On Line Support, Online Assessment: Education without Boarders

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Abstract: The need to new technology in teaching and learning process grows substantially. More recently, the integration of Information Technology (IT) into online teaching is of great importance for education. Nowadays, teachers have to think globally, due to the fact that the image of education is undergone drastic changes; thus, the time is right to move beyond the walls of traditional classes and methods in order to join with other educational centers to revitalize education. According to Haag [1], Information Technologies are set of tools that can help to provide the right people with information at the right time. Given the findings, due to the emergence of distance learning, online courses and virtual universities, e-assessment has taken a prominent place in effective teaching and meeting the learners' educational needs. The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, it elaborates on e-learning and argues that how and why e-assessment is becoming widely used by educationalists and an administrator over paper-based assessment and then; it introduces some effective strategies for online assessment.

Key Words: Assessment, e-assessment, e-learning, Information Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Information technologies have affected and touched every aspect of human activity remarkably and have a potential and vital role to play in the field of education and training, specially, in distance or online learning. The last two decades have witnessed a revolution in education due to onset of technology and globalization .Undoubtedly web-based learning will continue to expand and provide one of the chief resources for language learning in this century and assigns new challenges and duties on the modern teachers; in fact, the tradition of English teaching has been markedly changed with the remarkable entry of technology. Moreover, technology provides so many options as making teaching interesting and also making teaching more productive in terms of improvements. As Haag [1] puts, information technologies help in promoting opportunities of knowledge sharing throughout the world and can help the teachers and students having up-to-date information and knowledge since accurate and right information is essential for effective teaching and learning. The new era is the age of globalization; thus, the growth of ELT through technology is of great importance to grasp on various foreign languages particularly English language. English Language Teaching has been with us for many years and its significance continues to grow by IT. With the integration of IT with e-learning, e-assessment lies at the heart of education and it becomes the most enterprise in any educational systems in such a way that it is impossible to work in either field without being concerned with the other one. E-assessment can take different forms including the use of e-testing, e-portfolios, social software (such as wikis and blogs) and other approaches. As the findings manifest, there are many benefits to using e-assessment that will be discussed in present paper.

THE INTEGRATION OF IT IN CLASSROOM

According to Daintith [2], Information technology (IT) is defined as the use of computers and telecommunications equipment to store, retrieve, transmit and manipulate data and it is used as a tool to facilitate Interactive Learning. As Hussain [3] notes, IT can be used in classrooms in presentation and practice phases as the following ways:

•**Audio-Visuals and Animations:** Audiovisuals, video conferencing, short animations, virtual reality, etc can be used in teaching learning process to present or recycle new language to learners.

•**Multimedia:** Development in computers, communication, electronics and other Multimedia tools provide a wide range of sensory stimuli.

•**Community resources:** An electronic community allows students to engage in dialogue with each other, their teacher, experts and teachers in different parts of the country or the world.

•**Individualized instruction:** Technology can be used for individualized instruction in order to bridge the gaps between the teaching styles and the learning styles.

Digital devices: The digital devices like cameras, scanners can be used for instruction.

• **Online materials:** The online materials used in the educational setting.

• **Teacher-parent interactions and Teacher- teacher interactions**

• Last but not least is **online testing:** The teacher may prepare a question bank or an objective type test and place it on the network. The students answer and submit the test. The immediate feedback and scores can be obtained by the student. The evaluation can be done by means of assignments in the form of presentations, documents, and audio visuals, drill and practice, online quiz in various subjects, etc.

From above it is quite obvious that the benefits and influence of IT in education in the classrooms cannot be underestimated; therefore, as an effective and successful teacher, we should be able to find suitable ways and means to improve teaching techniques by using IT.

HOW IT IS USED BY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

●Students use information technologies to:
1. Participate in a media revolution, profoundly affecting the way they think about and use information technologies.
2. Improve the ways of learning in new learning fashions
3. Extend the ability and skills of applying their learning in real situation.
4. Working in groups for cooperative and collaborative learning
5. Developing self-learning habits at their own pace and time.
6. Learn with the teacher rather by the teacher.
7. Develop inquiry-learning habits.
8. Use right information at right time to achieve right objective.
9. Review and explore qualitative data.
10. Exchange learning experiences and information with others students and teachers living anywhere in the world.

●Teachers use the information technologies to:
1. Present the material in more interesting and attractive way.
2. Guide and help students in searching the qualitative material.
3. Make best use of time.
4. Coach the students.
5. Provide individualized instruction.
6. Direct the students toward cooperative as well as collaborative learning activities.
7. Prepare learning material for students, rather teaching in conventional situations.

8. Diagnose the learning problem of students and help them to overcome.

E-LEARNING

E-learning or web-learning is currently huge buzzword in education includes all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching, including educational technology [4]. Abbreviations like CBT (Computer-Based Training), IBT (Internet-Based Training) or WBT (Web-Based Training) have been used as synonyms to e-learning. In fact, E-learning allows us to be educated on any subject at any time in many different locations and it brings new dimensions in the world of education. It is commonly thought that new technologies can make a big discrepancy in distance learning .For instance, learners specially children can interact with new media, and develop their skills, knowledge, and perception of the world. Many proponents of e-learning believe that everyone must be equipped with basic and rudimentary knowledge in technology, as well as use it as a medium to reach a particular goal. Some of the advantages of the use of e-learning are indisputable and obvious. They stem from the opportunities offered by this type of systems. In fact, for those who have yet to experience the e-learning revolution, there is a treasure trove of rich benefits and exciting advances just waiting to be discovered, but some believe that there are also major pitfalls that must be carefully avoided.

Here are the advantages of e-learning for foreign language training that can be considered in several aspects [5]:

• Student can study anywhere as long as there is access to a computer with internet connection (education for all).
• They can work at own pace.
• User can accommodate different learning styles through different activities.
• Flexibility to join discussions any hour of the day
• E-learning is cost effective.
• E-learning also offers individualized instruction, which print media, cannot provide, and instructor-led courses allow clumsily and at great cost.
• E-learning can target specific needs.
• Online instruction knows no geographic boundaries. Online courses link students from all over the world.
•Students can share ideas in a culturally diverse setting with people from different social, economic, and experiential backgrounds.

Disadvantages of e-learning: The research findings indicate that there are some possible barriers and enablers to e-learning use as below [5]:

• Lack of personal community and connection (not for blended learning)
• Tech, toys, and teaching over learning
• Focus on memorization over learning core competencies
• Underutilized talents and facilities
•Learners with low motivation or bad study habits may fall behind.
•Without the routine structures of a traditional class, students may get lost or confused about course activities and deadlines.
•Students may feel isolated from the instructor and classmates
•Instructor may not always be available when students are studying or need help.
•Slow Internet connections or older computers may make accessing course materials frustrating.
•Managing computer files and online learning software can sometimes seem complex for students with beginner-level computer skills.

All in all, e-learning advantages and disadvantages are important to consider when organizations and individuals are making learning decisions, but what is universally agreed is that e-learning, whether offered as a stand-alone approach or mixed or blended with other training, is difficult to implement.

E-ASSESSMENT

Professionally, e-Assessment in present decade has played a pivotal role in people's lives and has been one of the key factors behind the success of people in education. The term e-assessment is a broadly-based one, covering a range of activities in which digital technologies are used in assessment. Such activities include the designing and delivery of assessments, marking – by computers, or humans assisted by scanners and online tools – and all processes of reporting, storing and transferring of data associated with assessments [6]. In fact, e-Assessment is an alternative to testing since using only tests as a basis for assessment has obvious drawbacks. Some form of e-assessment at which a learner's attainment and progress come under review are as below:

●Formative assessment or diagnostic testing is a range of formal and informal assessment procedures employed by teachers during the learning process in order to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student attainment. It typically involves qualitative feedback (rather than scores) for both student and teacher that focus on the details of content and performance [7].

●Summative is the final assessment of a learner's achievement, usually leading to a formal qualification or certification of a skill. Summative assessment is also referred to as assessment of learning [7].

BENEFITS FROM E-ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND SYSTEMS [8]

•Greater flexibility in when and where assessment can be taken.
•Increased motivation for candidates through the use of media-rich elements in assessment
•Support for preferences in different learning styles and assessment approaches
•Immediate feedback to candidates (depending on the e-assessment type)
•Time savings for assessors through automatic marking (depending on the assessment instrument)
•Assessment management is easier and quicker
•Support for candidates who use assistive technologies in assessment
•Cost savings, quality assurance gains and improved administration through easy access and transfer of electronic evidence
•Assessing metacognition
•Knowing how to use knowledge
•Better exemplification for students and teachers
•Increased flexibility Assessments can be provided at a greater range of locations and times.
•More efficient and environmentally friendly administration; that is, e-assessment, and the associated e-administration of candidates, reduces the administration burden on centers.

Generally, e-assessment may be best used to free staff for tasks that humans do best. Administrative functions performed by the computer – scoring, recording, and transfer of data – will ensure greater accuracy and objectivity than is achieved by humans. However, a uniquely valuable attribute that e-assessment can offer to learners and practitioners is an authentic assessment experience. Computer-based assessments can be taken in the workplace, acquiring an immediate relevance. They may also replicate an authentic context through simulations, virtual worlds or use of audio or image files, so that the activity seems more real and purposeful for the candidate. The use of gaming software as a preparation for, or as part of, a summative assessment increases the stakes in this respect, and, where development funding is available, has the potential to revolutionize assessment practice.

THE USE OF ON-LINE TOOLS TO ASSESS LEARNER PROGRESS TOWARD SUBJECT OBJECTIVES CAN TAKE MANY FORMS INCLUDING: [9]

- Electronic submission of written assignments
- Parallel print and on-line assessment options where students are given the choice of whether and how they use on-line tools in assessment tasks
- Publication of documents on the web
- Labeling of on-line diagrams
- Manipulation of on-line graphs
- Completion of on-line quizzes
- Completion of short-answer and multiple choice questions
- On-line exams with monitored and controlled start and stop times
- Any formative or summative task carried out in a web-based environment.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE ON-LINE ASSESSMENT [9]

- An access and usage checklist
- A quality of teaching and learning checklist
- A technical and administrative checklist.

Access and usage checklist

1. Has any inherent unfairness if some students are less familiar with computer use than others (for example, some international students and some older students) have been avoided?
2. While most students have access to computers at home, some do not – does the design of the task ensure that this latter group is not disadvantaged?
3. Is student access to assessment tasks and related material assured?
4. Has the potential issue of using the on-line medium as the principal or sole vehicle for assessment, thereby disadvantaging or excluding some learners, (Morgan and Reilly, 1999) been avoided?
5. Has the potential issue of significant financial costs associated with external access to university computer networks been addressed?
6. Has the potential issue of access to on-campus university computers been addressed? "It's very time consuming to travel to university and line up to get a computer"
7. Has equity been ensured in relation to the cost of students printing large amounts of material?

8. Have appropriate educative resources been made available to address the issue of ICT skills?

Quality of teaching and learning checklist

9. Does the on-line assessment assess anything that can't be assessed as well (or more effectively) in a traditional format?
10. Have greater opportunities been provided for students to practice their knowledge and skills than are available in traditional formats?
11. Has the highly valued and expected flexibility of time-of-day access, pace of work and time spent on task been incorporated?
12. Have the opportunities for diagnostic, continuous, case-based and/or formative assessment of student learning been taken?
13. Is student learning related to subject content knowledge, understanding and skills being assessed rather than, or in addition to, ICT skills?
14. If relevant, have opportunities for students to demonstrate creativity in their submissions, which is possible with other forms of assessment, been incorporated?
15. Where necessary, is the approach chosen to verify individual student performance/submission reliable?
16. Has the opportunity to plagiarize been eliminated or at least minimized?
17. Has the tendency, particularly where automated responses are incorporated, to focus on lower level cognitive skills been avoided or at least, supplemented with assessment of higher order learning?
18. Are mechanisms to enable rapid feedback both to and from the students included?
19. Are examples of model assignments/exam answers on the web for student access, consideration and discussion?

For on-line examinations in particular:

20. Have practice on-line exams in the same format as the real exam been provided so students can prepare adequately?
21. Are all answers able to be changed by the student up until the point where the test is submitted?
22. Have question banks and random selection of items been used, where appropriate?
23. Have dynamic on-line test questions that are in themselves learning experiences been provided,

incorporating rich information and activities through the use of interactive images, sound and text?

For evaluation in particular:

24. Have robust evaluation strategies that produce diagnostic, formative feedback on the success of on-line assessment been integrated into planning and development?
25. Has student feedback (including on-line discussion boards) been used for reflection on the content and quality of the discussion, as part of examination of teaching practices?

Technical and administrative checklist

26. Has interference to the on-line assessment from scheduled maintenance periods been planned for?
27. Has the system been kept as local as possible so that reliance on large (less reliable) networks is minimal?
28. Will the difficulties that some students have with passwords, access, usage and related issues be adequately managed by the system?
29. Have management systems been put in place to deal with student difficulties with matters unrelated to on-line assessment that they will attempt to solve through on-line systems (email, discussion boards etc)?
30. Where a range of computers and software packages are in use among students and staff, has the potential issue of compatibility and readability of files containing assignments that are submitted electronically been planned for?
31. Have simple but time consuming matters, such as students forgetting to put their names on electronically submitted assignments, been planned for?

For on-line tests and exams in particular:

32. Has adequate technical support during the development and use of on-line exams been ensured? Have emergency backup procedures been put in place?
33. Has the server containing the exam questions been isolated from the internet in order to maintain security?
34. Is the server reliable?

In closing, there are at least three useful guiding principles when starting to use on-line assessment. These are:

- **Start with clear educational objectives:** The subject objectives – what is being assessed? And the needs, characteristics and situations of the learners.
- **Start small:** aim for quality rather than quantity. If might also be useful to start with formative rather than summative assessment on-line.
- **Start where success is most likely:** Successful on-line assessment is most likely if that assessment is aligned with teaching and learning objectives. In other terms, there should be a strong relationship between the purpose of on-line assessment task(s) and the intended outcomes of the subject. It is highly recommended to design assessment tasks that require the students to integrate the material they have learned in the subject with their own interpretations of that material. The on-line assessment should also allow students to communicate their understandings and allow the provision of feedback to students on their efforts to these ends.

CONCLUSION

Although, there are some disadvantages to use e-learning as well as e-assessment, students will get tremendous satisfaction from it. According to student surveys, e-learning has had a broadly positive pedagogical impact on students. What is of great importance is that e-learning and classroom learning cannot be separated by teachers, but classroom learning can be enhanced by adding e-learning .For example, a discussion to continue dialogue after session can be fruitful for learners to improve their speaking. In fact, the focus is now how to make e-learning and e-assessment more effective and useful both for teachers and learners. E-assessment is not just about multiple choice objective testing; technology can be used to provide assessment opportunities not possible with pencil and paper. In brief, learning English is a lifelong process that preparing learners to learn online is the greatest skill that teachers can offer since learn how to use some skills in order to acquire knowledge play a vital role in success. Given that e-learning and e-assessment are novel activities so there is much more to be done by researchers in this field to get a clear understanding for the future.

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