# MONITORING INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS IN EDUCATION: STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

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**Daniela Pascaru**
Moldova State University
**ORCHID 0000-0003-1337-8531**

***The article aims at presenting monitoring individual progress in education as an essential practice to assess and improve student's performance in a personalized and effective way. This process involves the collection and analysis of data about each student's progress and performance in a range of learning activities. Progress monitoring is essential to support personalized learning, identify weaknesses, and improve student academic performance. Personalized learning emphasizes adapting the learning process to each individual student's needs, pace and learning style. This fact is based on the idea that every student is unique and that an individual approach to teaching and assessment can maximize understanding and retention of information. Monitoring can have a significant impact on the quality of education with the right tools and strategies.***

***Key words :*** *monitoring, individual work, differentiation, strategies, personalized learning.*

In the world of education, progress monitoring is a method to assess student growth and improvement in areas where students have difficulties. Focusing on incremental progress can help students find success in small achievements and encourage them to keep working toward larger goals. The teachers can better understand the strengths and weaknesses of their students, adjust their teaching strategies, and help them reach their full potential. The key is to use high-quality assessments and tools that accurately measure students' knowledge and skills. By doing so, we can provide targeted support and interventions that will close learning gaps definitively. It also provides teachers with data that allow them to prepare lessons with the needed changes so that students who need additional support can access and progress in the curriculum being taught. By regularly collecting and analysing data, teachers can make sound decisions and instructional adjustments based on each student's performance.

The analysis of specialized literature shows that progress monitoring significantly differs from traditional classroom assessments by many reasons. First, it provides objective, reliable, and valid data on student performance, in terms of the mastery of a curriculum. Subjective judgement is unavoidable for teachers when they prepare classroom assessments for their students. On the contrary, student progress monitoring measures and procedures are standardized which guarantees relative objectivity, as well as reliability and validity of assessment results. (Foegen and Morrison, 2010)

According to Safer and Fleischman, progress monitoring helps teachers use student performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and to make informed decisions regarding teaching and learning, suggesting that progress monitoring has become "critically important" in maximizing academic outcomes for all students. (2008 : 141)

Fuchs concluded that when teachers use systematic progress monitoring to track their students' progress, they are able to identify students in need of additional or different forms of instruction, they design stronger instructional programs, and their students achieve better results. (2002 : 1)

The teachers define clear, measurable goals for each student in the process of progress monitoring. These goals are based on the student's current performance levels and the expectations for their grade level. They serve as the benchmark against which the student's progress will be measured. With regular and systematic monitoring of student progress, teachers can adjust their instructional techniques and strategies to better meet the learning needs of their students. As a result, student achievement and growth are improved as instruction becomes more individualized and differentiated based on the data. The heart of progress monitoring is data collection. Teachers use a variety of methods to collect data on student performance, including tests, quizzes, and observational data. (Wayman and Johnston, 2007)

This collected data provides quantifiable evidence of a student's rate of improvement or lack thereof. Once the goals have been set, teachers begin the process of regularly monitoring the student's progress. This typically involves collecting data on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The frequency of monitoring may be adjusted based on the student's individual needs, the nature of the instruction, and the goals set.

By using progress monitoring data, educators can make informed decisions about each student's educational plan. It aids in identifying which students are on track and which may need additional support or a change in instructional techniques. Moreover, it helps to determine if the instruction or intervention being used is effective, thus ensuring that resources are used efficiently. In the realm of education, progress monitoring serves as a crucial tool for understanding and evaluating student progress. It provides teachers with a clear and objective understanding of a student's academic growth over time. When progress monitoring is used effectively, it can significantly increase student achievement and growth. The data collected provides information, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction based on individual students' needs, thus ensuring all students make sufficient progress.

Differentiating the teaching material means providing students with multiple options and opportunities to show what they know and can do. The teachers can differentiate the content, process, or product, depending on the learning objectives and the students' readiness, interests, and preferences. For example, the teachers can vary the difficulty or complexity of the questions, the format or mode of the assessment, or the choice or scope of the topics. Differentiating the teaching material helps teachers adjust the diverse needs and strengths of their students, increase their motivation and engagement, and capture a more comprehensive and authentic picture of their learning.

Fostering the students' optimal development primarily takes place by implementing the principle of individualization, which requires schools and teachers to plan and implement the educational process in a way that gives each individual student the opportunity to acquire knowledge and develop their abilities and personality traits. Individualization is a didactic principle requiring that schools and teachers adapt classroom teaching and learning to the individual educational and learning characteristics, needs, aspirations, and inclinations of each student, allowing them to learn as independently as possible. (Strmčnik, 1987 : 6) Individualization serves as one of the factors influencing the choice of organizational and instructional approaches.

The teachers look at the expected rate of improvement, the student's response to instruction, and the proximity of the student's current performance level to the set goals. Data analysis helps teachers understand whether the student makes sufficient progress or if changes in instruction are needed. If the data shows that a student does not make sufficient progress toward their goals, the teacher can use this information to adjust the instruction.

This could involve modifying the instructional techniques, increasing the intensity of the instruction, or providing additional support. Progress monitoring is not a one-time event but a continuous cycle. The process repeats, with the teacher continually collecting data, analysing it, and adjusting instruction as needed to support the student's progress. (Hallinger and Heck, 1998 : 157-191)

It was proved that when teachers use student progress monitoring, students learn more, teacher decision making improves, and students become more aware of their own performance. But many teachers will find this strategy worth the effort because it provides a powerful tool that can help them adjust instruction to ensure that all students reach high standards. (Deno, 2003 : 184–192)

Experienced teachers vary teaching strategies in response to student performance cues. Some of these strategies are the following:

– asking them to interpret or summarize material presented to them in the lesson;

– thinking about the questions that students are asking and noting what parts of the lesson do not seem to be understood;

– asking questions from various levels of Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives;

– asking students to act things out or draw them;

– walking around the class and checking worksheets, calling attention to errors and noting good work being done;

– encouraging students to listen to each other by summarizing comments of others and calling on children who do not seem to be listening. (Fleischman, 2005 : 81–83)

In order to properly track the students' growth, a baseline to compare students' future progress should be established. This fact will help better adjust the curriculum to the students' needs. Students should know what work they are accountable for, how to get help when they need it, and what to do when they finish. Performance should be monitored for completion and accuracy, and students should receive timely and specific feedback. When the whole class or group has the same assignment, the review of the assignment can be part of the next day's lesson. Other assignments will require more individualized feedback. The teachers should provide not only feedback but reteaching and follow-up assignments designed to insure that the material is mastered where performance is poor.

Hallinger and Murphy include the principal behaviours in the subscale Monitor Student Progress in creating their principal instructional management rating scale:

- meet individually with teachers to discuss student progress;

- discuss academic performance results with the faculty to identify curricular strengths and weakness;

- use of tests and other performance measures to assess progress towards school goals;

- inform teachers of the school's performance results in written form;

- inform students of the school's academic progress. (1985 : 157-191)

Teachers' competence in assessing students' skill levels and monitoring their learning progress is essential for effective instruction to take place. Imagine, an archer who shoots an arrow at a target but never finds out how close to the bull's-eye the arrows fall. The archer wouldn't be very accurate to begin with, and would certainly never improve in accuracy. Similarly, effective teaching requires that teachers be constantly aware of the effects of their instruction. (Slavin, 1986)

Assessment is a key element of the monitoring process. A well-designed classroom testing bear a positive relationship to later student achievement. Beneficial effects are noted

when tests are administered regularly and students receive a prompt feedback so that they can understand their correct errors before these become ingrained. Students who are tested frequently and given feedback have positive attitudes toward tests. They generally regard tests as facilitating learning and studying, and as providing effective feedback--an outcome which has surprised some researchers, who had anticipated finding more negative student attitudes toward testing. Given the strong connection between monitoring of students' learning progress and academic performance, it would be ideal if teachers received thorough training in monitoring and were highly skilled in classroom monitoring practices. The research on classroom-level monitoring and assessment reveals that:

– while standardized achievement test results are the main focus of assessment/evaluation efforts, nearly all important decisions about student placement, instructional pacing are made on the basis of teachers' ongoing classroom monitoring;

– many teachers do not assign and record completion assignments, monitor seatwork and check on students' progress, or conduct the kind of questioning that helps to monitor learning;

– teachers do not receive adequate pre-service training in conducting formal or informal assessments;

– many teachers are aware that their monitoring skills are inadequate and desire training to expand their capabilities;

– many others are unaware of the importance of close monitoring of student progress and of their own need for skill development in this area.

Progress monitoring is a set of evaluation procedures used to determine the extent to which students benefit from school instruction, as well as to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum. The educational approach starts from the premise that students benefit from a quality education. This generally assumes that students learn and master the skills and content taught in the classroom. For students who fail to learn in the classroom, alternative interventions can be provided, the results of which can also be monitored.

Monitoring is a valuable tool for measuring the effectiveness of the school training process periodically and identifying the current educational issues to be addressed. It also aims at adjusting the instructional strategies to meet the student's individual learning needs and directing the act of learning towards capacity and competences, abilities and attitudes in the context of activities/tasks as close as possible to real life.

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