

Online Writing Assessment during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges, Options and Scenarios

Fitri Handayani¹⁾, Hermawati Syarif²⁾

¹⁾ Universitas Mahaputra Muhammad Yamin, ²⁾ Universitas Negeri Padang
email: fhandayani1786@gmail.com¹, hermawati_sy@yahoo.com²

Abstract

Assessment is at the core of the teaching process. It shapes students' understanding of the curriculum and determines their ability to progress. Choosing an assessment strategy is an important aspect of the curriculum planning process. Hence, in the context of this shift from face-to-face learning to full-time online learning, several challenges arose including how to develop online writing assessment to the students. In particular, online assessment of students' writing has become an unprecedented new situation for many English lecturers. The transition from face-to-face assessment to online assessment has been a new experience for many English lecturers who have never applied it before nor have background knowledge of its mechanisms and methods. The issue has raised an important point for English teaching practitioners and course designers regarding the strategies and challenges of this mandatory mode of assessment. From this perspective, the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of online writing assessments in the COVID-19 pandemic era, including challenges faced by lecturers in conducting online assessments, as well as a set of recommendations for designing online assessment mechanisms and strategies that will result in a fair assessment process for all.

Keywords: Online Learning; Online Writing Assessment, COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Assessment is central to the teaching process. It is an effort to obtain data/information from the learning process and results to find out how well the performance of students, courses, or study programs is compared to certain learning objectives/achievements. It also refers to assessing and observing students' performance in order to continuously support impactful adjustments in the teaching/learning process (Pachler, et al., 2009). Assessment may help students learn more effectively, identify their strengths and weaknesses, enhance the efficiency of curricula and instructional effectiveness, and give data for future use (Kellough & Kellough, 1999). Thus, assessment is one of the crucial components to be considered in designing a course.

For course designers, in this case a lecturer, assessment is one of the important aspects that must be included in the course design. The assessment carried out by the lecturer will provide a complete picture of the development of the learning process. Through the results of the assessment, lecturer can also check the fulfillment of learning outcomes and provide value for the process and student learning outcomes. Thus, lecturer can get feedback as part of a continuous improvement cycle in order to improve and develop a course.

To do that, the lecturer must be able to design an effective assessment that can evaluate student learning outcomes that have been defined in line with the learning goals. An effective assessment might represent the students' skills from the learning implementation process that has been completed and provided to them. The assessment will also serve as a benchmark for the completion of a program or the attainment of the learning goals of a course. Therefore, a lecture as a course designer must be able to

consider the critical aspects of the sort of assessment to be performed, the form of its implementation, and the extent to which the assessment can evaluate students' learning skills.

Because of the importance of assessment in teaching and learning, a lecturer must have good preparation and competence, both in terms of lesson planning and good teaching and learning process atmosphere. Therefore, a lecturer must really be able to design and think about the forms of assessment given to students according to what has been learned by students and how well the assessment can measure the achievement of student learning outcomes. Before learning begins, lecturer usually has designed a syllabus that contains various aspects that will be carried out during learning for one semester. These aspects can be in the form of learning objectives, teaching materials, regulations and rules, learning methods and strategies, as well as various types of assessments that will be given to students in face-to-face learning.

However, the COVID 19 pandemic crisis has caused a significant shift in the learning pattern. The recent global response to the COVID19 outbreak compelled several universities to quickly shift from various modes of instructional delivery to a hundred percent online delivery. This rapid transition to online delivery has been called emergency remote teaching. It refers to a temporary transition in instructional delivery medium to an alternate delivery mode as a result of a crisis situation. It entails using totally remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be offered face-to-face, as blended or hybrid courses, and will revert to that format once the crisis or emergency has passed (Hodges, et al. 2020).

For this situation, lecturers must construct their online courses to accommodate the needs of students with varying backgrounds, skills, and levels of familiarity using online technologies. However, in a rapid change, lecturers should employ the simplest and most accessible techniques. Students should be exposed to new tools or applications one at a time, with proper orientations (a help page, a brief video, or a short step-by-step instruction) to assist them become acquainted with the new technology. To properly introduce students to a new online tool, lecturers should be familiar with it and, ideally, get continued assistance from their campus and the technology itself as they learn to use it.

The transition to online learning as a result of the pandemic crisis has an impact on the assessment approach that lecturers may use. As with writing assessments, lecturers who often perform face-to-face assessments in the form of handing written examinations to students must be able to create and develop a really valid and reliable evaluation that accurately measures students' writing skills. Changes in learning processes from face-to-face to online occur abruptly and without adequate planning, making writing assessment challenging for lecturers. As a result, the lecturers must be able to consider the gaps and ways in which the assessment may be done online while also measuring students' writing skills.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present an overview of online assessment in writing learning, beginning with the obstacles that lecturers confront during online writing assessments. Furthermore, this essay aims to provide course designers and lecturers with a collection of guidelines and scenarios to assist them in organizing online assessments of their subjects in the context of the COVID-19 situation.

Methods

This study was a review of the literature. It is a detailed analysis of prior research on a given issue that explains all of the findings to demonstrate an in-depth grasp of the topic at hand (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012). The purpose of this research was to look into information on conducting online assessments, as well as a set of recommendations for designing online assessment mechanisms and strategies that will result in a fair assessment process for all. I gathered data for my study from publications accessible in online academic journals. The publications were found using several academic research databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Directory of

Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Researchers examined databases for publications using the keywords "online writing assessment."

Results and Discussion

Concepts of Online Assessment

Online assessments are generally defined as any method of evaluating students achievement, offering feedback, or moving students ahead in their learning process in completely online credit courses (Weleschuk, Dyjur, & Kelly, 2019). These assessments can be entirely online (for example, online examinations) or only need online submission (such as essays). Similarly, Crisp (2011) defines online assessment as the use of digital technology to help in the development, delivery, storage, or reporting of student assessment activities, replies, grades, or feedback in the online environment. Online assessments can be conducted using a variety of devices, including computers or laptops, portable smart phones, and digital technologies such as iPads and tablets. Furthermore, online assessments can be conducted in a variety of formats, including text document formats and multimedia formats such as voice, video, or pictures. It may also be done by students in groups or individually, and it can happen with a large group of students. Thus, it can be stated that online assessment is the process of evaluating students' performance on the learning process through the use of ICT such as laptops, computers, and Smartphone in online mode via an internet connection.

To run the online assessment effectively, a course designer need to consider some principles in developing online assessment. Rahim (2020) suggests some principles for course designers to follow while creating online assessments. They must first analyze the conditions for executing the online assessment. If an online assessment is to be effective, course designers must pay attention to two kinds of crucial prerequisites: institutional and educator preparation. Institutional policies, resources, and behaviors all contribute to institutional preparedness. The preparedness of educators, on the other hand, is no less important. They must be taught in effective assessment procedures as well as the usage of accessible online assessment tools. Second, course designers must verify that assessment activities are aligned with stated learning objectives. The fundamental premise of assessment is that it must be structured to evaluate stated learning objectives. Third, the assessment must take into account the wide range of student conditions. Course designers must be aware of this variability in order to avoid discriminating against students who do not have enough support for online teaching and learning. Fourth, course designers must maintain an appropriate balance of formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments offer students with relevant feedback on their completion of defined learning objectives. Summative assessments, on the other hand, serve the primary function of judging students' success at or near the completion of a course of study. Fifth, they must use online assessment to encourage student learning. Assessment techniques have an impact on how students learn, and online assessments should be structured to encourage good learning practices. Sixth, course designers must consider exam type, schedule, and timing. Seventh, they must develop open lines of contact with students about assessment issues. Clear communication with students about assessment concerns is seen as evidence supporting the assessment validity. Eighth, course designers must guarantee that high-quality feedback online assessment helps learning by providing timely, rich, and constructive feedback, as well as feedback that makes examinations successful. Finally, they must overcome the risk of evaluation validity. Risks to validity include issues with sample and design, item quality, determining passing scores, and assessment integrity, including cheating and test problems.

Westhuizen (2016) also provided some guidelines for online assessment. To begin, lecturers should use the digital outputs of assessment tasks to collect data and reflect on their teaching methods. Second, in online assessment tasks, lecturers should employ higher-quality feedback. Third, by using rubrics or assessment standards, the performance requirements for online assessment assignments should be clearly stated. Fourth, online assessment tasks should be distinguished by their relevance to real-world situations.

Fifth, online assessment activities that demand discussion and participation among students are included in the scope of assessment tasks in a program.

Types of Assessment

There are two main types of assessment, each occurring at different levels in the learning process: formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment can place both before and throughout the learning process, and it is typically used in classrooms as continual feedback to improve teaching and learning (Abduh, 2012). Formative assessment occurs during the course and offers information on how well the students are doing—what they have accomplished, what they need to improve on, and how well the course is serving their requirements (Graves, 2000). Formative assessment activities are included into lessons to monitor learning and assess learners' comprehension in order to alter teaching and influence future learning by providing continuing and timely feedback until the target level of knowledge is attained (Gikandi, et al., 2011). Meanwhile, formative assessment benefits both students and teachers in several ways. For example, students can utilize formative evaluation feedback to determine what they have not yet learned and what they need to study further (Bransford, Vye, & Bateman, 2002).

Summative assessment, on the other hand, is used to guarantee that the targeted learning objectives have been fulfilled or to certify that the appropriate levels of competence have been attained (Challis, 2005). It is completed at the end of a semester and offers information regarding the students' overall achievement as well as the course's overall efficacy (Graves, 2000).

In addition, there are three assessment fundamentals; validity, reliability, and dishonesty are the three. Validity is linked to the availability of a variety of relevant assessment activities that promote contextual, inquiry-based learning and multidimensional views. It's also linked to the success of formative feedback in terms of adequacy, immediacy, creating meaningful interactions, and learner support. Reliability includes the capacity to document and track learning over time, which drives the feedback process. Dishonesty is linked to pupils fully owning their work and is determined by the degree of validity and dependability produced (Gikandi, et al., 2011).

Challenges in Online Writing Assessment

The shift from a physical classroom to a virtual class has changed traditional techniques and assessment methods. As a result, it affects a number of challenges that constrain the implementation of online writing assessment. According to Breuch (2004), the challenges in online writing assessment are related to the lack of computer integration training for writing teachers, the absence of computer-based writing instruction, and teachers' reluctance to transfer face-to-face activities to virtual spaces. Kearns (2012) proposed another view which reported new and difficult challenges to assess their students online such as establishing rapport due to physical distance; handling students with poor time management of their work; being pressed to learn new technologies fast and with limited support; and having to keep gathering data from different assessments and providing constant feedback.

Furthermore, in online learning, exams are frequently conducted online, limiting lecturers to proxy monitoring of learners, making it hard to govern and manage cheating (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). In similar vein, Al-Nuaim (2002) adds that, the low integrity of test and homework results provided by students who are evaluated from a distance is due to the lack of confirmation of their identity or whether they truly accomplished their work themselves. Additionally, the biggest issue with online tests was the uncontrollable problem of cheating.

On the other side, there are several challenges that students confront when completing online assessments. Some students may be unfamiliar with computer applications and online assessment approaches (Way, 2012). Another issue may be a lack of computer availability and internet access (Crews and Curtis, 2010); a lack of adequate and good infrastructure. On the other hand, some teachers may experience difficulties when obliged to utilize e-assessment for the first time. Some teachers may be inexperienced or unfamiliar with technology (Jordan & Mitchell, 2009).

Based on the obstacles of online writing assessment discussed in the preceding research, it is necessary for a course designer to think about, consider, and design an effective online writing assessment that can manage any disruptive scenario that may impact the process of online writing assessment. To do that, a course planner may have expertise in designing acceptable methods and instruments for online writing assessment that are based on the suitable students' condition and circumstance.

Online Platform for Online Writing Assessment

To conduct online writing assessment, the lecturers need to consider appropriate online platform to be effective in online writing assessment. Here are some of the platforms that may utilize easily by the lecturers in conducting writing assessment:

1. Moodle

Moodle is a free learning management system that provides a platform for e-learning. It greatly assists various teachers in conceptualizing the various courses, course structures, and content, hence enabling interaction with online students. The institution can employ any of a variety of modules for assessment in Moodle™. The most popular modules are Assignment, Quiz, Survey, Workshop, and Choice. Other modules, such as the Forum and the Journal, can be utilized for evaluation as well. Moodle provides available space for conducting online writing assessment. Some of them are as follows:

- **Essay questions.**

Essay questions provide a space for lecturers to deliver online essay writing. Through this feature, several online marking tools exist to assist with onscreen.

- **Short answer.**

Short answer questions may also be used by lecturers to assess students' understanding of writing theories. Students must use this function to put in a word or phrase in answer to a question.

- **True/False.**

In this type of question, a student is given only two options in this sort of question: truthful or false. The substance of the question may include a picture or html code, or it may demand an explanation.

2. Social media

Social media is an excellent medium for assessing writing. Account users can use this site to build profiles, chat socially, exchange thoughts, images, and video clips, and play games against "friends." It is all about connecting, sharing, and networking with others. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are likely to be the most well-known social networking platforms. As a result, these are useful tools for quickly linking students, teachers, and teachers. Lecturers are graciously using these venues to allow students to publish their writing tests. Facebook, for example, provides a plethora of educational tool. Facebook provides services such as Facebook Mobile, which gives learners access to the majority of Facebook's functionality on tablets and smartphones, Facebook Messenger, an instant messaging service, and Facebook Paper, an app for the IOS environment that functions similarly to a newspaper. As a result, professors may quickly construct knowledge repositories on Facebook, spark dialogues, and publish critical "news" items.

Options and Scenarios to Online Writing Assessment

Before performing an online writing assessment, the lecturer should examine key elements in online writing assessment management (Tuah & Naing, 2021). To begin, lecturers must analyze the institutional and educator readiness to perform online assessments. Institutional preparedness relates to institutional policies, resources, and procedures, such as internet access and the availability of the IT support staff. Educator preparedness refers to educators' acceptance and "acquire" while transitioning to online teaching and learning, which includes training in teaching methods, assessment, and online tools. Second, the lecturers must be aware of certain types of cheating methods that may occur throughout the test. Screen

sharing among candidates, using multiple monitors, using a mobile phone, using a Bluetooth technology headset, imitation, taking a screenshot and sending to friends, are all examples of possible cheating practices during the mock online examination. As a result, lecturers must have effective methods to reduce any cheating efforts. Finally, while considering online assessment techniques, educators must consider students' diversity.

After considering online writing assessment management, the lecturers can set specific steps to be implemented in the online assessment. The steps might be useful as guidance in managing online writing assessment to run efficiently. The first step begins with planning and designing an early assessment. Lecturers must have planned and designed the type of writing test that will be administered to students since the beginning of the lecture. The test that will be given must be in accordance with the material being taught and the learning objectives. Furthermore, lecturers must be able to prepare instructions, rubrics, and expectations as clear as possible. The instructions given in the test must be complete, clearly structured, and easily understood by students. In addition, the online writing assessment given to students must also be facilitated with a space for students to ask questions, such as a discussion board, to ensure that all students have same access to the information. After that, the lecturers can plan to use a variety of writing assessment types to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in different ways. Finally, lecturers must also prepare feedback that will help students improve their writing results and provide input for improvements in the future.

Furthermore, the lecturers may see certain assessment methods would be more acceptable and less challenging for achieving the intended goals in remote assessing. Here are some options which can be used by the lecturers in delivering online writing assessment.

1. Essay

Essays are one type of assessment method that may be used when completing online writing assessments. Essay questions are the only sort of question that can examine all six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. They enable students to express their views and opinions in writing, providing a more accurate picture of student knowledge. Finally, because they are open-ended questions, they favor recall over recognition. For that reason, Essays are adaptable and can be used to measure higher-order learning skills.

When essays are submitted online, it may be easier to grade them using online rubrics or an online marking scheme with prepared comments or other anticipated answers. These comments may be placed onto the electronic essay, or new ones can be added. The lecturer may utilize many forms of LMS when handing essay tests to students (Moodle, Google Classroom, Edmodo). The student would have composed the essay and uploaded it to the LMS. The lecturer would then be able to grade the essay using the "Grading" method available on the platform to mark the essay.

For the assessment scenarios, it begins with asking students to write essays on various genres of classification and division, such as descriptive, narrative, comparison and contrast, argumentation on the LMS. Each student have an account in the website. They are supposed to go into their account and write their essay in the platform. The lecturers grade and provide feedback on the students' essays. The feedback from the lecturers includes comments on the language, content, and organization of the student writings.

To use essay for online writing assessment, the lecturers can follows recommendation proposed by Weleschuk, Dyjur & Kelly (2019). First, writing materials should be specific and should be integrated into notes or assignment descriptions. Second, if several students struggle with the same areas on a written assignment, provide feedback to the entire class. Then, the lecturer should set a time for grading written assignments to ensure that it is completed on time. After that, larger projects might be arranged as cumulative assignments that are divided into stages to allow for more regular feedback and learning throughout the process. Next, feedback can be provided in text, as notes inside a student's work, or as audio/video files. The lecturer should provide examples of expert writing in the same format that students will be using. Finally, when students are seeking for feedback, have them complete a self-assessment so

the lecturers can check whether the view of their work matches theirs and to ensure they are thinking about the grading criteria.

2. A collection of Quizzes

Quizzes can be used by lecturers as an alternate method of increasing students' grasp of writing theories. It can be used as a diagnostic tool to test learner understanding at the beginning of the topic. It also gives ongoing data on students' comprehension and acts as input for future development. To make cheating more difficult, quizzes may be readily randomized utilizing application technologies like as Canvas and Sakai (Guangful, et.al, 2020).

To apply quiz as online writing assessment, the lecturers need to make choice in arranging the quiz such as appropriate platform to be use for online writing assessment, the need for feedback and hints in the quiz, the available time of quiz to be done by the students, grading system. For the first choice, the lecturers can choose online writing assessment platform that can be access easily by the students to do quiz. ProProfs Quiz Maker, Fyrexbox, iSpring QuizMaker, Moodle are some of online quiz platform available to be used for the lecturers. After choosing the platform, the lecturers can continues to reconsider feedback and hints given during the exam. Automated marking is typically a fundamental feature of online quizzes, which means formative feedback may occur frequently. Quizzes should include comments on why certain responses are wrong. To provide official feedback on the quiz, it should refer to quiz results in lectures so students are aware of the importance of this chance for feedback and are more inclined to participate. The quiz should then be arranged into a period and time restriction to acquire reliable results. Finally, remember to set up the grading system in the platform.

3. E-portfolio

Lecturers can also use E-portfolio to conduct online formative assessment. E-Portfolios are electronic collections of academic, personal, and professional progress that are created with a number of internet tools or computer software packages. LMS frequently include portfolio features that allow students to collect a variety of course-related resources. E-portfolios enable lecturers not only to observe what students know and can do, but also to indicate how students learn through their reflections (Rutgers, 2020). The students' portfolio may show appraisal of their progress by offering the best exemplar from the archive of writing they have, their future vision of writing difficulties and how they plan to address them, their evaluation of feedback they got from lecturers and how they respond to the remarks. As a result, the electronic portfolio writing provides various facilities for students to check points and grades, reflect on their progress, and captures performance data and promotes critical self-assessment their work (Mohamadi, 2018; Joshi, et.al, 2020).

In addition, there are various websites available for building, managing, and accessing e-portfolios and most of them offer a number of useful features that teachers may tailor to the needs of their specific course and students. Moreover, some of them provide facilities to design e-portfolios which are more personal, organized, and informative without any commercial worries than regular websites (Alawdat, 2013). The websites are Flavors.me, Shown'd, DoYouBuzz, PathBrite Blog, Weebly, Portfolio Gen, OPRResume. Through this website, lecturers simply need to direct their students to one of them, so that they may manage their personal, professional, and academic tasks. Apart from that, lecturers can select more customized e-portfolios to adjust writing activity and provide their users more choice to organize their exteriors. It can take several types of e-portfolio such as Facebook based e-portfolios, blog folio, Pebble Pad based e-portfolios, wiki-based electronic portfolios, and web folio (Babae & Tikoduadua, 2013).

To assess the students' writing though e-portfolio, it begins with analyzing the students' writing process in making a draft of their writing until creating a final writing. Thus, the assessment utilizing this way prescribes that writing should be undertaken and assessed in stages rather than assessing the written output simply. As a result, the academic writing assessment included in the e-Portfolio is separated into

phases, allowing students to write and edit their work overtime. As a result, the tasks are divided into processes and products: among the processes are a mind map created during brainstorming (prewriting), an essay outline (drafting), an essay draft (revising), and a final essay (editing); among the products (publication) are the published essay and a presentation of the completed e-Portfolio. Breaking down writing into sequential phases may also be beneficial since students are given opportunity to revise their drafts without feeling rushed to complete the perfect essay (Ngui, et.al, 2019).

Thus, the lecturers can consider the recommendation of above as a way to be used in implementing online writing assessment. However, while implementing it, lecturers must also examine choices for conducting online writing assessments based on the writing test goals to be accomplished and students' abilities to complete the online test. Furthermore, assessment informs much of the curriculum, which is structured to focus on the components of the curriculum most directly related with the assessment needs. The sections that follow are specific to excellent online assessment techniques.

1. Maintain a good balance of formative and summative assessment tasks.

During online learning, lecturers must also balance the use of formative and summative assessment. Lecturers do not only focus on summative assessments that are able to show the results of students' writing abilities. However, lecturers must also use formative assessment net to be able to find out the progress of students during the online learning process of writing. Lecturers also have to assess how students progress in the writing process to produce a piece of writing. Lecturers can balance the use of both in online learning activities. Lecturers can offer online summative evaluations at any time, in any location, and in any area. Formative assessments, on the other hand, are typically conducted by teachers throughout a learning unit to measure student learning as it occurs. Formative assessment, when used successfully, gives information that allows teachers to adapt teaching and learning activities to increase learning.

2. Development of 21st-century Skills

Lecturers must also equip students with a larger range of "21st century abilities" in order for them to survive in a quickly changing, technologically saturated environment. Students must better grasp how to use what they learn in academic topics to cope with real-world issues in order to be successful in both their employment and their personal life. Lecturers cannot merely expect information replication during assessment assignments since this does not prepare students for the kind of challenges they will face in the real world. Students must learn to think critically about information, solve fresh issues, communicate and cooperate, create new products and processes, and adapt to changes. As a result, evaluation methods should be based on many measurements of students' ability, including 21st-century skills.

Conclusion

This article includes a summary of the issues experienced with online writing assessment, as well as numerous ways for doing the online writing assessment. The overview has looked at the idea of online writing assessment for course designers and lecturers. Specific attention has been paid to the development of online technologies for online writing assessment teaching, as well as the contexts in which these technologies may be used, and the principles presented are appropriately responsive to theoretical constructs that should inform modern-day assessment. As a result, it is important to consider the viewpoints of all persons participating in this process. Collaborative efforts should be made by IT specialists, educators, testing experts, and policymakers to improve the quality of online assessment. In light of the above discussion, the author emphasizes the importance of academic institutions ensuring the availability of a dependable remote proctoring system, training lecturers on various forms of online assessments and directing them to use a variety of assessment methods, and educating students on the importance of academic integrity.

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