Chapter 4

The Usability of Online Quizzes: Evaluating Student Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on assessment, an essential component of teaching and learning. It examines the usability of online quizzes and determines what features of Blackboard-based testing are most beneficial from a student perspective. A survey of 395 students provides new insights that can help teachers, administrators, course providers, trainers, and instructional technology specialists make informed choices in developing and implementing online assessments. The author concludes that instructors should move away from the “one-size-fits-all” approach towards flexible, learner-centered models.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in Internet-based educational technologies promise to create learning environments that could transform many aspects of the traditional relationships between instructors and their students, including the presentation of course content, learning activities, student-teacher and student-to-student interactions, as well as assessment (Oliver & Moore, 2008; West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2007). Currently, over fifty different web-based course management systems (CMS) are being used by higher education institutions around the world (Pieper, Edwards, Haist, & Nolan, 2010). Well-known online systems such as Blackboard, Desire2Learn, eCollege, Angel, Sakai, and Moodle have been widely adopted by educators and offer an array of embedded assessment tools (Adlakha & Aggarwal, 2009).

One study of instructors’ use of course management systems revealed that 80% of respondents had used online testing in their face-to-face classes (Morgan, 2003). Another study of college students reported that 70% of them had taken
online quizzes, 88.8% had used online practice exams, and 71.8% had obtained faculty feedback online (Kvavik, Caruso, & Morgan, 2004). Focusing on the educators’ experiences, Liang and Creasy (2004) argued that technology provides numerous opportunities for online assessment to become more learner-centered, increase learner autonomy, and promote self-directed learning. It should be noted, however, that when educators integrate technology to assess student learning, they tend to overlook the significance of creating assessments that are both convenient and usable from the contemporary students’ point of view.

In addition, the number of online learners in higher education continues to grow, according to the 2009 report by the Sloan Consortium. In the Fall 2008, as the report states, 25% of all higher education students in United States, or over 4.6 million students, were taking at least one course online (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Finally, blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning activities, is gaining increased recognition (Koohang et al., 2010). Given the prevalence of web-based technologies in educational practices, it is critical to adequately evaluate their effectiveness. However, despite the growing use of online assessments, there is insufficient evidence to indicate how suitable and useful these tools are from a student perspective. Regardless of the mode of instructional delivery, it remains unclear how much online testing and evaluation can add to the quality of students’ overall learning experiences.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (a) to examine the students’ perceptions of the usability of web-based assessment tools offered by Blackboard, one of the most prevalent course management systems in higher education, and (b) to determine the formal features of online quizzes that are the most beneficial from a student perspective, as well as those that might need improvement. Thus, the chapter focuses on an essential component of computer-assisted teaching and learning—assessment. The author seeks to provide insight on the perceived usability of online quizzes, which can help teachers, administrators, course providers, trainers, and instructional technology specialists involved in the creation of e-learning applications, make informed choices in the development and implementation of online assessments.

The chapter is organized as follows: it first reviews the pertinent literature on e-assessment, and usability evaluation. The author then describes the study methodology, the results and procedures, and provides a discussion of the future trends. The concluding section contains recommendations for teachers, instructional technology specialists, and educational practitioners involved in the design and implementation of web-based testing.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Assessment of student competences is central to both teaching and learning. Regardless of the area of study and the mode of presentation, the evaluation of the effectiveness of classroom instruction is vital in today’s system of higher education. A large volume of research has focused on student competencies, including measuring and reporting learning outcomes. The proliferation of Internet-based social interaction technologies (Dumova & Fiordo, 2010) such as social networks, blogs, wikis, and podcasts, and the growth of e-learning have revived interest in the assessment of student learning outcomes, but with an emphasis on the implementation of new and innovative ideas that may contradict the status quo and go against the traditional practices of evaluation of student learning.

In today’s networked world, information sharing and the co-creation of knowledge have been increasingly viewed as the cornerstones of a new learning culture, one in which learners build connections, create a community, and engage in collaborative education. Steve Hargadon (2009),
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