

NAVIGATING ASSESSMENT IN THE DIGITAL REALM: EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS IN A DISTANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

In the era of digital learning, assessment has become a crucial aspect of distance education. This study explores the experiences of educators in a teacher education institution (TEI) as they navigate assessment in a distance learning environment. The research aims to investigate the assessment tools used by teachers, identify positive and negative experiences, address challenges faced by faculty, and propose ways to enhance assessment in distance learning. The findings reveal that essay-type, project-based assessments, and performance tasks are commonly used, while rearrangement and analogy assessments are less frequent. Positive outcomes include the development of technology skills, improved teaching strategies, and enhanced student habits. However, negative effects include issues concerning the reliability and validity of assessments, academic dishonesty, dependence on technology, and excessive workloads. To address these challenges, this study recommends administering authentic assessments, valid and reliable evaluations, regular monitoring, and effective time management. These strategies can help educators in TEIs ensure the effectiveness and reliability of assessments in a distance learning environment.

Keywords: Authentic Assessment, Educational Measurement, Remote Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an integral part of education and reflects the level of learning. Teachers' assessment practices have a significant impact on students' learning outcomes. In teacher education institutions (TEIs), it is important to ensure that teachers are equipped with effective assessment practices to help them evaluate their students' learning progress accurately (Nazar, Sarwar, & Tariq, 2020).

Assessment practices are essential components of quality education and are critical to ensure that students are achieving the desired learning outcomes. In the context of distance learning, assessment practices become even more crucial as teachers must rely on online platforms to monitor and evaluate students' academic progress.

Nazar, Sarwar, and Tariq (2020) examined how teachers in distance learning in TEIs assess their students' academic progress and the challenges they encounter when doing so, they indicated that teachers primarily rely on online quizzes and assignments for assessment but face difficulties related to technical issues, maintaining academic integrity, and student engagement.

Despite challenges faced by teachers, they perceived their assessment practices to be effective in assessing students' academic progress. However, a lack of consistency in assessment practices was identified, which could impact the validity and reliability of assessments. Idris, Rahman, and Othman (2021) highlight the importance of developing effective and consistent assessment practices that align with learning outcomes and address the challenges faced by teachers to ensure accurate measurement in distance learning settings.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented teachers with numerous challenges in assessing their students' learning skills. Exploring both the positive and negative experiences of teachers in assessing students during the pandemic is crucial for identifying successful adaptation strategies. Several related studies, such as Black and Wiliam (2018), Gielen and Peeters (2021), and Lee et al. (2019), emphasized the importance of effective assessment practices.

The COVID-19 outbreak has compelled institutions worldwide to resort to distance learning as an alternative mode of delivering education. This shift has affected teaching methodologies in teacher education. However, to maintain academic rigor, teachers in TEIs have had to utilize alternative means of evaluating student performance, such as authentic assessment. Authentic assessment allows students to apply their skills and knowledge to an authentic context, providing teachers with a better understanding of students' abilities and challenges while fostering learning and development.

The utilization of authentic assessment practices in TEIs has garnered academic interest. Lobb and Lewis (2020) indicate that the use of authentic assessment improves learning outcomes in higher education. In the context of distance learning, exploring authentic assessment practices in TEIs can provide innovative approaches to achieve academic rigor in teacher education. This study aimed to explore assessment practices utilized in TEIs as part of the best practices in distance learning, highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating authentic assessment practices in distance learning settings.

2. METHOD

This study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate the use of assessment tools by faculty members at the College of Education at the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus. This approach involved collecting and analyzing data to describe and understand the phenomena. The researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data, including a Google survey form for numerical data, and interviews with open-ended questions for qualitative data. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account specific criteria such as specialization and academic rank. The researchers conducted a content analysis to analyze and categorize the qualitative data into themes based on the participants' responses. Additionally, frequency counts and percentages were used to assess the extent of assessment tool utilization among faculty members and to identify any patterns in the data. By combining these methods, the researchers successfully achieved their objectives and provided insights into the factors that influenced the use of assessment tools among faculty members at their institution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Level of Assessment Tools Utilization

In distance learning, essay-type, project-based, and performance-based assessments are more frequently used compared to problem-solving, oral recitation, alternative response, matching type, completion, analogy, and rearrangement assessments (Almulla, 2020; Ferretti et al., 2021; Narathakoon et al., 2020).

Table 1: Level of Assessment Tools Utilization

Assessment Tools	Mean	Interpretation
1. Essay Type (Discussion/Explanation)	4.52	Always
2. Project-Based Assessment	4.50	Often
3. Performance Task/Demonstration	4.40	Often
4. Simple recall	4.20	Often
5. Multiple Choice	4.20	Often
6. Identification	3.60	Often
7. Problem-solving	3.00	Sometimes
8. Oral recitation	3.00	Sometimes
9. Alternative Response (True or False)	2.90	Sometimes
10. Matching Type	2.80	Sometimes
11. completion (Fill in the blank)	2.80	Sometimes
12. Analogy	2.50	Rarely
13. Rearrangement	2.20	Rarely

3.2. Positive Experiences

The positive experiences of the TEI faculty had to assess their students and sample responses to these themes. Four (4) themes were generated from the responses: enhancement of knowledge and skills in technology, enhancement of teaching strategies/assessments, improvement of student's study habits, and enhancement of students' habits.

Students' knowledge and skills in technology have broadened and they have become more independent, adapted to online learning, and become more self-motivated. (Idris et al., 2021).

“Technology is more important; it connects teachers and students towards attaining good learning”-

“Cellphones and laptops were a great help for teachers during the pandemic”

“I was able to use a different technology for the first time”

“I became innovative”

“The use of technology is highly commendable”

“Able to use a different technology for the first time”

Recording and checking mechanisms to assess students improve teaching strategies. UNESCO urges higher education institutions to develop innovative assessment practices. Assessment is crucial to gather information about students' knowledge, skills, and values. Reassessing assessment practices is important due to the current global crisis that limits normal learning conditions. (Allen, 2004; Kuh et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2020).

“I was able to learn new strategies for assessing my students using digital tools”

“The checking and recording mechanism are better than the traditional one”

“Students overcame test anxiety which they felt in a usual face-to-face examination”

“Peer teaching was enhanced”

“It lessens the burden and the task of the teacher in administering, retrieving and checking the outputs of the students”

The study by Idris et al. (2021) found that online pedagogy promotes independent student work and enhances their self-efficacy. The current study confirms this finding by showing that the themes created by the respondents resulted in an improvement in their student's study habits, as well as their self-management and time-management skills. Students were also able to answer assessment tasks and modules well, and they had enough time to complete their work.

“Students were able to manage their time”

“Most of the students were able to answer and comply with all the learning tasks and activities in the module”

“I was able to see their eloquence in answering questions through their modules”

“During the pandemic, I noticed that almost all of my students are very clever in answering assessment tasks”

“They can answer assessment tasks within the comfort of their homes”

“Most of my students were able to answer the given assessment task because of the time frame”

“Peer learning was enhanced”

Studies have shown that effective study habits, using digital technology for studying and engaging in assessment tasks can all lead to improved academic performance. (Kaul and Sharma, 2019; Khatun et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2018).

Students save on printing materials and believe that technology-based resources are more cost-effective than traditional resources. (Dhawan et al., 2020).

“Not expensive”

“Practical when it comes to test questions”

3.3 Negative Experiences

Participants' feedback on their negative experiences in assessing students online resulted in five main themes. These themes included concerns about the low reliability and validity of assessments, instances of academic dishonesty by students, challenges related to late submissions and poor internet connection, dependence on technology, excessive workload in checking outputs, and poor study habits exhibited by students.

One of the main challenges faced by teachers in assessing students online was the difficulty in ensuring the reliability and validity of assessments. Teachers struggled to accurately assess students' authentic performance and had concerns about the authenticity of online submissions. (Bista et al., 2021)

“Difficult to monitor if it is my students who answer his/her assessment tasks.”

“Their answers do not measure their knowledge and capability.”

“Low validity and reliability”

“Failure of the real goal of the assessment”

“The reliability of the result is not guaranteed”

“I was uncertain if the answers of my students were authentic since I was unable to monitor and see them in the flesh. Hence, the assessment could probably be unreliable”

Academic dishonesty is a serious concern that can lead to significant consequences, both within academia and in society as a whole. Studies have shown that students who engage in academic dishonesty are more likely to be dishonest in other aspects of their lives (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020) and that these behaviors can have serious repercussions in professional settings, such as nursing (Lynch et al., 2021). There is a broad consensus across academia and society that academic dishonesty is unacceptable and should be addressed proactively.

“Academic dishonesty of the students”

“Most of the answers are the same”

“They have the same source through the internet”

“Some students are just copying without taking into consideration the correctness of their answers”

Students in the Philippines frequently experience delays in submitting their work and struggle to effectively participate in online classes due to poor internet connectivity. This issue highlights the importance of a robust infrastructure and reliable technological tools for the successful implementation of online learning. (Akamai, 2017; Dayagbil et al., 2021; Assaf and Neme, 2022)

“Late submission because of poor internet connection”

“Poor internet connection which resulted in late submissions”

“Some students submit their modules very late”

“Consume more time in downloading students' output”

The integration of new technology has made teaching and learning more engaging and interactive, but it has also presented challenges, such as over-reliance on technology, academic dishonesty, and distraction in the classroom (Baidoo-Anu et al., 2023; Anasel and Swai, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021; Schindler et al., 2017).

“Students are too dependent on to gadgets answer their modules.”

“Answers were taken from online sources.”

The respondents reported that they encounter instances of late submissions from students due to poor Internet connections. They also noted that it takes a significant amount of time to download and review students' work for grading and record-keeping. Finally, they pointed out that the Philippines' internet infrastructure falls behind that of other developing nations in Asia, particularly in terms of connectivity. (Slac & Kim, 2016)

“Checking volumes of modules at the same time”

Teachers reported challenges in monitoring student progress and providing feedback due to the transition to online learning. The use of new technologies and the absence of face-to-face interaction made it difficult to assess student comprehension accurately. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Dayagbil et al., 2021).

“Students just turn in their assessment tasks just for compliance”
“Students do not read and study their lessons.”

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that teachers preferred to use essay-type, project-based assessments, and performance tasks/demonstrations, instead of identification, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank assessments because they reduced copying answers from peers and online sources. This shift in assessment practices during the pandemic promoted more authentic assessment tasks.

The study found that online education had positive effects on technology knowledge, teaching strategies, study habits, and costs. However, negative experiences also surfaced, such as concerns about assessments, academic dishonesty, internet connection, excessive workloads, and poor study habits. These findings emphasize the need for further exploration of the downsides of online education and the development of strategies to address these challenges and provide the best possible education for students.

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