Chapter 16
Managing Student Expectations: Using Online Quizzes in University Subjects

Greg Jones
University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Hazel Jones
University of Southern Queensland, Australia

ABSTRACT

Online quizzes, and particularly multiple choice quizzes, are fast becoming a standard type of assessment for distance learning as well as classes taught through a blended delivery modality. Whilst there are advantages for teachers of automatic marking there are also a range of concerns such as collusion and for students the impersonal nature of these types of assessment. This chapter will consider ways in which these concerns can be addressed through conversations between staff and students, the ways in which quizzes are designed and administered and the feedback that is provided to students. Students’ expectations of the processes around quizzes as well as the merit of this type of assessment often varies significantly from the reality, leading to discontent and lack of engagement. Strategies for setting realistic expectations for students are provided that will help make online quizzes a more personalized experience for students.

INTRODUCTION

Online quizzes, which can take a variety of forms including incorporating multiple choice, true/false, matching, calculation and short answer questions, have become an increasingly common form of assessment in a wide range of subjects. (Subjects will be used throughout this chapter to describe a single unit of study). Quizzes primarily have two purposes, either as formative or summative assessments, and constitute one of the most commonly utilized interactive elements of online learning (be this for fully online or blended learning). Whilst the automated nature of these quizzes can lead to quizzes being impersonal, it is also possible to make these a very individual activity through the conversations between
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staff and students around the quizzes, both before the quiz, through setting realistic expectations for students and after completion through provision of feedback information. This chapter will explore the different types of conversations that can occur and how these can be used to set realistic expectations for students of the why, what, how and when of quizzes.

The chapter will examine some of the different ways in which quizzes can be used to promote learning, some of the issues faced by staff during the development and administration of quizzes, and students when attempting those quizzes. Additionally, recommendations will be provided for optimal settings within a quiz. These settings will be dependent on the intent of the quiz and the role the quiz plays in assessing and developing student learning.

BACKGROUND

This chapter developed from two main perspectives: the frustrations of an early career academic, who, with the best of intentions, changed some details of curriculum design (altering the first of two online quizzes), resulting in student complaints, dissatisfaction and little change in student success; and a learning designer/researcher with a keen interest in learning analytics, who worked together to formulate strategies to reduce the levels of frustration and dissatisfaction. The ideas in the chapter were generated through the experience and research of the authors, who have both worked in multiple roles within several Australian universities over twenty years. They have drawn on their combined experience, and many conversations together and with others, including students, to bring these ideas together. This work has also been influenced by student feedback (both positive and negative).

Students’ levels of satisfaction with a subject and their overall educational experience are dependent on a complex set of factors. Students can have markedly different perceptions and levels of satisfaction with a subject even though they have identical experiences. One factor most likely to influence their satisfaction is the preconceived expectations with which they enter the subject (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006). Students often have unrealistic expectations about the role of online quizzes, as well as various aspects of them which can lead to student dissatisfaction and low levels of engagement. These expectations can be influenced by students’ goal setting, motivations and beliefs, and this chapter will include a brief discussion of these factors. A rationale for setting realistic expectations and suggestions of how to convey these expectations to students is also discussed.

Methods

This chapter builds on the reflective practice of the authors in administering and assessing student performance in online quizzes across a range of subjects and universities. Quantitative analysis of quiz results, utilizing standard reports in the LMS from individual students as well as full cohorts, have informed the strategies developed throughout the chapter. Feedback from students on various aspects of the online quizzes led to an extensive review of current literature, which has also informed the content of the chapter and the strategies included. Subjects and cohorts that have informed the chapter range from large, multi-campus first year subjects offered on-campus with a blended delivery, to fully online postgraduate subjects. All quizzes that have informed the discussion consist of multiple choice questions and range from voluntary practice quizzes to summative assessments testing learning throughout the