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NARRATIVE-BASED ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY-LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT*

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ABSTRACT

Narratives represent depictions of factual or fictional events that coherently incorporate explicit or implicit messages, meanings, and interpretations. Although they can play a significant role in the teaching and learning process at all levels of education, the evaluation methods for assessing student achievement through narratives are not always clearly defined. Therefore, the aim of this exploratory study is to examine the possibility of defining and applying assessment criteria for student responses presented in narrative form, in relation to the intended learning outcomes in the domains of knowledge acquisition and the development of socio-emotional competencies. The analysis was conducted on students' assigned narratives, in which they were required to describe personal experiences using concepts and theories covered in the lesson. The study presents assumptions for identifying assessment indicators, explicates their connection to educational goals and learning outcomes at both course and lesson levels, and introduces two main domains for evaluating student achievement: the acquisition of factual and conceptual knowledge and the assessment of socio-emotional sensitivity (including emotional awareness and expression, empathy/perspective-taking, and conflict resolution). The paper further provides a detailed explanation of the quantification process for each indicator and includes examples of student narratives that illustrate the proposed evaluation approach. Finally, the study highlights the advantages, as well as the limitations, of this method of student achievement assessment.

Key words:

narratives, student achievement evaluation, higher education.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Stories and storytelling about real or imagined events, different contexts, characters, actions, motivations, emotions, and outcomes are fundamental aspects of human communication that provide structure, context, interpretation, and meaning to human experiences (Bruner, 1991; Derry, 2013; Olson, 2022). Stories facilitate academic, social, linguistic, and cultural learning and have therefore been used in teaching throughout the history of education (Gillam & Pearson, 2004; McCabe & Bliss, 2003).

In contemporary literature, various terms can be found, such as narrative, stories, case studies, and clinical vignettes. All these terms share common characteristics—they depict factual or fictional events, experiences, or interactions that include real or imaginary actors in a coherent and meaningful way. It is evident that, beyond the explicit content conveyed through spoken, written, or visual means, stories always carry additional meanings, messages, and interpretations that may not always be explicit but remain implicit (Antić, 2022, 2024; Gee, 2000). Among these terms, *narrative* is the broadest concept—a kind of “umbrella term” encompassing all the others. Its meaning and application fluidly traverse various disciplines within the social and human sciences, as well as public discourse.

In teaching and learning in higher education, there are multiple educational and formative objectives that justify the use of narratives (Abrahamson, 1998; Kromka & Goodboy, 2019; Moon, 2010). For example, instructors can enrich their lectures through storytelling. A quasi-experimental research design, in which the instructor connected the lecture content with personal experiences through anecdotes, demonstrated positive (albeit modest) effects on student achievement. These effects included improved recall of information, an increase in positive attitudes toward the instructor, and greater attention during lectures (Kromka & Goodboy, 2019).

Different forms of narratives can serve to actively engage students in the teaching process. For example, students may be asked to analyze a situation, a case study, a story, or a real-life clinical vignette. In educational contexts where the emphasis is placed on applying knowledge to future professional practice, narratives are used to intentionally connect the scientific and social aspects of a given phenomenon. Their resolution requires not only academic knowledge and cognitive skills but also an understanding of the complexity and contextuality of the studied phenomena, professional decision-making, assessment of event participants, evaluation of one's

own and others' ethical reasoning, as well as social skills such as argumentation, persuasion, presentation, collaboration, teamwork, and peer teaching (Baumberger-Henry, 2005; Berkowitz & Simmons, 2003; Bell, 2003; Bell & Liderman, 2003; Pešikan et al., 2016; Poleksić et al., 2022; Sedler, 2004; Sulé et al., 2023; Zeidler & Keefer, 2003). Additionally, such instructional scenarios foster the development of professional values, a sense of fairness and inclusivity, and ultimately contribute to the formation of students' professional and personal identities (Moon, 2010; Sulé et al., 2023).

Another equally effective approach involves students creating their own narratives, which they then analyze and reflect upon. Writing narratives enables students to express themselves creatively, fostering divergent thinking. Furthermore, sharing their personal stories, experiences, and perspectives helps students develop a stronger sense of community and generational belonging within their cohort (Tan, 2023).

Considering these various skills, it can be concluded that learning through narratives also contributes to the development of emotional skills, i.e., socio-emotional learning (Greenberg et al., 2003; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Jones et al., 2020; Pešikan & Lalović, 2017). The outcome of this learning is a key 21st-century competency. Socio-emotional learning can be broadly defined as the process through which individuals acquire and apply a set of social, emotional, and related skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values that help them regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions in ways that contribute to success in school, work, and life (Jones et al., 2021; Pešikan & Lalović, 2017).

Narratives can be useful for assessing various educational outcomes in both formative and summative evaluation. One of the most important tasks of any student achievement assessment is to verify their understanding of the learned material and their ability to apply knowledge. A given task may require students to analyze and solve a real-life scenario or to translate principles, concepts, and scientific notions into a self-constructed narrative.

If a problem-based story has only one correct answer, students must disregard all distractors and irrelevant information, reconstruct the missing elements based on the available data, and solve the problem. However, when there is no single correct solution or when students must choose between equally viable – or equally undesirable – options, as is often the case in real life, they have the opportunity to demonstrate their readiness for future professional roles.

Narratives in Assessing Individual Student Learning Achievement

The evaluation of student achievement in higher education is most often summative and norm-referenced. It is rarely an assessment of a student's progress relative to their own starting point, meaning that individual achievement is almost never compared between an initial and a final test (Bloxham et al., 2011; Gladovic et al., 2023; Maghnouj et al., 2020; Winstone, 2022; Winstone & Boud, 2022).

Moreover, student knowledge evaluation is predominantly focused on the cognitive domains of academic achievement, while socio-emotional aspects of learning are almost entirely absent from assessment practices.

The development of socio-emotional competencies cannot be measured through traditional knowledge tests because it is a deeply conditioned, multimodal phenomenon. This is where narratives have a clear advantage, particularly when they involve ethical dilemmas, conflicting priorities, or ambiguous outcomes within complex, ill-structured contexts. While educators recognize the importance of socio-emotional learning, they still require support in fostering and assessing these aspects (Jones et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022; Pešikan & Lalović, 2015).

This list of potential uses of narratives in assessing student achievement is neither final nor exhaustive but serves as an introduction to a future field of further research and practical solutions.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to highlight the possibilities of using narrative forms in the assessment of student achievement in higher education. Specifically, the study aims to examine the potential for defining and applying evaluation criteria for student responses presented in narrative form, in relation to the expected learning outcomes in the domains of knowledge acquisition and socio-emotional competence development.

At the outset, it was necessary to formulate assumptions that would guide the further concretization of indicators for assessing student narrative responses. The assumptions of this endeavor are as follows:

- 1) Clearly define the pedagogical requirements, including the set educational and instructional goals, the nature of the subject, and the expected learning outcomes. These requirements determine which criteria will be relevant for analyzing tasks that incorporate narratives. In other words, it is necessary to define which aspects of the narrative will be evaluated and classified as correct, incorrect, or partially correct in relation to the learning outcomes.

- 2) Identify objective indicators within the narrative that can signify a change or learning process.
- 3) The analysis must focus on the manifest content rather than the latent content to enhance the objectivity of assessment.
- 4) The form of narrative used in this study differs from traditional essay-type questions commonly used in knowledge assessment. Students use their personal experiences, which they categorize, analyze, and reflect upon in accordance with the evaluation criteria aligned with learning outcomes. Unlike conventional essay tasks that engage similar cognitive processes, it is expected that applying narratives to personal experiences will increase student motivation and engagement. Additionally, personal storytelling has greater potential to activate students' socio-emotional competencies.

■ CONTEXT

The course in which students were given the assignment is called *Psychosocial Aspects of Health, Illness, and Aging*. The objectives of this course are to familiarize students with various theoretical approaches to the phenomena of health, illness, and aging, as well as to equip them with critical understanding and basic empirical analysis of the psychosocial dimensions of these phenomena.

The lesson preceding the assignment focused on the topic *Illness Awareness and Coping Strategies*. The lesson objectives were:

- 1) To introduce students to key professional terms and theoretical approaches related to the psychological processes underlying illness awareness and coping mechanisms that follow the recognition of illness.
- 2) To develop sensitivity to the emotional states, thoughts, and perspectives that arise both within themselves and in their surroundings when confronted with illness.
- 3) To cultivate awareness of the conflicts that often emerge between individuals in the process of illness recognition and coping and to help students identify effective conflict resolution strategies.

From these lesson objectives, the following expected learning outcomes emerge:

- 1) Students have acquired factual and conceptual knowledge from the lesson *Illness Awareness and Coping Strategies*.

- 2) Students can interpret coping strategies through the lens of different theoretical perspectives.
- 3) Students successfully recognize the emotional states associated with illness awareness and coping, both in themselves and in others.
- 4) Students develop sensitivity to the emotions, thoughts, and perspectives of others involved in the process of illness recognition and coping.
- 5) Students can identify potential conflict situations that may arise in the context of illness awareness and coping and recognize effective strategies for conflict resolution.

■ METHODOLOGY

To practically demonstrate how specified learning outcomes can be translated into indicators applicable for assessing student achievement through narratives, we used an assignment in which, after learning about a specific thematic area, students were asked to create a story based on their personal experience. In doing so, they were required to apply the acquired knowledge, use technical terms, and incorporate theoretical perspectives covered in the course.

Sample and Task. The assignment was posted on an electronic platform for a group of 25 second-year students at the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Belgrade, after they had completed the relevant thematic unit. The students were given the following task: *Recall the last time you were ill (e.g., when you had a headache, a virus, a cold, a broken leg, etc.). Reflect on how you conceptualized your illness (how you assigned meaning to it). How did this conceptualization of illness influence the coping mechanisms you used and your recovery process?*

Procedure. After completing the lesson on this thematic area, students were informed that they would receive a homework assignment related to the lecture, which would be used to assess their application of the learned material. Before starting the task, they were encouraged to recall and reflect on their most recent illness experience. They were then instructed to use the knowledge gained in class to “translate” their subjective experience into academic concepts related to illness coping and coping strategies discussed in the lecture.

The assignment was completed at home through the Microsoft Teams electronic platform, seven days after the lecture. Students had 45 minutes to complete the task from the moment they logged into the platform.

Narrative Analysis. A qualitative content analysis approach was applied to several student responses to demonstrate the potential of a novel method for assessing competencies. The unit of analysis was sentences and sentence fragments within student responses. A deductive approach was used – criteria (indicators) were predefined (explicitly presented later in the text) and then identified within student responses.

During the evaluation process, two assessors independently coded the responses and assigned scores. After evaluating each response, the assessors compared their assessments and discussed discrepancies until they reached full agreement on the evaluation. These discussions about differing assessments allowed the assessors to further specify and clarify the evaluation criteria for narratives.

This procedure was repeated for all 25 student responses. As expected, greater discrepancies in assessment occurred in the domain of socio-emotional sensitivity, while evaluations of knowledge application showed minimal differences.

Criteria for Assessing Student Narratives

The first two learning outcomes indicate the ability to apply acquired knowledge, while the remaining three relate to the degree of students' socio-emotional sensitivity. The indicators used in this study for *assessing knowledge application* are as follows:

- The responses contain factual knowledge and technical terms relevant to the given thematic area.
- The responses include an accurate interpretation of the narrative content within different theoretical perspectives and scientific approaches.

The learning outcomes related to the *assessment of socio-emotional sensitivity* aspects were specified based on the framework of socio-emotional learning formulated by Jones and Bouffard (2012) and further developed by Jones et al. (2021, 2022). According to these authors, socio-emotional learning consists of several domains: cognitive, emotional, and social, including values, perspectives, and individual identity. In this study, we selected only specific indicators from the emotional and social domains that are relevant to the defined learning outcomes. The identified indicators are as follows:

The response demonstrates the student's emotional awareness, which is more specifically expressed when the student:

- Accurately recognizes emotions in themselves and others.
- Accurately identifies the intensity of emotions in themselves and others.
- Clearly identifies the connection between a situation and the emotions it may evoke.
- Clearly recognizes the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behavior (e.g., understanding that certain thoughts can trigger emotions, which in turn influence behavior).
- Predicts emotional states in themselves and others based on available information.

The response demonstrates empathy, which is more specifically expressed when the student:

- Identifies the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of other characters in the narrative.
- Considers how the thoughts and experiences of the characters differ from their own.
- Reflects on how the emotions of the characters differ from their own emotional experiences.
- Examines how the perspectives of the characters differ from their own perspective.
- Considers what position they would take if they were in a different situation.

The response demonstrates the ability to apply strategies and solutions that lead to the successful resolution of interpersonal conflicts, which is more specifically expressed when the student:

- Identifies the source or antecedent of the conflict.
- Clearly articulates both their own position and the positions of other actors in the conflict.
- Identifies effective and ineffective conflict outcomes (e.g., whether the issue was resolved, how it was resolved, and whether all parties were satisfied with the resolution).

Thinks critically and clearly articulates the broader context underlying the conflict.

Quantification of Narrative Indicators

The following section presents the method used to assess student responses based on the predefined criteria. The quantification of indicators and examples of responses are provided in tabular form. For better clarity, variations of the same response have been used as examples.

TABLE 1. Narrative indicators for assessing the ability to apply acquired knowledge

Mastery of factual knowledge and technical terms in the given thematic area	
Criteria	Examples
0 points No knowledge and/or technical terms are present in the narrative. The student primarily relies on personal/ everyday experience.	"...I had a cold, fever, frequent coughing, and throat problems. At first, I tried to avoid the problem, hoping it would go away."
1 point At least one sentence demonstrates knowledge from the thematic area and/or contains at least one technical term from the field.	"...I had a cold, fever, frequent coughing, and throat problems. At first, I attempted a <u>cognitive avoidance strategy</u> (presence of one technical term) hoping it would go away."
2 points Two or more sentences demonstrate knowledge from the thematic area and/or contain two or more technical terms.	"...I had a cold, fever, frequent coughing, and throat problems, which was my first <u>recognition of symptoms and, consequently, an interpretation of the illness</u> (1. presence of knowledge about illness coping aspects). At first, I tried to manage my symptoms <u>using a cognitive avoidance strategy</u> (2. presence of a technical term), hoping it would go away."
Interpretation of narrative content within different theoretical perspectives and scientific approaches	
Criteria	Examples
0 points The narrative does not include any theoretical perspective or scientific approach.	"When I had COVID... my doctor forbade me from going outside, prescribed strict bed rest, and gave me specific medications... After recovering, COVID left a positive mark. I became closer to my family and friends and started thinking more about my life and future."
1 point The narrative includes one theoretical perspective or scientific approach.	"When I had COVID... my doctor forbade me from going outside, prescribed strict bed rest, and gave me specific medications... After recovering, COVID left a positive mark. In accordance with the benefit-finding approach in illness coping (1 scientific approach to coping with illness crises), I became closer to my family and friends and started thinking more about my life and future."

2 points The narrative includes two or more theoretical perspectives or scientific approaches.	“When I had COVID... my doctor forbade me from going outside, prescribed strict bed rest, and gave me specific medications... After recovering, COVID left a positive mark. In accordance with the benefit-finding approach in illness coping (1 scientific approach to coping with illness crises), I became closer to my family and friends. Additionally, I went through a process of personal growth, reflecting more on my life and future, which <u>aligns with the Adaptation to Physical Illness approach and the Theory of Cognitive Adaptation</u> (2 scientific approach to coping with illness crises). ”
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TABLE 2. Narrative indicators for assessing aspects of socio-emotional sensitivity

Emotional Knowledge and Expression	
How well the student is able to:	
• Accurately recognize emotions in themselves and others. • Accurately identify the intensity of emotions in themselves and others. • Clearly identify the connection between a situation and emotions (recognizing the emotions a particular situation may evoke). • Clearly identify the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behavior (e.g., understanding that certain thoughts can trigger emotions, which subsequently influence behavior). • Predict emotional states in themselves and others based on available information.	
Criteria	Examples
0 points None or only one of the indicators of emotional knowledge and expression is present	“When I was sick, <u>I felt very uneasy.</u> ” (1 recognition of emotions ¹)
1 point Two indicators of emotional knowledge and expression are present.	“ <u>Illness</u> , like any 'malfunction' in the physical or psychological functioning of the complex system of body and mind, <u>evokes a sense of unease in me</u> (1 recognition of emotions, 2 connection between situation (illness) and emotion). In addition to worrying about my condition, its progression, and course of illness, I was also concerned about neglecting my responsibilities, being unable to complete tasks, skipping daily routines, and postponing exams ² ...”

1 The indicator of the connection between the situation and emotions is not present, as it is not explicitly stated that the illness causes a sense of unease.

2 Merely listing thoughts and emotions is not sufficient for it to be considered an indicator of the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behavior.

2 points Three or more indicators of emotional knowledge and expression are present	“<u>Illness</u>, like any 'malfunction' in the physical or psychological functioning of the complex system of body and mind, <u>evokes a sense of unease in me</u> (1 recognition of emotions, 2 connection between situation (illness) and emotion)... In addition to worrying about my condition, its progression, and course of illness, I was also concerned about neglecting my responsibilities, being unable to complete tasks, skipping daily routines, and postponing exams... <u>All of this created a great deal of confusion in my mind</u> (3 connection between thoughts, emotions, and behavior), and my sense of panic grew every moment (4 intensity of emotions)...”
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Empathy/Perspective-Taking

How well the student is able to:

- Identify the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of other characters in the narrative.
- Consider how the thoughts and experiences of the characters differ from their own.
- Consider how the emotions of the characters differ from their own emotions.
- Consider how the perspectives of the participants differ from their own perspective.
- Reflect on what position they would take if they were in a different situation.

Criteria	Examples
0 points None of the empathy indicators are present.	“The last time I was sick... I didn't think it was anything serious because the symptoms didn't appear right away... However, at my mother's insistence, I decided to visit a doctor, so I did...” (There is no clear identification of different perspectives taken by the characters in the narrative).
1 point At least one empathy indicator is present.	“The last time I was sick... I didn't think it was anything serious because the symptoms didn't appear right away... <u>Unlike me, my mother had a different perspective and believed that regardless of the severity, I should see a doctor</u> (1 identification of different perspectives), so I did...”
2 points Two or more empathy indicators are present.	“The last time I was sick... I didn't think it was anything serious because the symptoms didn't appear right away... <u>Unlike me, my mother had a different perspective and believed that regardless of the severity, I should see a doctor</u> (1 identification of different perspectives), so I did... I felt that something was wrong but didn't think it was serious, <u>unlike my mother, who showed concern</u> (2 reflection on how the emotions of the participant in the situation differ from one's own). When I first went to the doctor, he did not recognize the seriousness of the situation or predict possible complications and worsening. As a result, he confirmed my belief that it wasn't serious. <u>If I had visited a doctor who provided a proper diagnosis, I would likely have taken a more responsible approach to my treatment</u>” (3 consideration of the position if placed in an alternative situation).

Conflict Resolution/Social Problem-Solving

How well the student is able to:

- Identify the source/antecedent of the conflict.
- Clearly articulate their own position and the positions of other participants in the conflict.
- Identify effective and ineffective conflict outcomes (e.g., whether the problem was resolved and how and whether all parties were satisfied with the resolution).
- Reflect on and clearly articulate the “bigger picture” behind the conflict.

Criteria	Examples
0 points None of the conflict resolution indicators are present.	“The last time I was sick... I didn’t think it was anything serious because the symptoms didn’t appear right away... When I first went to the doctor, he did not recognize the seriousness of the situation or predict possible complications and worsening... As my condition significantly worsened, my frustration grew, leading to an argument with the doctor.”
1 point At least one conflict resolution indicator is present.	“The last time I was sick... I didn’t think it was anything serious because the symptoms didn’t appear right away... When I first went to the doctor, he did not recognize the seriousness of the situation or predict possible complications and worsening... As my condition significantly worsened, my frustration grew, leading to an argument with the doctor. However, I was aware that <u>arguing would not resolve my health problem, so I decided to visit another doctor who gave me the right treatment</u> .” (1 identification of effective and ineffective conflict outcomes).
2 points Two or more conflict resolution indicators are present.	“The last time I was sick... I didn’t think it was anything serious because the symptoms didn’t appear right away... When I first went to the doctor, he did not recognize the seriousness of the situation or predict possible complications and worsening... As my condition significantly worsened, my frustration grew, leading to an argument with the doctor. However, I was aware that <u>arguing would not resolve my health problem, so I decided to visit another doctor who gave me the right treatment</u> (1 identification of effective and ineffective conflict outcomes). <u>This situation reflects the long-standing issues in the healthcare system in our country</u> ” (2 articulation of the 'bigger picture' behind the conflict).

Each student response is evaluated based on each specified indicator. The total score represents the overall number of points the student has achieved. Each instructor, in accordance with the set goals and outcomes, can determine the threshold between sufficient and insufficient competence in applying knowledge to other situations.

Likewise, instructors can refine the grading scale by adding more than three levels for each indicator. Finally, it is important to note that it is up to the instructor to decide the weight and significance assigned to each of the specified domains.

EVALUATION OF NARRATIVES USING ESTABLISHED CRITERIA

Although the task was described in previous sections, we will reiterate that students were asked to write about their personal experience of dealing with illness. They were expected to apply the knowledge from the lesson *Illness Awareness and Coping Strategies* to describe their illness and treatment process through the lens of

psychological theories. In the following section, we present a sample narrative that will be evaluated based on the selected criteria (ability to apply acquired knowledge and aspects of socio-emotional sensitivity).

The last time I was sick, I had an ear infection. At first, I did not think it was serious because the symptoms did not appear immediately. I felt as if it was just a common cold, so I did not rush to see a doctor.

*Unlike me, my mother had a different perspective and believed that, regardless of severity, I should visit a doctor, so I did. **(Regarding interpretation, I believe that I was more influenced by the social message than by my own perception of the symptoms. I felt that something was wrong, but I did not think it was serious).***

When I first went to the doctor, he did not recognize the severity of the situation or predict possible complications and worsening. As a result, he reinforced my belief that it was nothing serious. If I had gone to a doctor who provided an accurate diagnosis, I probably would have taken a more responsible approach to my treatment.

*As my condition significantly worsened, my frustration increased, leading to an argument with the doctor. However, I was aware that arguing would not resolve my problem, so I decided to visit another doctor who prescribed the right treatment. This situation aligns with the long-standing issues in our country's healthcare system. **(Regarding coping mechanisms, I believe this was an instance of dealing with an illness crisis).***

*Since the illness was unexpected, I also felt a strong sense of guilt because it happened during the exam period, and everything fell apart. **My previous experience was limited**, as I had never had an ear infection before, meaning I lacked prior information about it. The recovery process went well because I followed all the doctor's instructions and **was focused on solving this "problem"**.*

The bolded sentences indicate that the student demonstrates factual knowledge and uses technical terms (social message, symptom perception, coping mechanism). Therefore, in the domain of knowledge acquisition and use of technical terms, the student would receive 2 points.

On the other hand, the narrative does not contain an interpretation of its content within different scientific approaches, so in this domain, the student would

receive 0 points. Thus, in the category of understanding of learned material, the student would receive 2 out of 4 possible points.

The assessment of socio-emotional sensitivity is based on the underlined sentences. In terms of emotional knowledge and expression, the student identifies only one emotional state (feeling of guilt), which is not sufficient for scoring points in this criterion. Empathy indicators are identified in two instances (recognition of the mother's different perspective and an alternative scenario where the doctor acted differently), earning the student 2 points. Regarding conflict resolution, the student identifies effective and ineffective conflict outcomes but also recognizes the broader systemic issue (a failing healthcare system). Due to these reasons, the student would receive 2 points for conflict resolution. In total, within the socio-emotional sensitivity category, the student scores 4 out of 6 points. The student achieved 6 points in total for this task.

■ DISCUSSION

Narrative structures have a long history of use in the teaching process (Gillam & Pearson, 2004; McCabe & Bliss, 2003). In modern education, where there is a need to develop higher levels of knowledge, cognitive and socio-emotional skills, as well as broader professional and ethical value frameworks (OECD, 2019), teaching students through various narrative forms gains particular significance. Despite their multiple benefits, practitioners are not always ready to incorporate different narrative forms into their teaching. One potential reason lies in the fact that it is not always clear how to “approach” narratives when it comes to their evaluation. This study represents an attempt to formalize the evaluation process by quantifying specific narrative indicators produced by students after learning about a particular thematic area.

Starting from the assumptions for formulating criteria, we emphasized the need for a clear definition of pedagogical requirements. Thus, the starting point was not merely the formulation of criteria but the determination of educational goals and outcomes from which the criteria emerged. This approach ensures that the formulated criteria for narrative assessment serve as relevant indicators of learning outcomes. In the case of our course and the specific lesson or thematic unit, we focused on the ability to apply acquired knowledge and socio-emotional sensitivity. The ability to apply knowledge included mastery of factual knowledge and technical

terms, as well as the successful interpretation of narrative content within different theoretical perspectives and scientific approaches. Socio-emotional sensitivity encompassed emotional knowledge and expression, empathy, and the ability to resolve conflict situations. The strength of the proposed evaluation process lies in reducing the possibility of subjective assessment of narrative quality by instructors.

Just as criteria and narrative indicators derive from educational goals and outcomes, the task itself must be structured so that its requirements clearly align with the defined indicators (Crisp, 2010). Only in this way can it be ensured that students adequately understand the task. In the task description provided to students, the criteria and indicators for evaluating narratives were not sufficiently explicit, which represents a limitation of this study. Since students were exposed to socio-emotional indicators and knowledge application indicators during lectures, it was assumed that they would be capable of producing responses related to the lesson and demonstrating skills in recognizing their own and others' emotions, perspectives, and social relationships. We believe that by making the task requirements clearer during formulation, we could obtain more diverse responses that would better serve as measures of students' ability to apply knowledge and their level of socio-emotional sensitivity—competencies that are significant but often difficult to assess (Crisp, 2010; Jones et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022; Pešikan & Lalović, 2015).

The process of determining evaluation criteria suggests that the proposed list is not exhaustive and is open to further additions and modifications. Future studies could develop a narrative task (either created by students or provided by the instructor) that incorporates and tests additional indicators: those assessing cognitive skills such as critical thinking and planning, socio-emotional skills like responsible decision-making, and broader value systems such as ethical values (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Jones et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022).

In this study, we specified criteria that can be an integral part of narrative assessment, regardless of the nature of the course, its objectives, or expected outcomes. These primarily include indicators related to the ability to apply acquired knowledge. Therefore, we believe that this study can serve as a solid starting point for researchers and practitioners engaged in empirical validation and the use of narrative structures for achievement evaluation.

The proposed evaluation criteria also allow students to receive feedback on a range of competencies that are considered essential in the job market (OECD, 2019) but are often not addressed through traditional knowledge-testing approaches.

Furthermore, explicitly defined criteria for narrative analysis can contribute to greater student participation in the assessment process. When students are aware of the evaluation criteria, it is expected that this will enhance their engagement in self-evaluation processes while learning. We see an analogy with the use of “rubrics” in self-assessment situations. This term is increasingly used in the literature, and one definition describes it as a document that articulates task expectations by listing key criteria and describing levels of quality on a scale from excellent to weak. Rubrics have three key features: evaluation criteria, an assessment strategy, and definitions of standards/quality (Pandero & Romero, 2014; Taylor et al., 2024). Research shows that when such a document is used, students employ more diverse learning strategies, achieve better outcomes, and provide more accurate responses (Pandero & Romero, 2014). In line with these findings, we see that defining criteria for evaluating narrative structures, some of which have been proposed in this study, can also be useful for encouraging self-regulated learning.

As previously mentioned, assessors always performed a double-check of their evaluations – first independently, by comparing their assessments with predefined criteria, and then together, by comparing their evaluations with each other. We are aware that in everyday academic settings, ensuring intersubjective agreement in this way may not always be feasible, raising the question of how instructors can ensure objectivity in this approach. First and foremost, the mere existence of clearly specified criteria significantly limits subjectivity. Discrepancies between assessors arose primarily at the beginning when the criteria needed further clarification. When disagreements did occur, they mostly concerned socio-emotional sensitivity. This is somewhat expected, given that evaluating socio-emotional sensitivity in narratives is a relatively new experience for most instructors. Therefore, we recommend that when first engaging in narrative evaluation, instructors consult with colleagues, just as the assessors did in this study. Such consultations will primarily help instructors gain confidence in objectively assessing narratives based on predefined criteria. Additionally, we recommend that the evaluation process remains open to discussion with students, allowing them to justify their perspectives regarding their narratives.

Although narratives vary in length, evaluating them can be time-consuming, especially in courses with large student groups. However, this challenge can also be addressed if students are introduced to the indicators for narrative assessment and encouraged to take on the role of assessors themselves. In this way, students have

the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their knowledge and skills from a dual perspective—both as students and as evaluators.

The time factor is important when considering whether narrative evaluation will be used for formative or summative assessment. In this study, students were asked to write narratives seven days after attending a lecture. Although students received points for completing the task, the primary goal was to determine what they had mastered from the lecture and to identify aspects that required further reinforcement to ensure they had fully understood the material. This type of task was fundamentally formative in nature.

However, the same task could be assigned again during an exam after a certain time gap to examine what knowledge had been retained after the lesson was initially learned. In this sense, narratives would serve a summative function. Future research could investigate whether the use of narratives for knowledge assessment can be equally beneficial in both formative and summative evaluation. While we believe that narratives could be useful for both types of assessment, this remains to be empirically verified.

Additionally, future research should compare traditional knowledge tests with narrative-based tasks to examine which form of evaluation allows students to apply more knowledge and competencies and to assess which type of task provides a better learning experience for students.

However, it is crucial to ensure curricular alignment, meaning that learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment strategies must be coordinated. The application of narrative structures should be an integral part of the teaching process before being incorporated into achievement evaluation.

■ CONCLUSION

The proposed evaluation of narrative structures can serve as a model for both formative and summative assessment of student achievement. By integrating narrative structures into both the teaching process and assessment practices, instructors can create meaningful and authentic learning experiences that encourage students to apply their knowledge, engage deeply with course content, and develop essential skills necessary for academic and future professional success.

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