

# Chapter 20

## Digital Assessment Literacy in Online Courses (Formative/Summative): Rethinking Assessment Strategies in the Open Distance and E-Learning Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

*Assessment is a valuable process that assists teachers to identify teaching practices that are effective for all students since not every student learns or retains information in the same way. In the open, distance, and e-learning (ODeL) environment, specific assessment strategies can be employed to make a judgment and make the best decisions about the student's achievement. Due to the nature of the ODeL learning environment, assessments should be digital for powerful insights without the paperwork. This chapter employed digital assessment literacy to provide a particular perspective of assessment strategies in the ODeL.*

### INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an essential element to evaluate whether the lessons' educational goals and standards are being met in any learning institution. That being the case, over the past years, assessment has become one of the most researched and contested domains in higher education institutions. Ayuk and Jacobs (2018) established that assessing students' learning outcomes seems to have become a key indicator of institutional effectiveness in the current Higher Education context. Ayuk and Jacobs' view stimulates one to look at the assessment value in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Melguizo and Coates (2017)

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put forward the value of assessing Higher Education students' learning outcomes as creating learning and insights into what has been achieved.

For the Open Distance eLearning (ODEL) institutions which are also part of the HEI, assessment has been distinct in the teaching and learning context, including two or more modes integrating digital technology at varying degrees. The University of South Africa (UNISA) was gradually shifting from the blended to fully online teaching and learning mode when COVID 19 was declared a pandemic; thus, the transition from the traditional print-based to fully online courses suggests a paradigm shift in assessment. UNISA used a blended model with a portion of print media instruction and web-based online learning. COVID-19 rules, regulations and restrictions compelled a swift transition from the blended or mixed mode to online. COVID 19 lockdowns restricted movements, including postal services leaving the university with only one online delivery option. The shift to online courses called for new ways of conducting assessments, requiring ODeL practitioners to rethink assessment strategies to create more innovative structures and processes to evaluate their lessons' educational goals.

The proposed chapter argues that assessment in online courses should be responsive to the online learning environment and be informed by digital assessment literacy. Digital assessment literacy refers to the role of the teacher as an assessor in a technology-rich environment.

Against this backdrop, ODeL practitioners should possess digital assessment literacy to develop self-regulated and reflective learners. As confirmed by Bayat and Rezaei (2015), the role of assessment literacy is to help teachers to perceive, analyse, and use data on student performance to improve teaching. Assessment literacy consists of an individual's understanding of the fundamental assessment concepts and procedures deemed likely to influence educational decisions.

The author reflects on the assessment strategies at the University of South Africa (UNISA) before and during COVID 19 lockdowns. For example, UNISA's exams used to be venue-based with trained invigilators. The university opted for electronic take-home and other online assessments and employed online proctoring or remote online proctoring during COVID-19 lockdowns. Against this backdrop, this chapter argues that an increase in digital assessment literacy in the ODeL leads to rethinking innovative synchronous and asynchronous assessment strategies suitable for online courses. Drawing from digital assessment literacy, this chapter (1) conceptualises the role of digital assessment literacy in online courses; (2) explores the synchronous and asynchronous assessment strategies in the ODeL (3) propose digital assessment literacy guidelines for ODeL.

## **WHAT IS DIGITAL ASSESSMENT LITERACY?**

Before 2012 digital assessment literacy has not yet appeared in the academic literature Eyal (2012) coined the term by first clarifying the term assessment literacy before describing digital assessment literacy. Eyal first acknowledges the diverse interpretations other researchers have on the term digital assessment literacy and argue that the environment mentioned in the definition of literacy by Vygotsky (1987) includes the digital environment. In addition, Kahl, Hofman, and Bryant (2013) identified core components of digital assessment literacy as valuable skills and knowledge. However, they did not specifically identify the building block components of knowledge and skills.

Murray (2020) highlights different definitions of digital assessment literacy, which have similarities, such as its focus on technological knowledge required for students to succeed. Several authors, such as (Liang & Creasy, 2004; Petty, Johnston & Shafer, 2004), posit that unique characteristics of the ODeL

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