



DIDIMAL: A Pedagogical Framework for Assessment Innovation in African Higher Education

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Abstract

Assessment practices in higher education remain largely dominated by summative and certification-oriented approaches that insufficiently support learning and student self-regulation. Research has consistently highlighted the limitations of assessment systems primarily focused on measurement, ranking, and accountability.

Drawing on humanistic pedagogy and formative assessment theory, this article proposes **DIDIMAL (Didactic Integrated Model for the Assessment of Learning)** as a pedagogical framework for assessment innovation in African higher education. DIDIMAL reconceptualizes assessment as a continuous, ethical, and relational learning-support process grounded in **humanitude, formative mediation, and systemic pedagogical coherence**.

The framework responds to the structural and pedagogical challenges faced by higher education systems in African and Global South contexts, including massification, limited resources, and entrenched examination cultures, while remaining aligned with internationally recognized principles of assessment for learning. DIDIMAL provides a conceptual foundation for rethinking assessment practices and for guiding future empirical research and institutional reform aimed at improving the quality, equity, and humanization of higher education.

Keywords: DIDIMAL; assessment innovation; formative assessment; humanistic pedagogy; higher education; Africa

1. Introduction

Assessment is a central component of higher education pedagogy, shaping students' learning strategies, motivation, and engagement. Despite sustained calls for reform, assessment practices in many higher education systems remain predominantly summative, emphasizing grading and certification rather than supporting learning processes (Sadler, 1989).

Research has shown that such approaches tend to encourage surface learning and strategic compliance, often undermining deep understanding and long-term academic development (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). In contrast, assessment-for-learning perspectives emphasize the formative role of assessment and its capacity to promote self-regulation and academic success (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

In African and Global South contexts, these challenges are compounded by massification, constrained institutional resources, and historically entrenched examination cultures (Tikly, 2019). These conditions call for pedagogical frameworks that are theoretically robust, ethically grounded, and sensitive to

contextual realities. This article addresses this need by proposing DIDIMAL as a framework for assessment innovation in African higher education.

2. Theoretical Background

The DIDIMAL framework is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: **humanistic pedagogy**, **formative assessment**, and **systemic pedagogy**.

Humanistic pedagogy emphasizes the recognition of learners as active subjects and whole persons within the educational process. Rogers (1983) argues that meaningful learning emerges in environments characterized by trust, respect, and authentic educational relationships—conditions often weakened by assessment practices perceived as punitive or purely administrative.

Formative assessment theory conceptualizes assessment as a process of learning regulation rather than judgment. Black and Wiliam (2009) demonstrate that formative assessment practices significantly improve learning outcomes when feedback is timely, comprehensible, and actionable. Hattie and Timperley (2007) further emphasize that effective feedback helps learners understand learning goals, current performance, and strategies for improvement.

The concept of **feedback literacy** highlights students' capacity to interpret and use feedback productively, reinforcing the need for assessment designs that actively engage learners in feedback processes (Carless, 2018).

Systemic pedagogy views assessment as an integral component of a coherent pedagogical system aligned with learning objectives, teaching strategies, and institutional values. In continuity with recent work on humanistic and systemic pedagogical models in higher education (Masandi Lez, 2024), DIDIMAL seeks to ensure coherence between educational purposes and assessment practices.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **conceptual and theoretical methodology** aimed at pedagogical model development. Rather than reporting empirical findings, it synthesizes key strands of the literature on assessment, humanistic pedagogy, and systemic educational design to construct a coherent framework for assessment innovation.

Conceptual modeling is widely recognized as a legitimate methodological approach in educational research, particularly when introducing new frameworks intended to inform practice and guide future empirical inquiry (Sadler, 1989). DIDIMAL is therefore presented as an orienting framework that can be adapted to diverse institutional, cultural, and disciplinary contexts.

4. The DIDIMAL Framework

DIDIMAL defines assessment as a **continuous learning-support process** grounded in humanity, formative mediation, and systemic coherence (Masandi Lez, 2025).

The framework integrates four interrelated dimensions:

- **Cognitive**, focusing on knowledge construction and conceptual understanding;
- **Relational**, emphasizing pedagogical dialogue and supportive interaction;
- **Ethical**, ensuring fairness, inclusion, and respect for learner dignity;
- **Reflective**, promoting self-regulation and metacognitive development.

By integrating these dimensions, DIDIMAL moves beyond narrowly summative conceptions of assessment and promotes a learner-centered approach aligned with contemporary assessment-for-learning theory. The framework encourages educators to design assessment practices that support learning trajectories rather than merely certify outcomes.

5. Discussion

Higher education systems in Africa face significant structural and pedagogical challenges that directly shape assessment practices. Tikly (2019) argues that educational reforms in postcolonial contexts must address local realities and epistemic conditions to be sustainable.

From this perspective, DIDIMAL contributes to debates on the humanization and contextualization of higher education by proposing an assessment framework that is both locally grounded and internationally intelligible. The model invites institutions to reconceptualize assessment as a pedagogical responsibility rather than a purely administrative requirement, thereby supporting more inclusive and meaningful learning experiences.

6. Conclusion

This article has presented **DIDIMAL** as a pedagogical framework for assessment innovation in African higher education. By integrating humanistic pedagogy, formative assessment, and systemic coherence, the framework reconceptualizes assessment as an ethical and relational practice that actively supports learning.

Although conceptual in nature, DIDIMAL provides a robust foundation for future empirical research and institutional experimentation. It offers higher education institutions in Africa and the Global South a theoretically grounded pathway for improving assessment practices while aligning with international academic standards.

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