E-Assessment via Apps/modules, Based on the Post Methods Theorizing

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Abstract
The post methods era has witnessed a dramatic change in approaches to and methods of teaching as well as testing. At the heart of such a change, collaborative learning has received top priority and testing domain has actually gone under scrutiny. This new mode of education has made stakeholders, especially in higher education; reflect on an interactive e-assessment based instruction. Such a cyber-based environment provides immersive and authentic learning, mixed with a type of e-assessment task, no longer functioning like a summative test but it has become learning and teaching tool. The present research study intends to shed some lights on the characteristics of an e-assessment-based App in a descriptive format on one hand, and its viability in an exploratory design on the other, with emphasis on e-assessment at its core for teaching ESAP- English Specially for Academic Purposes- while instruction and assessment of language skills and sub skills are included. The descriptive and exploratory design of the study highlights the mode of interactivity inherent in this App, which provides a chance for learners to explore, make errors and construct meaning/solutions to their problems via hyperlinks in the created App.

Keywords: e-assessment, interactivity, ESAP, App, collaborative learning, meaning construction

Introduction

The multidisciplinary in science of learning, ranging from cognitive science, learning process, learning impediments to neuroscience, is challenging long-held views about learning, approaches to assessing and reporting or reflecting on the agenda; it is providing insights to review learning as an ongoing process. The advent of technology has made unprecedented effects in such a way that traditional system of testing and measurement of the learners' achievements are questioned. (Masters, 2013)

Testing has already connoted challenging, difficult, tough, trying, hard, analytical concepts in having a mental picture of the learners' achievement. Estimation has basically favored concentration on approximation, guesstimate, guess Judgment has triggered ruling, decision, finding, verdict, sentence, conclusion, result, and decree in the mind; Measurement and calculation have depicted control, cunning, scheming, intention, design, shrewdness, and deviousness, (American Heritage Dictionary, 2014); Evaluation has been quantitatively coterminous with external / internal reliability and validity, while qualitatively with credibility, transferability, dependability as well as conformability, which can be enhanced by reliance on triangulation, member checking and matrices (Brown & Rodgers, 2004). This concept, which has been widely used for decision making in the degree of system effective utility, makes the process especially much more complicated to have an outside representation of what goes on in the minds of the learners or at the heart of programs or machines as a unified body or system as far as achievement to the predefined goal is supposed to be measured. But with the advent of

technology-based interaction, assessment has been a newly coined term, with connotations of valuation, calculation, task-fulfillment, process-orientation, acquisition rather than learning orientation, personalization, interactivity, conformity, empowerment, etc.

Testing in its traditional sense was expected to pass or fail the candidate, grade or rank him/her, to select for future courses, to predict success in future courses, to provide a profile of what the learner has learnt, to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses, to provide feedback to learners, to improve their learning, to help learners develop their skills of self–study, to motivate learners to provide feedback to their teachers and to evaluate the course's strength and weaknesses. But assessment is a concept, which is expected to satisfy two educational needs: to assist assessment become the focal part of the learning process and diagnose those learning areas, which have proved ineffective and need modification (Nichol, 2005).

Brindley, (2001) takes assessment an umbrella term, whose instrumentations range from formal tests to informal ones such as observations or portfolios. In Spolsky's commentary, (1985) it is believed that practically thinking up new tests and testing techniques, which are simpler than explaining precisely what we are supposed to measure as well as resolutely pragmatic and atheoretical approaches or else Backman's (2000) real life approaches are attended to; assessment is emphasized as an instrumentation either for placement, certification or vocational contexts (Douglas, 2000). While some researchers, (Ewell, 2009, cited in Cain, 2014) talk about mandated assessment on two grounds: assessment for accountability and assessment for improvement. The present study concentrates on carefully controlled cyber-based e-assessment for strengthening shared governance structures and practices, which rely on such rubrics. The social media have already paved the path to that end. This new approach to e-assessment is based on the German ideals in freedom of inquiry- Lehrfreiheit- freedom of learners' learning, which implies a lack of administrative direct supervision for enforcing restrictions on teaching or learning. Such freedoms are not to be awarded to carefree learners, but to be bestowed upon delineated professional expertise.

Principles and Parameters of E-Assessment

In planning assessment strategy, certain principles and parameters are reported to be effective: assessment is a form of communication for giving feedback to the learners on their learning, the lecturers on their teaching, curriculum designers on developing materials, administrators on their use of resources, and employers on the quality of job performance; hence, these five points are focal: the assessment purpose and whether the task fulfills the purpose, the validity and reliability of the assessment constructed, the assessment referencing, the construction quality of assessment items, and the grading of the assessment. (McAlpine, 2002)

Assessment has already found its ground to rely on technology as a platform for doing so. Hence, e-assessment has become a concept for speculation. Lai (2011) speculates that e-assessment in critical thinking should include open-ended tasks, authentic or real life problem solving contexts, and collateral materials to lead the learners toward logical arguments, judgments, or assertions.

But unlike traditional summative tests, e-assessment is personalized and probable problems or illnesses cannot affect the result; it is process, rather than product-oriented; burden of workload is minimized, learners' backgrounds tackling the same material is removed; skills and abilities rather than knowledge is emphasized and it is always continual and democratic.

Therefore, if David Azuble's advanced organizers in subsuming information theory (2000) equals internalization; if formal teaching, which is conscious, does not necessarily end in functional, efficient and effectual scheme; if subconscious, informal arrangement is anticipated,

which is based on personalization in which individual differences are attended to; if desirability means acquisition rather than learning- in Krashen's terminology, (Schutz, 2014); and if i+1 means knowledge construction, which causes knowledge creation and innovation in higher order level of learning, then it will be the right time to appraise the status quo of education in its extant setting.

Taken for granted that the constructivists' model of speculation is accepted in educational settings; for instruction purposes, e-modules/Apps are developed with high level of emphasis on learners' autonomy, learners' centeredness, learners' orientation, peers' collaboration and teachers as facilitators; Richards' best behaviors or maxims in language teaching the maxim of involvement, the maxim of planning, the maxim of order, the maxim of encouragement, the maxim of accuracy: working for accurate student output, the maxim of efficiency: making the most efficient use of class time, the maxim of conformity: making sure teaching follows the prescribed method, the maxim of empowerment: giving the learners control are all operationalized in the App/Module developed to that end; and the tact, subconscious image construct or classroom as home is fully taken into consideration (Richards, 1996), then what to do with measuring achievements of the learners or who to assess achievements?

If ideal learning is changed into instruction, which facilitates acquisition in peer coaching platform and the teacher remains a facilitator in such an instruction task, why not grant the same role in achievement test to the learner?

In our a theoretical model, organizational competence is devalued to be kept as a tacit knowledge while other metacognitive competences such as strategic facets, affective schemata, interactive constructs, task types, planning stages, interlocutor behaviors, elicitation contexts and all in all transferability are not only highly valued but they are highly personalized; hence, test scores are analyzed and reported in a portfolio format; for generalizability purposes, certain artifacts as well as band and benchmarks are also included to guarantee efficiency and cost-effectiveness or to reconceptualize and move assessment away from centralized agenda, with low wash back effects toward a more democratic, personalized, local one, and far from the traditional positivists' framework of educational measurement.

E-assessment is also controversial enough. There are some scholars, biased against or in favor of it. The former scholars are accreditors and higher education institutional leaders. Surveys reveal that chief academic officers have specified learners' goals and indices to measure the learners' achievements in the goals already set; they also refer to certain obstacles such as: "alienation from the language of such an assessment, lack of training in its principles and practices, incongruities between it and faculty reward systems, worries about its punitive uses, concerns about its potentially negative effects on standards, and doubts about its pedagogical usefulness (Cain & Hutchings, 2015); Scholars like Powell, (2011) reveals their objection, claiming that the corporate neoliberal, DE-professionalized e-assessment is a detriment to faculty undercuts. They also refer to it as the gate toward disenfranchising faculty; while the latter scholars have expressed their optimism so as cultural change is underway in favor of e-assessment protocol and future witnesses its legitimacy, viability and desirability.

Characteristics of a Workable E-Assessment Scheme

Although the final decision to be made is: "who should test whom?" Far beyond the stakeholders'- administrators', learners', teaching staffs', specialists support staffs', external examiners' and quality assurance managers'- concerns about blended learning and assessment, the necessity of induction and training on the IT-based infrastructure code of practice as Zakrzewski

and Steven (2003) have stressed, a workable e-assessment scheme should satisfy the following requirements:

- Weller's concern, (2002) on plagiarism/counterfeit should be attended to; the use of portfolio is introduced as an effective strategy.
- Rovai's suggestion, (2000), concerning distance course taking is also critical; his suggestion is to use proctored assessment under test condition in alternative venues.- Personal identification security can be checked via soft wares and protocols. Then the tutor can make sure that the learner is the right person, checked and rechecked. Iris scans accompanied by the use of webcams can be favored to monitor the participants, via LBS- Location Based Services- protocol.
- E-assessment techniques including identification programs, marking/ scoring systems, plagiarism detection, e-portfolios for both synchronous and asynchronous purposes and online submission of the learners' protocols need to be included.
- According to Clarke et al, (2004) constructive feedback in form of recast should be timely, related, explicit and understandable to the learners, especially to raise the self-esteem of low-attainers.

Characteristics of the present App, created for the purpose

To operationalize the good behaviors, an electronic protocol needs to be developed. To that end, a full-fledged E-instruction setting is developed in Flash maker software, entitled: ESAP- English Specifically for Academic Purposes- in which a bilingual dictionary is attached and it gives on-demand instructions to the learners, ranging from standard reading of the text or words, lexical information, tacit grammar teaching and lexical items functions in their contexts to consciousness raising to formal grammar points.

The template favors the Evan & Sabry's three-way model of interactivity in the online environment, (2003) in Crisp's, (2006)**:** initiation, response/scoring algorithm and feedback, ranging from marks to detailed description of the learners' right or wrong responses**.** They are so packaged as java/IMS applets or learning objects, using a simple offline HTML application. The Java Offline Simulation Platform provides a simple toolkit for the preparation of simulations, which can be packaged in the applets of the present App.

*- Plugins are all user friendly and there is no need to install specific Acrobat Readers, Flash Players or alike to play particular file types.

***-** It also relies on an instruction platform in flash maker format with certain potentialities like having a text reader machine, a bilingual and monolingual task-based dictionary, written in fuzzy format and having a potentiality for changing the font size of the texts. Comprehension questions are also constructed in quiz Faber/quiz buffer templates with scoring system and a bimodal feedback form.

*- Grammar time sections promote functional grammar, in e-assessment based format with the preceding characteristics plus more. It has a hyperlink at the end, which helps the learners to learn grammar lessons with enough examples to let the learners construct their conscious grammar knowledge.

*- Vocabulary time exercises help the learners learn language in real time context by reliance on synonymous description, with the same level of interactivity and bimodal feedback forms. The machine provides hints for right meaning construction.

*- Conversation is constructed with reliance on L1 strategy use in a separated mode of presentation in talk-phrase protocol.

*- Writing is constructed in the same template with hyperlinks to represent writing task models.

All tools, in the APP created, provide the learners a framework for miscellaneous items, ranging from MC, matching pairs, fill in the blanks and essay types.

Such applications need induction, training and familiarity with its functioning, which are included in the Help Menu Bar of the application. The installation instruction platform has proved effective to the users' needs.

Its viability in practice

An exploratory design was favored to measure the App's viability. To that end, 123 candidates, ranging from heterogeneous genders and disciplines to a variety of educational backgrounds, were asked to enroll for a general English teaching course. The mode of the task has already been announced in the instructor's weblog and just IT literate/IT prone candidates were invited for enrollment process. For non IT prone candidates, other sections were introduced. Hence, all candidates knew in advance the type and mode of instruction and assessment. These candidates attended two sessions for induction and training on: how to register and receive activating code; how to install and use different platforms in the App; how to assess themselves as well as their being attentive to all security measures. They were also informed that all candidates would go under a three-month supervisory process.

The semester lasted three months and periodically trained system controllers used checks and balances to let the candidates follow the desirable path.

Four trained judges, two of whom were App prone IT academic members and two others App prone members from TEFL department, were invited for oral interview with these candidates. The learners' e-portfolios were analyzed in their own presence and their reactions were recorded. Ninety two percent showed their full satisfaction with the protocol, %78 of whom expressed their tendency for that e-assessment protocol proliferation to other courses, especially chemistry, biology and engineering ones; %5 of the candidates displayed concerns on their personal anxiety attributes; the rest showed a lessee affaire attitude toward the protocol.

It seems fair to announce that App was desirable as far as its viability is concerned. As it has already been explored and reported by judges, the App has been significantly comprehensive. This self-instruction protocol in cyber has reported to be thoroughly far-reaching.

The final word is that more research is needed to replicate the effect of such models of instruction and assessment on the educational system stakeholders and to gauge the use of IT/ICT-based assessment of creative and critical mental power to trigger critical thinking skills. Further investigations are also called upon to measure the gender roles, the candidates' disciplines and their ideas toward the prospects of such an agenda.

To download, install and use the App, visit the author/creator via the following URL:
http://uplod.ir/p9x6blgpk6z0/ESAP.zip.html

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