Assessing outside-of-class activities of individual EFL learners

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Abstract

It may be of special interest to note recent trends of active learning seen in education in Japan. An inevitable consequence is that teachers must cope with a new paradigm of teaching. Learner-directed and learner-centered approaches are introduced into our daily activities, and one-way lecture-type teaching or passive in-class learning can be replaced by flipped learning or other hybrid learning methods. One of the new roles teachers play is to monitor and evaluate learners' activities taking place both inside and outside the classroom.

This study examines individual learners' learning process, behavior, and achievement data through various online activities.

Keywords

LMS, Technology-enhanced Language Learning

1   Background

Among educational practitioners, Scriven (1967) and Bloom (1968) classify assessment or evaluation into the two types: formative vs. summative. The former may be perceived as the assessment for learning, while the latter is considered to be the assessment of learning. Another type may be 'diagnostic' assessment. By using this diagnostic assessment, we can gain an understanding of what the students already know or can do prior to class. In the same vein, Lucantoni (2002) introduced three types of assessment, by adding formal qualification (high-stakes testing) to the two dimensions of assessment (i.e., formative vs. summative). Learning does not necessarily take place only in class, but also outside of class, and the assessment can have a huge influence on learners' lives. Therefore, language teachers have the utmost responsibility to evaluate individual learners' knowledge, needs and skills more comprehensibly.

2   Assessment in the era of active learning

Let us turn our attention to another aspect of learning and assessment. Matsushita (2016), for instance, describes four types of evaluation, using the two axes: indirect vs. direct, and qualitative vs. quantitative.
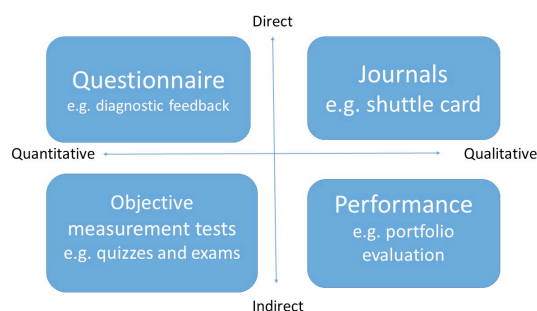

Figure 1:   Four types of assessment (adapted from Matsushita, 2016, p. 18)

As shown in Figure 1, we deal with learners' learning outcomes and resources through (1) student journals, (2) questionnaire surveys, (3) objective measurement tests, and (4) performance tests and portfolios. In the era of active learning, various performance tasks are provided via pair work, group work, or project-based activities. In order to assess these, we have to make more tangible and comprehensible rubrics and goals available to students as well as colleagues. Also, in order to ensure the fairness of the evaluation, we need to seek a better way of scoring students' performance and establishing the consistent calibration process.

More technically, we may want to provide a learning environment that allows students to create, store and share their works. One good

way may be to make use of learning management systems or other open-source software products.

3 LMS and other open-source platforms

Moodle has been widely used by many teachers around the word for the past few decades. It is a course management system that allows teachers to conduct questionnaire surveys and quizzes. Also, as an alternative to the student-teacher shuttle card, students can enter journals and self-reflective comments to the server.

In terms of computerized adaptive testing, *Concerto* is now a popular open-source platform. This, developed by the University of Cambridge, allows us to conduct online surveys and complex tests, and obtain various assessment data generated by IRT models.

Another platform called *the Mahara platform* is more suitable for project-based learning activities and portfolio evaluation. (Kent, Hand, & Bell, 2012). Students can work individually or collaboratively in making and sharing PowerPoint slides and videos. Moreover, *Moodle* and *Mahara* are compatible to each other and now easy to use.

4 Tentative findings

Various assessment types may arise in response to recent trends of active learning. We must selectively use assessment tools and methods amidst a new paradigm of teaching. Since pair work, group work and project-based learning have been gaining popularity, more fair and balanced ways of assessing students' performance are needed than ever before.

This study shows that making use of LMS and other open-source platforms allow teachers to monitor and evaluate learners' activities that take place both inside and outside the classroom. We will be able to examine individual learners' learning process, behavior, and achievement data stored in LMS. With the use of proficiency and achievement test data, we may shed a light on characteristic features of high and low achievers, which may provide us with some ideas about the success or failure of self-directed learning.

References

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