt, 2008 586 [Standards for assessment of students in primary education, Draft, 2008]).

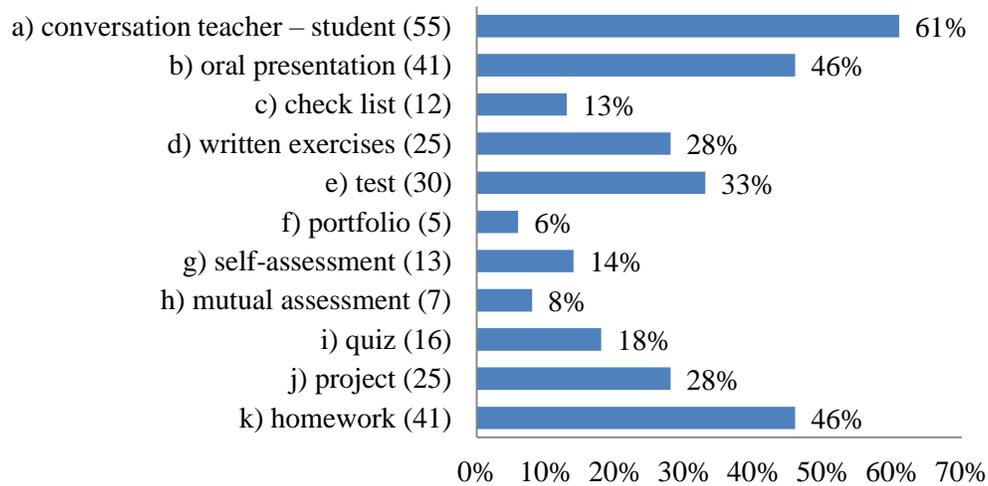


Figure 15. Question no.4. Which three of the following forms help you to learn more easily and to improve your knowledge?

However, regarding the difference between the results of the two questionnaires, (see Figure 8, Figure 15), it should also be suggested that teachers should take into consideration the viewpoint of their students. They should consider using techniques and instruments which help students learn more easily and improve their knowledge. For instance, it is evident that the quiz is not used by the teachers but part of the students prefers it as a technique for formative assessment. The results demonstrate that certain techniques and instruments are preferred by a small number of students, for instance, the self-assessment and the mutual assessment, as well as the project and the portfolio. This indicates that teachers should use them more often in the teaching practice, because studies confirm that they are powerful tools for formative assessment, (Talevski, 2011). Additionally, the importance of the use of other techniques and instruments which are not mentioned here should be emphasized. The constant use of the same techniques could lead to a decrease in students' motivation, to boredom and non-development of their potentials for creative and critical thinking.

The following result, presented in Figure 16, refers to the frequency of use of the tasks in the Macedonian language textbooks in general. Most of the students, i.e. 50% (45 respondents) state that the teacher uses them constantly, and 49% of them (44 respondents) state that the teacher uses them occasionally. Only 1 student (1%) states that the teacher never uses the tasks from the textbooks.

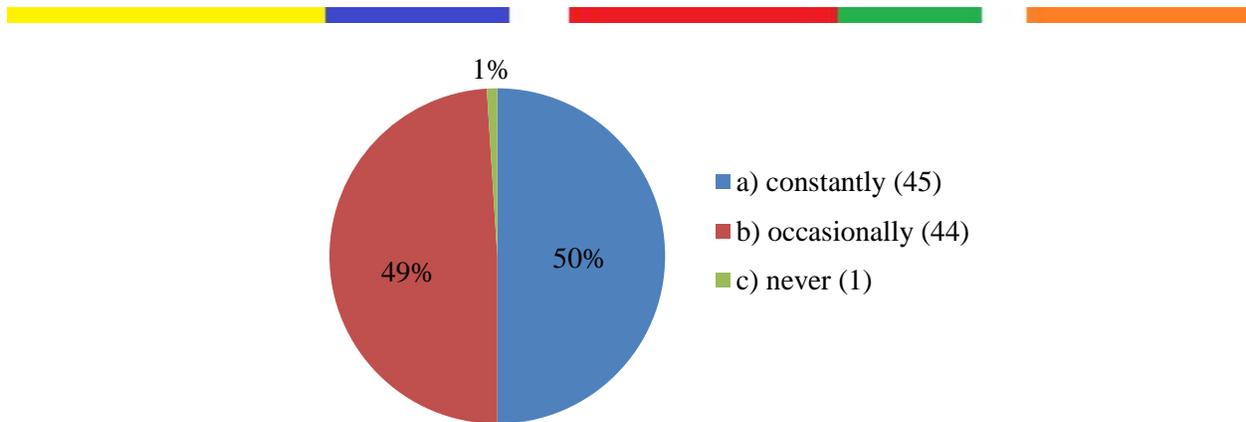


Figure 16. Question no.5. How often does your teacher use the tasks in the Macedonian language textbooks for the purpose of observing and assessing your achievements and development?

This result suggests the existence of certain doubt in the veracity of the teachers' statements, because the results are not entirely correlated, (see Figure 9). Sometimes, a great number of teachers give answers in the questionnaires that do not reflect the real situation in the teaching practice. Their aim is to demonstrate that they know all about the subject of the questionnaire and that they use the directions for formative assessment given by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for Development of Education. Nonetheless, teachers do not consider the directions when planning their teaching practice, i.e. they plan and realize the teaching practice according to their vision. This is confirmed by informal conversations with teachers. Moreover, regarding this result, the potential weakness of the instrument for obtaining results, i.e. the questionnaire should be taken into consideration. It is clear that the questionnaire could not contain unlimited number of questions. Most of the questions provide choice which means that teachers only have to choose an answer without giving an explanation. Also, there is a need for further research on this topic by using other methods and instruments, such as observation of classes, increase of the number of samples and population, and so on. However, it should be stated that the research serves as an illustration of the situation on national level, even though it has local character (the research is conducted in one region of Republic of Macedonia). This assertion is corroborated by: the results obtained with the conducted research; the information from other studies that have already been mentioned; our experience, observation and findings as teachers of Macedonian language; the findings gained as direct participants (disseminators) in the project by USAID (United States Agency for International Development).

As for the quality of the tasks in the Macedonian language textbooks, regarding their potential for assessment of students' achievements, the students had the opportunity to choose more than one answer. In Figure 17 it could be noticed that 52 respondents (58%) state that the tasks are comprehensible and very easy, 48 respondents (53%) state that they help them recognize their weaknesses and suggest them further directions for improvement, 45 respondents (50%) state that the tasks make the process of assimilating knowledge easier. Only 28 respondents (31%) state that the tasks have medium level of clarity and difficulty. Thereby, this result indicates that a greater number of students have positive viewpoint regarding the tasks in the Macedonian language textbooks in general. Smaller number of students, 8% (7 respondents) state that the tasks are incomprehensible and very difficult, and that they do not make the process of assimilating knowledge easier. Only 6% of the students (5 respondents) state that the tasks do not help them recognize their weaknesses.

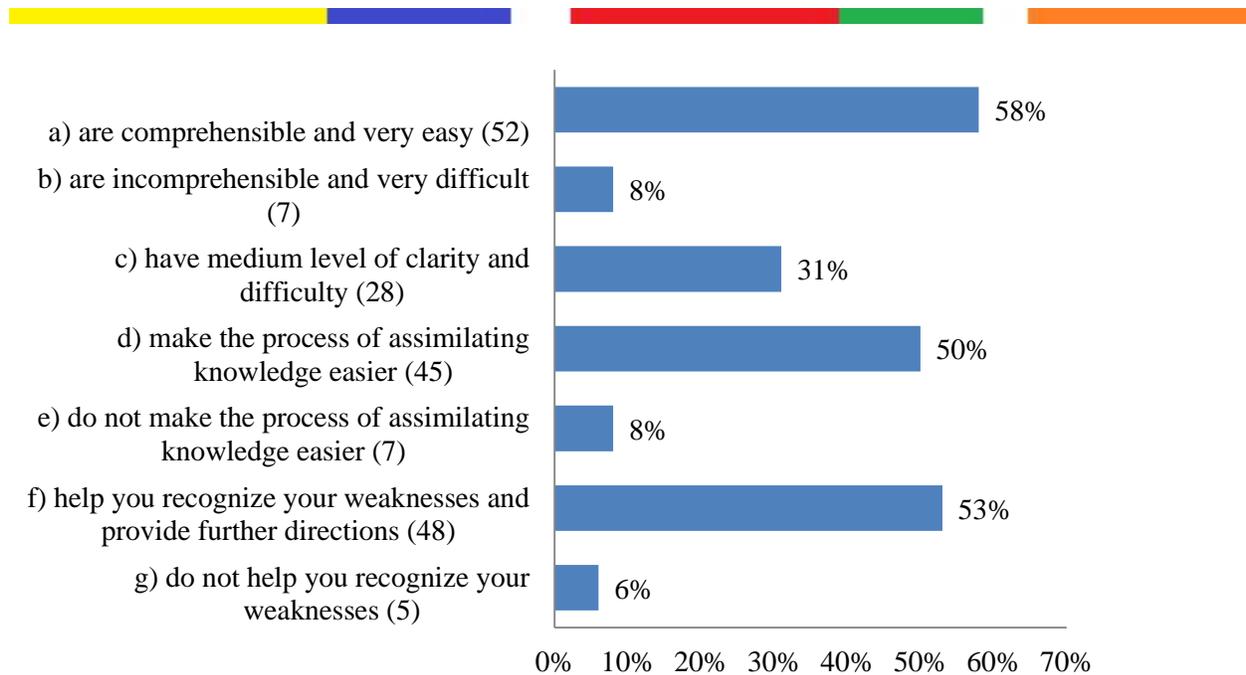


Figure 17. Question no.6. The tasks that are given in the Macedonian language textbook for the purpose of observation and evaluation of your knowledge...

Further, regarding the four tasks from the Curriculum (one task) and the Textbook (three tasks), a greater number of the students, 87% (78 respondents) state that they are suitable for their individual needs. The other 13% (12 respondents) do not agree with it. 83% of them (75 respondents) state that these four tasks actively involve them in the teaching process and the other 17% (15 respondents) do not agree with this. 77 respondents (86%) state that the tasks are suitable for estimating whether they have assimilated the required knowledge, and the other 13 respondents (14%) do not agree with it. It is more than certain that students differ regarding the individual abilities and needs, the style of studying and learning, the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, and so on. They do not represent a homogenous group. However, these results indisputably indicate the need for reconsidering the following: the degree of suitability of the tasks intended for realization of formative assessment in the Macedonian language textbooks; the extent to which the tasks respond to the individual needs of the students; the need for incorporating tasks which would activate the students' higher cognitive processes; as well the need for compatibility of the textbooks with the directions and the prepositions for successful realization of formative assessment.

5. CONCLUSION

The assessment of students' achievements should be understood as a continuous process which is directly connected with the development of the entire personality of the student. That means that the emphasis should be on the process of learning which leads to support of the process of assimilating knowledge, and not on the results.

The results from the analysis of the Macedonian language teaching curriculum, from first to ninth grade of the nine-year primary education in the Republic of Macedonia, demonstrate that the formative assessment has a very strong institutional support. According to them, all prerequisites

and prepositions are ensured for correct interpretation of the directions for implementation of formative assessment in the teaching process.

The results from the questionnaires for teachers and students confirm the awareness of the teachers that the formative assessment should be part of the planning of the teaching practice. They also confirm that formative assessment is directly connected with students' achievements. It motivates the students to participate in the activities and it helps them achieve better results. That means that a great number of segments of formative assessment are implemented into the teaching practice to a great extent: sharing the teaching goals with the students; observation of and taking notes of students' achievements; continuous feedback; and use of tasks which are reflection of the individual needs of each student. A weaker segment is the involvement of the students in the process of assessment, which depicts the need for further improvement of the teachers' competencies regarding this segment. Studies confirm that students' involvement in the assessment significantly contributes to the quality of the teaching process. It also provides an increase in the number of students who think critically and students who are able to make realistic evaluation. Thereby, the purpose of education is to create citizens who accept responsibility for the improvement of the community. Further, the analyses demonstrate that teachers use various techniques and instruments for formative assessment. These methods provide greater validity of the collected information, so teachers could become more objective in the assessment of the students' achievements. Regarding the tasks from the Curriculum and the Textbook, the analyses indicates a correlation between the viewpoints of teachers and those of students. It demonstrates that the tasks from the Textbook refer to the first two levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, and that the third level (applying) is questionable when referring to the task from the Teaching Curriculum and the two tasks from the Textbook. Consequently, the following should be emphasized: the great carefulness when choosing suitable tasks with regard of the Bloom's Taxonomy; the need for creating tasks which would develop students' higher cognitive processes; and the need for more precise explanation and further clarification of the concept of the third level (applying), as well as of the other three levels (analysing, evaluating and creating). The other levels and especially the third one (applying) are interpreted in different manner by teachers and other people involved in the process of assessment of students' achievements. For instance, it is questionable whether the multiple choice questions could refer to the level applying, and so on.

It could be concluded that the implementation of formative assessment contributes to the improvement of the quality of the teaching process. The classroom becomes an environment that nurtures a culture which stimulates the interaction between teachers and students. This leads to partnership which promotes learning in an environment that gives to the students the possibility to state their viewpoints, and to the teachers the possibility to evaluate their performance and the quality of their activities.

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