

## Abstract

With the increasing rate of literacy, online teaching and learning have seen a new adopted trend and soon online assessment to these new modes of instruction has become more prevalent. Hence, educationalists have thought of designing courses, with their assessment levels and typology, together with finding out appropriate training strategies on how to assess students' formative and summative achievement progress. Exploratory, descriptive and qualitative methods in the field have proven the effective efficiency of assessment on line as it gained much time, measured well the students' degree of progress and has given students another motivating opportunity and fillip to follow their teachers' notifications and corrections on the spot. And though online assessment is not the privilege of every distant student; yet, it has helped a lot of learners integrate technology at their proper will using the websites, moodle, teleconferencing and group discussion. It has also helped teachers to identify areas of their learners' misunderstanding. Teachers' effective feedback has helped students a lot in clarifying what good performance is and what quality information is expected about their learning. Various assessment tools as portfolios, quizzes, tests, essays, reports and rubrics completion have been used and where students have shown a great talent in their use, adaptability and efficiency. (203 words)

**Key Words:** *online assessment, formative and summative assessment, stimulating strategy*

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# The advantages of online assessment-an asset for distance learning

## Introduction

Teaching and learning require an assessment where the learners' feedback versus the teachers' input makes the difference. Hence, measurement of all forms of learning even with adults must observe a kind of measurement in some way. Consequently, the role of teachers is to find out how well a student has grasped a kind of input termed intake regardless of the level and subject of study they had undergone.

Many teachers find frequent, ongoing online assessments an effective way to measure knowledge. Whereas Other educators use only mid-term and final assessments within a course.

Since assessment is an important lens through which education is viewed (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000), and a driver of student performance, the authors considered it an important component of any online distance education program that needed further study.

According to Keegan's (1990, 44) *distance education definition* includes "quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process", "influence of an educational organization, use of technical media", "provision of two-way communication", and "quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the learning process...so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups."

Online assessment in recent years has shown a great improvement in giving students an autonomous way to keep in contact with their own progress through adapted systems of digital teaching and learning that Kirkpatrick defined as "the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the program" (Kirkpatrick, 1998 )

Great universities as the University of South Africa (UNISA) have gone far in pursuing their students in their distance learning and have set high standards of objective assessment.

Our intent through this paper is to show the importance of online assessment for students who did not have a chance to get a normal schooling the way they learn, the way they are assessed for the different extracurricular activities and tasks they perform, the nature of assigned work and their feedback.

## Definition of assessment

Assessment is the ongoing process of proofreading, reading, perusing, analyzing and reflecting with evidence upon an assigned work to find fault with and make informed and consistent judgments upon to improve future student's learning through comments , observation and grades. Before talking about assessing students, we need to talk about the program content, the students' nature, and their

social background and mostly about the target knowledge the program aims at, together with the training profile we envisage to teach. These are termed domain of knowledge that are basic in online distance courses completion.

But what does the term mean in psycho pedagogy? Seels and Glasgow (1990) discussed three commonly accepted knowledge domains as their psychological basis for instructional design – *affective, cognitive, and psychomotor*. In addition to these domains, Romiszowski (1981) identified a missing domain – social/interpersonal/interactive skills that may need to be developed, and, therefore, assessing students is basically dependent on the outcomes of the course or program.

## **Literature Review:**

### **Principles for assessment**

Hence, Literature review regarding assessment that improves student learning and a deep understanding of their standard requires a range of assessment principles and practices to be used as the importance of authentic assessment activities (e.g., Kim, Smith, & Maeng, 2008; Robles & Braathen, 2002), the use of assessments that promote academic self-regulation (Booth et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2008; Robles & Braathen, 2002), concerns about academic integrity (Kennedy, Nowak, Raghuraman, Thomas, & Davis, 2000; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2006), and the challenges involved in assessing online discussion and collaboration (Meyer, 2006; Naismith, Lee, & Pilkington, 2011; Vonderwell, Liang, & Alderman, 2007).

Over the last few decades, many researchers have been convinced that assessment of learner achievement in online distance environments should be integral to instruction, be continuous, and maximize feedback (Meyen et al., 2002). First of all, Pennsylvania State University (1998) developed a set of principles to guide assessment in online distance education. These principles of assessment might be an initial guide for designing “big picture” evaluation of learner achievement (p.7):

1. *Assessment instruments and activities should be congruent with the learning goals and skills required of the learner throughout a distance education program or course.*
2. *Assessment and management strategies should be integral parts of the learning experience, enabling learners to assess their progress, to identify areas of review, and to reestablish immediate learning or lesson goals.*
3. *Assessment and measurement strategies should accommodate the special needs, characteristics, and situations of the distance learner.*

4. *Distance learners should be given ample opportunities and accessible methods for providing feedback regarding the instructional design of the distance education program.*

Kibby (2003 ) reiterated that web-based assessment might assist students in taking ownership of their learning because the assessment could provide integration of learning and assessment, and also immediate and effective feedback to students. Thus, web-based assessment systems could have more potential than paper-based assessment systems in terms of access and flexibility for both students and teachers in effective and efficient management. In order to develop web-based assessment, she suggested several key decisions to be made as follows (Kibby, 2003):

1. *Which perspectives for learning are going to be assessed, cognitive (acquisition of knowledge), behavioral (skill development), or humanistic (values and attitudes)?*
2. *Who is going to make the assessment, the student, their peers, or the instructor?*
3. *Will assessment strategies be learning experiences in themselves?*
4. *Is the assessment to be formative (providing feedback during learning) or summative (Measuring learning at the end of the process)?*
5. *Are judgments of performance made against peer standards (norm referenced) or established criteria (criterion referenced)?*
6. *How can assessment provide a balance between structure and freedom?*
7. *Will the assessment be authentic, related to real life situations?*
8. *Will the assessment be integrated, testing a range of knowledge and skills?*
9. *How can reliability and validity of assessment be assured?*

### **Assessment purposes:**

1. *The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student performance*
2. *Assessment should be based on an understanding of how students learn*
3. *Assessment should be an integral component of course design and not something to add afterwards*
4. *Good assessment provides useful information to report credibly to parents on student achievements on a regular basis*
5. *Good assessment requires clarity of purpose, goals, standards and criteria and a variety of measures*
6. *Assessment methods used should be valid, reliable and consistent*
7. *Assessment requires attention to outcomes and processes*
8. *Assessment works best when it is ongoing rather than episodic*
9. *Assessment for improved performance involves feedback and reflection*

# Features of Assessment in Online Distance Education

**Types of Assessment**-There are many types of assessments-

## 1. Ongoing Assessment: Formative Assessment

*Formative assessment* is an on-going assessment based on observations set in a classroom or at a distance level. Teachers use formative assessment to ameliorate and improve their instructional methods and students' feedback throughout the various teaching and learning processes. *Formative assessment* is used by teachers to reinforce a teaching point that according to them needs reinforcement so they design a review activity or a series of tasks as remedial work or use a different instructional strategy to give another fillip to learners' lapses.

According to Bransford, Vye, and Bateman (2002), *formative assessment* serves students as well as instructors in many concrete ways. For example, "*students can use feedback from formative assessments to help them know what they have not yet mastered and what they need to study on further*" (p. 174), instructors can change their instruction to be more effective and efficient and to target students who need further help (Bransford et al., 2002).

## 2. Summative Assessment

*Summative assessments* are used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and methods established by teachers at the end of an academic year or at a pre-determined time or course of study. The aim behind administering summative assessments is to make a judgment and form an idea about student's competency and growth after instructing him over a period of time that is complete. In short, summative assessments are cumulative and make a total rate about the students' progress for a whole span of time in which many activities and tasks are taken.

Although there are many types of summative assessments, the most common examples used include:

1. The end-of a course unit or -chapter tests
2. The end of the term or -semester exams or final exams

According to the North Carolina Public Schools, summative assessments are often created in the following formats:

1. Selected response items
2. Multiple choice items
3. True/false statements

4. Matching pairs or lists
5. Short answers
6. Fill in the blanks
7. One or two sentence response
8. Extended written response in the form of paragraph or essay
9. Performance assessment

### **3. Self Assessment**

Self-assessment should be a major component of online distance education (Robles & Braathen, 2002). Some instructors might want to assess student learning only by themselves. However, Robles et al. believed that it would be very important for students to participate in assessment of their own learning because students could measure their own learning process and achievement. This fact is true with University of south Africa (Unisa) students who monitor their own progress thanks to their teachers' comments and follow up. Thanks to self assessment that students could have the ability to determine "if they have arrived at the required instructional objectives, and that if not, they could repeat the coursework "by themselves in order to attain their own goals (p.45).The best activities students could envisage are online pre-tests because students would be able to receive immediate feedback after taking their pre-tests in order to determine their existing knowledge level (Robles & Braathen, 2002).

### **4. Authentic Assessment**

Grant (1990) insisted that assessment should be authentic when the authors would want to directly measure learner 's achievement on worthy intellectual tasks, instead of the type of indirect test items that traditional assessments rely on for their advantages as efficient and simplistic substitutes. In this way, electronic portfolios have been suggested as the best type of authentic assessment in an online distance learning environment (Meyen et al., 2002).

Electronic portfolios are very useful tools that help both teachers assess their own students' action research at home where students themselves feel guided and oriented towards the various trends of the course.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Design and Development of Online Learning**

Before administering an online course, teachers need to ensure themselves about the following points-

1. To consider who their students are if they are distance students and what would be their intentions in following an online course. How skillful they are in handling the necessary

equipment and the extent to which they can hold their proper material, what equipment will they need access to?

2. To provide their students with clear guidance on the online learning requirements for their module ,the type of learning they wish to establish, the course content, the availability of the material online, incorporating a search facility, and having options to easily print or download material that distant learners need.

In short, online learning, before being functional, it needs technology, time, and availability of the resources , follow up, technical knowhow in addition to research action.

## Online Assessment Methods

Studies on online methods of assessment have indicated the existence of many types of assessments the instructors use to get their students ‘overall grades. Swan (2001) examined 73 online courses and identified methods that include discussion, papers, other written assignments, projects, quizzes and tests, and group work. In her study, almost three quarters of the courses used online discussion as a graded activity. About half of the courses used written assignments and tests or quizzes. Arend (2007) made similar findings in a study that examined 60 courses. She identified methods that included online discussion, exams, written assignments, experimental assignments, problem assignments, quizzes, journals, projects, and presentations.

Gaytan and McEwen (2007) asked online instructors to identify assessment methods they found to be particularly effective in the online environment. These included projects, portfolios, self-assessments, peer evaluations, peer evaluations with feedback, timed tests and quizzes, and asynchronous discussion..

**Table 1. Assessment Categories Used to Analyze Online Courses**

<i>Assessment Types</i>	
<i>Formative Assessment</i>	-Assessment of the learning experience progress (Pennsylvania State University, 1998) - Continuous, ongoing assessment and feedback (Bransford et al., 2002; Concord Consortium, 2002; Meyen et al., 2002) - Immediate and effective feedback during learning (Kerka & Wonacott, 2000; Kibby, 2003; Meyen et al., 2002)
<i>Summative Assessment</i>	-Measuring learning at the end of the process (Kibby, 2003, Meyen et al., 2002) Traditional tests (Concord Consortium, 2002)
<i>Assessment Instrument / Method</i>	
<i>Paper / Essay</i>	-Short papers (Robles & Braathen, 2002)

	-Student reports in real time (Meyen et al., 2002)
<b>Project / Simulation / Case Study</b>	-Authentic assessment (Grant, 1990; Kibby, 2003) -Collaborative projects (Freeman & McKenzie, 2002; Meyen et al., 2002; Rovai, 2000) -Case studies (Freeman & McKenzie, 2002; Rovai, 2000)
<b>Reflection</b>	-Meta-cognitive skills (Dewald et al., 2002; Grant, 1990)
<b>Portfolio</b>	-Electronic portfolio (Dewald et al., 2002; Meyen et al. 2002; Robles & Braathen, 2002)

## Online assessment and Distance Learning-Benefits and challenges

### Benefits of Online assessment and its impact

#### 1. On Instructors

1. Instructors need to revise their established programs and plans and review the necessary jargon for the completion of the course.
2. They need to encourage students to improve their outcome through diagnostic reports sent to parents.
3. They have to identify learners' deficiencies and areas of weaknesses to be able to remedy them on the spot.
4. They help students use technology in their day to day extracurricular activities.
5. If everything is well set up, instructors work with their students with an offhand ease; for everything should well briefed in advance.
6. Online assessment helps instructors to quickly diagnose their learners' weaknesses and help them discover their misunderstanding.
7. Instant grading saves time and effort in grading, which can then be used for planning and instruction

#### 2. On Students

1. It helps students complete online tests in less time than it takes to complete written tests.
2. It raises level of student's interest by using an electronic format.
3. Test results and feedback are immediately available.
4. Reduces stress for students.



5. Adds flexibility of delivery: students can take a test from anywhere and at any time convenient for them (as long as they have Internet access).
6. Promotes positive attitudes in learners when assessments are interesting.
7. Provides multiple opportunities for learners to practice understanding when quizzes or tests are repeatable.

## **Recommendations**

1. Develop rubrics ahead of time that students can use as guidelines for their work. Make available examples of previous student work. Give students opportunities to critique one another's work.
2. Use rubrics to guide student activity on the discussion board as well as in written assignments.
3. Make use of synchronous technologies, where appropriate
4. Explore the use of peer-assessment strategies to foster community development and give students chances to learn through analyzing and critiquing the work of others.
5. For project assignments in graduate courses that require students to perform some kind of authentic analysis within their own professional setting, students appreciate the opportunity to learn more about their peers' work settings.
6. Use portfolios to help students collect the maximum of information about each credit through action research.
7. Make learners understand that online assessment help them get aware of their own level and progress and that facilitates their continuous work through time.

## **Conclusion**

In fact, online assessment is a very effective tool in measuring learners' work and progress as many researchers and reports have proved. Today millions of students study through distance and their continuous work is assessed on line. They have, according to reports, shown a great

ability in following their teachers' counsels and have ,in the course of time ,been successful in their final exams thanks to their formative and summative assessment; in addition to their own self and peer assessment. And though some instructors believed they encountered many disadvantages in assessing their learners on line; yet with the development of technology, problems started to decrease and the progress for the future is underway.

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