

Chapter 2

Assessment Types and Methods in Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Learning in distance education is a continuous process and highly supported by assessment opportunities. Assessment in distance learning is divided into various types together with their corresponding purposes. While formative assessment covers the whole learning process, the summative assessment considers learners' performance at the end of the course. The other categorization is done according to the individual that performed the assessment hence involves the types as self-assessment, peer-assessment, and instructor-led assessment. The recently proposed methods of assessment are named as authentic methods that allow learners to transfer their knowledge to real-world practices. In this chapter, two major purposes have been formed. Initially, existing assessment approaches will be investigated. Then, guides for the implementation of these approaches will be provided in the context of a Distance Education Center at a state university of Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning (DL) can be defined as “teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organization” (Moore & Kearsley, 2011, p.2). Various technologies like learning management systems (LMS), personalized learning environments (PLE) including blogs, e-portfolios, social networks, webinars can be used to support DL (Fedina, Burmykina, Zvezda, Pikalova, Skudnev, & Voronin, 2017). As one of the advantages, DL provides time and place flexibility for learners. Therefore, learners can choose the appropriate time and place for their learning (Smedley, 2010). For instance, learners having job requirements or other duties can learn when they have time for the courses. DL results in cost-effectiveness since it diminishes travel expenses, and decreases the payments required for constructing buildings for the instruction. By providing access to various sources of information, DL enhances

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the efficiency of knowledge and qualifications. Furthermore, DL focuses on individual differences, and considers the self-pacing of learners (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015) and supports the interaction among instructors and learners (Kumtepe & Ersoy, 2018).

Instructors in distance education have various questions in their minds. That is, they may prompt questions in order to understand whether learners had confusion about any component of the course, how the progress of learners can be monitored, or how the achievement scores of learners can be recorded. The assessment strategies in DL can address such questions of instructors when these strategies highly correlate with learning objectives and teaching methods of the course (Sewell, Frith, & Colvin, 2010).

As a developing country, Turkey has been establishing distance education centers for coordinating and managing distance programs and courses in universities. This chapter considered a distance education center (DEC) established at a state university in Turkey. Currently, DEC provides online certificate programs and manages online programs in vocational, undergraduate, and graduate levels. In these online programs, the assessment was generally conducted with the implementation of midterm and final exams. However, learning in distance education is a continuous process, hence it needs to be supported by various assessment opportunities (Gülbahar, 2017). In addition, it is essential to conduct several assessment activities (Seifert & Feliks, 2019). In this respect, DEC needs to consider various assessment approaches for improving learning and assessment in online programs.

In DL, the assessment methods are categorized as traditional methods and authentic methods (Gülbahar, 2017). Traditional assessment methods generally refer exams that cover multiple-choice, true-false, matching, essay type questions. Yet, authentic assessment methods focus on the distance education process, hence expect learners to participate in project-based studies, electronic portfolios, assignments, webquests, discussions, and other activities. The use of authentic assessment methods gains significance in DL since it considers the learning process and allows learners to study on learning artifacts.

Instructor-led assessments can be conducted with formative or summative purposes. The summative assessment considers learners' performance at the end of the course. Yet, it is important in DL to consider the whole learning process by the use of formative assessment (Patronis, 2017). In addition to the instructor-led assessments, it is important to involve learners in the assessment process in DL. For instance, learners can perform self-assessment for the purpose of practicing a course content or perform peer-assessment for the purpose of assessing the work of a peer (Amo & Jareño, 2011).

All assessment approaches are essential in DL, hence they should be implemented in online courses. DEC also needs to consider the implementation of various assessment approaches in online programs. Hence, the aims of this chapter were formulated as follows. Initially, this chapter aims to present assessment methods and types in DL. After this background information, the study will provide practical implications necessary for improving the assessment strategies of DEC.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of assessment in DL is not just about grading. Instead, the purpose is to provide efficient and effective DL through the implementation of appropriate assessment practices (Conrad & Openo, 2018). Assessment in DL addresses several purposes such as evaluation, feedback, motivation, and learning. While the evaluation provides performance scores, the feedback allows students to learn about their achievement, hence allows them to improve their performance (Marriott & Lau, 2008).

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