

TECHNOLOGY-INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Cristina-Gabriela MARIN
University of Craiova

Abstract: In this early part of the 21-st century the range of technologies available for use in language learning and teaching has become very diverse and the ways that they are being used in classrooms all over the world have become central to language practice. This paper is concerned with a practise-based at how technology can be used in assessing English language teaching (ELT). Technology is having a direct impact on language assessment. There is an abundance of tools that can be used in assessment and these broaden the types of assessment tasks we can create as well as offer quicker and easier ways to distribute them. The format of testing should not be limited to paper and pencil examination. Many teachers stick to common tests for the sake of convenience, ultimately sacrifice the benefits of adjusting to learners individuality. A further shift in the assessment landscape is the attention paid to achievement area which was somewhat neglected in the past. Authenticity is a value to be explored in teaching and assessment and it has to be understood as a cooperation of the teacher and student not as a one-way transmitting of meanings.

Keywords: integration, challenges, testing approach, current trend, authenticity, etc

1. Introduction

Current needs analysis in EAP reveals that, along with linguistic demands, many academic tasks involve the use of technology. Students are expected to produce word-processed reports and documents, create digital slides to enhance presentations, use email to communicate and collaborate access and participate in online learning platforms and conduct research using online electronic databases and the internet.

As Jarvis¹ writes: “today’s students are being able to operate efficiently, effectively and appropriately in academic contexts has an additional element and that is being able to do so in an electronic environment. Such environments have, of course, become a prevalent nature at many higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe. Assessment has changed, firstly because the skills and content of any modern language course have changed and because what we understand about the nature of assessment has also changed.

This paper is therefore in three parts: the first presents the key factors that have influenced the way assessment has changes over the years. The second part is focused on the two functions that are commonly identified in the literature: formative and summative assessment. The third part focuses on a hands-on approach related to technology-integrated assessment that can be used in a variety of ways during the English lessons.

In the 1970-s assessment had moved towards communication, to learn language so that we can communicate better with others. The term “communicative competence” (i.e. our ability to communicate and put our ideas across either in the written or spoken form)

¹ Jarvis H. (2004)- Investigating the classroom applications of computers on EFL courses at Higher Education Institutions in UK. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, p. 137

became important. New skills were recognized as central to our ability to communicate, including the organisation and planning of a text, pronunciation, the ability to paraphrase, the ability to turn take and engage in conversation. These new skills are also needed to be assessed. There has been a lot of interest in autonomous learning in making learning more authentic and related to real- situations or work-related contexts² and in social interactions that aid learning.

The emergence of constructivism has been enthusiastically received by the CLT community since there are parallels in the two approaches.

In implication of the presence of *multiple intelligence* for second language learners, teachers is that instruction must be varied so that in a particular unit at different times each student gets a match with intelligences in which they most prefer to operate. Each student gets stretched by working with intelligences in which they are less developed and students come to appreciate the value of working with people of varied intelligence profiles. Additionally, by being aware of the different intelligence profiles of themselves, their classmates, their teachers and others can appreciate the benefits of learning with people of different profiles. Gardner³ described seven different intelligences which in his view provided a much more comprehensive picture of intelligence. In implication of the presence of multiple intelligence for second language learners, teachers is that instruction must be varied so that in a particular unit at different times each student gets a match with intelligences in which they most prefer to operate. Each student gets stretched by working with intelligences in which they are less developed and students come to appreciate the value of working with people of varied intelligence profiles.

2. Formative and Summative Assessment

Two functions are commonly identified in the literature: formative and summative assessment. Most of our classroom assessment is formative assessment evaluation students in the process of “forming” their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process. The key to such formation is the delivery (by the teacher) and internalization (by the student) of appropriate feedback on performance, with an eye toward the future continuation (or formation) of learning. For all practical purposes, virtually all kinds of informal assessment are (or should be) formative. They have as their primary focus the ongoing development of the learner’s language. So, when you give a student a comment or a suggestion, or call attention to an error that feedback is offered in order to improve the learner’s language ability.

Summative assessment aims to measure, or summarize what a student has grasped, and typically occurs at the end of a course or unit of instruction. A summation

² often called *task-based learning*

³ Beyond the traditional two forms of intelligence the following eight types of intelligence are typically listed in Gardner’s work: Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Musical (the ability to perceive and create pitch and rhythmic patterns) Spatial (the ability to find one’s way around, to form mental images of reality), Bodily-Kinaesthetic (fine motor movements, athletic prowess), Naturalist (sensitivity to natural objects such as plants, animals, clouds etc.), Interpersonal (the ability to understand others, how they feel, what motivates them, how they interact with each other), Intrapersonal intelligence (the ability to see oneself, to develop a sense of self-identity).

of what a student has learned implied looking back and taking stock of how well that the student has accomplished objectives, but does not necessarily point the way to future progress. Final exams in a course and general proficiency exams are examples of summative assessment. One of the problems with prevailing attitudes toward testing is the view that all the tests (quizzes, periodic review tests, midterm exams) are summative. A challenge to you as a teacher is to change that attitude among students: Can you instil a more formative quality to your students view as a summative test? Can you offer your students an opportunity to convert tests into “learning experiences”.

The figure below outlines some of the main differences between technology-integrated assessments versus traditional assessment:

Technology-Integrated Assessments	Traditional Assessment
represents a complete range of topics and subjects students are engaged in	assesses students across a limited range of topics and subjects
cannot be mechanically scored-often some form of scoring rubric is used	can be mechanically scored or scored by teachers using an answer key
students are involved in their assessments	scoring is done exclusively by the teachers or by a machine
is collaborative ⁴ : teacher and student	assessment is not collaborative
student peer- and self-assessment ultimate goal	no-student peer or self-assessment
allows for individual differences in achievement	assesses all students on the same criterion
assessment for achievement and development-effort included	

3. Empowering students- giving access to a wide range of web-based tools and allowing them to publish their work

There is no doubt that teaching and learning involves a much broader range of activity than in previous times, teachers are expected to find ways of teaching all four skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing), so assessing the learning that takes place and has also become more complex. Perhaps one way of seeing how far assessment has come is to look at the idea of an *e-portfolio*. It is an excellent example of where the affordances of technology can really make a contribution. E-portfolios can be word-processed documents, blogs, wiki-s, mind-maps or other specialist tools (for example Mahara⁵) and can include a wide range of digital assets such as videos or audio recordings, saved chat-room discussions or forum discussions and a wide range of other electronic artefacts.

Dialang is a tool that was developed to allow students to self-evaluate. It is similar to checklists produced in the paper-based portfolio, but has the added dimension that once the students have completed their work can do lists; they can click on a button and get

⁴ Collaborative assessment is when two or more learners attempt to assess some aspects of their own learning together.

⁵ is a free and open-source web-based electronic portfolio management system written in PHP.

some guidance on what to study to improve. An advantage of using e-portfolio is that they can be distributed and even adapted quickly.

Students could bring up a series of *oral recordings* over a course, and self-evaluate their work or the teacher could even set up activities so that peer evaluation takes place. The students have just recorded themselves giving a presentation about their closest friend. The goal to include information about how they met/ what they have in common/ what types of things they like doing when they are spending time together/ their friend personality/they could include pictures in the power point presentation along with the slides. They can upload their power point presentations onto my Brain Shark and are now expected to evaluate their own recordings.

Blogging –the students usually get a chance to try out the technologies during English classes and for homework by being encouraged to read each other’s blogs and leave comments. Their blogs are assessed at the end of the semester both for content and for language.

Quiz making tools can be provided so that students can access at any time, allowing for greater flexibility in the timing and organisation of assessments. Many systems can even automatically mark student input which has the potential to impact on the timeliness of feedback, provide students with useful knowledge of their progress(at least in terms of grammar, syntax, or comprehension questions and allow students to repeat the exercises as needed.

Virtual Learning Environments are free and not difficult to set up for teachers. One interesting VLE which is attracting a lot of interest at the time is *Edmodo*. The teacher sets a discussion topic and each student is obliged to make a minimum of three contributions. They do this at home. The teacher reviews the discussion and takes notes or highlights some of the best contributions and explains why she likes them. This is not based on grammar or language but on their ability to communicate an idea effectively.

Using *my Brain Shark*⁶ can be a really interesting idea because students can produce their own Power Points slides, load them up onto my Brain Shark and then add voice to their slides. So students can create Power Points on a given topic, record and re-record their voice until they are happy with their recording and then share their work at the click of a button. Students and teachers can listen to the recordings and add notes/ comments as feedback.

This tool is especially good for English for Academic Purposes because many of these students will be expected to give Power Point presentations during their course and this is a great way of getting them to practice. A big advantage is the fact that students do not stick to Power Point. They can load up PDF documents, Word files, pictures and even videos and then add their own voice narration.

Previously, it might have been very difficult for students to prepare a Power Point presentation without actually doing the presentation in front of the teacher/ peers and getting feedback. Now students can create them using my Brain Shark and then share them over the internet. Feedback plays a key role in the assessment process. Good

⁶ www.brainshark.com/my brainshark

feedback can help students to see their own difficulties, to overcome them and direct their future learning.

Lam and Lee⁷ experimented with an interesting combination of feedback when they encouraged their students to create paper portfolios. Students were expected to write part of their portfolios in the class and the teacher used this time to provide feedback.

Students also had one-to-one conferencing with students about their written work and finally students were expected to peer-review each other's work. They should choose their best two written pieces and put them forward for formal summative feedback. One advantage of this was that it really focused the students when it came to the peer evaluations and self-evaluation of their work since the students had to decide themselves which piece of written work to put forward for formative evaluation

The technology-integrated assessments presented throughout the paper can be used in ways that enhance their already inherent potential to promote learning and they are opened to students in ways to give them the opportunity to develop self- and peer assessment skills.

Blog Assessment

From the outset I had to make some fundamental decisions about how the blog assignment should work within the course. It is because one of the writing assignments, taking place in a regular old-fashion (2000 word essay), the blog itself was to be 500-1000 words long and accompanied by a commentaries read me only in which students discuss the process of writing a blog, especially the challenges they encountered and the solutions developed. The commentaries section gave students a chance to reflect on and thus to learn from their own writing processes; it also helped me to evaluate the effectiveness of the assignment.

Results and Learning: Each student wrote one post for the course blog and thus the assignment was like a regular term paper except that:

1. it was not an essay
2. it was published to the Web

Acting as the blog editor the teacher suggested chances to students' first submissions which they could incorporate into the final published version, if they wished; but I resisted the temptation to tinker with their final versions which were published afterwards. The teacher can use the course blog to post a series of writing tips for the class. Students did for the most part; write noticeably better in their blogs posts than in regular essay assignments. More was at stake in the blog posts students knew that their work would be read not solely by their professor/teacher but also by their peers and possibly by others outside the class. The informal nature of a blog also allowed students to write in many cases with a more genuine voice than for an essay assignment, and thus more effectively. There was a higher chance that they would write about something that truly interested them, and quite a few expressed enthusiasm about assignment. In conclusion, was that students wrote better when blogging. It is a

⁷ Lam & Lee (2010)- Balancing the dual functions of portfolio assessment. English Language Teaching Journalp. 54-64

very useful idea since one of our goals in teaching writing is to help students write better.

Conclusions:

Testing and assessment has changed enormously over the last 50 years and it has played a role in assessment for a long time but with the introduction of the internet, of Web 2.0 technologies and mobile technologies, the role of technology is greater than ever. There will be many teachers out there who are using technology in their assessments, but in general it is not the case. The large majority of assessments are still paper-based and the use of ICT for assessment, just like the use of ICT for teaching, is still a very experimental stage.

One drawback is the fact that technology often bemuses teachers because it changes so fast. According to Beatty⁸: “it is constantly changing” and it is almost impossible for both teaching and learning to keep up with these changes. Teachers should choose technologies that fit well with their assessment criteria and that will broaden your assessment criteria and that will broaden your assessment base and do not worry whether they are the latest thing or not. Moreover, they should try it on informal assessments in their classes and should gather plenty of feedback from their students, who can be very supportive and cooperative.

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⁸ Beatty, K (2010)- *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, London Longman, p.8