

ỨNG DỤNG MẠNG XÃ HỘI TRONG ĐÁNH GIÁ VIỆC HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ

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Sự phát triển của các công cụ học tập trực tuyến đang trở thành thách thức lớn đối với các nhà giáo dục và các nhà thiết kế phần mềm trong việc đánh giá kết quả học tập của học viên. Bài viết nhằm khảo sát tác động của việc tích hợp sử dụng mạng xã hội như một phương thức kiểm tra mới trong mô hình dạy học theo dự án và thảo luận những lợi ích và bất lợi của hình thức này trên các bình diện học thuật, xã hội, quản trị, công nghệ và đạo đức. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua các nhóm Facebook với sự tham gia của 40 sinh viên chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh thương mại của Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng quá trình tích hợp mạng xã hội để đánh giá việc học ngoại ngữ theo dự án giúp cải thiện năng lực của sinh viên, tăng động lực học tập và kỹ năng tư duy phản biện cũng như tinh thần tự học và sự hứng thú trong việc học ngoại ngữ. Tuy nhiên, khó khăn chính trong giảng dạy trực tuyến là sinh viên thiếu năng lực về công nghệ, vì vậy giáo viên phải hỗ trợ họ thường xuyên trong suốt quá trình dạy học để giải quyết những vấn đề liên quan.

Từ khóa: mạng xã hội, đánh giá, e-learning.

Advances in online learning tools are currently challenging educators and courseware designers in assessing student learning outcomes. This paper aims to investigate the impact of integrating social networking as an assessment tool into EFL project-based classroom and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this type of e-assessment in terms of academic, social, administrative, technological, and moral issues. The data were collected through Facebook groups joined by 40 Business English major students at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Vietnam. The findings reveal that integrating social networking services in EFL project assessment could help to boost learners' performance, increase their motivation and critical thinking, as well as develop their autonomy and engagement. The students' insufficient technical skills and the demand for teachers' immediate support for students are two main challenges during the process.

Keywords: social networks, assessment, e-learning.

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USING SOCIAL NETWORKING AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL IN EFL CLASSROOM

I. BACKGROUND

In the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), the online environment has emerged as a medium for teaching, learning, and assessment. E-assessment, the use of information technology for assessment-related activity, is particularly favorable in various academic institutions worldwide. Nevertheless, there is reluctance among teachers as to whether to use e-assessment for one or more of the stages of the assessment process. In Vietnam, the issue is more debated as traditional assessment formats have been so deeply rooted in education that a switch to e-assessment can cause difficulties to all stakeholders - the students, teachers, parents, managements, employers, and society.

According to Callan and Clayton (2010, p.9), “e-assessment is a broadly-based concept that covers a wide range of activities where technology is used in the designing and delivery of assessments”. E-assessment also refers to the processes of reporting, storing, and transferring data associated with assessments. The use of online and computer technology in designing assessment tasks is believed to better fulfill the requirements of current learning theories, described as “current shifts in educational thinking toward a constructivist approach” (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 133). These constructivist learning theories, derived in many cases from constructivist philosophical tenets,

stress the importance of the learner. Accordingly, students should be provided with abundant opportunities to play an active role in the learning process. From such a theoretical foundation, knowledge is gained from the construction of meaning by the student rather than from the collection of facts imparted by the teacher (Biggs & Moore, 1993, p. 25).. In the light of constructivist learning theories, online assessment is viewed as an assessment practice towards increased student control of assessment.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Why Should E-Assessment Be Utilized?

Online assessment, like other kinds of assessment, is to gauge learning outcomes (Bawa, 2012). Reliable assessment results are the basis for selecting appropriate pedagogical methods and materials. As e-learning is now widely used as a supplementary or exclusive educational approach, there arises the need for complementary methods for the assessment of teaching and learning. Thanks to ICT, online assessment or e-assessment offers particular promise for the evaluation of students at a distance (Sangi & Malik, 2007).

The technology offers a wider range of mechanisms to track, assess, and respond to the behaviors and mastery levels of students in online courses with far greater depth and rapidity than ever before (Prineas & Cini, 2011). With the ability to

continuously monitor students' progress, assessment in the online context ensures learners an observation of their own knowledge acquisition. Moreover, the flexible methods of assessment in the online context, oftentimes engaging and entertaining, further strengthen learners' motivation. To be specific, students can take automatically-marked self-tests at various times and at different locations (Phillips and Lowe, 2003). Generally speaking, the advantages of e-assessment mainly include (1) to increase the frequency of assessment, motivating students to learn and encouraging skills practice; (2) to broaden the range of knowledge assessed; (3) to increase feedback to students and lecturers; (4) to extend the range of assessment methods; (5) to increase objectivity and consistency; (6) to reduce marking loads; and (7) to aid administrative efficiency (Ozden, Erturk, & Sanli, 2004).

As an important part of teaching and learning, assessment should help learners to become more effective, self-assessing, and self-directed (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Assessment tasks under the constructivist approach should be designed to be authentic, which means they are derived from and simulate real-life conditions or situations (Berns & Erickson, 2001).

E-assessment, in fact, can be used for different purposes and can be categorized into any of assessment modes such as formative and summative, objective and subjective, referencing (criterion-referenced, norm-referenced, and ipsative), informal and formal, and/or assessment of

product and process. Accordingly, a variety of methods may be used in the online context to assess learners in the following areas: (1) critical thinking, (2) problem solving, (3) demonstrating techniques, (4) self-management, (5) information access/management, (6) demonstrating knowledge, (7) designing and creating, (8) communicating, (9) teamwork and collaboration (Morgan & Reilly, 1999).

2. E-assessment Issues

Despite its benefits, e-assessment has several issues related to academic, social, administrative, technological, and moral aspects. Literature review and informal interviews with students and colleagues in some academic institutions in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam regarding e-assessment practices have revealed the following issues, which are particularly noticed in Vietnam learning contexts.

2.1. Pedagogical Issue

It is important to investigate the validity and reliability of e-assessment practices. The question is raised as to whether this medium of assessment actually measures the learning it attempts to and whether the results are repeatable. The most common type of questions currently used in online tests tend to be closed-ended choice format (simple binary choices, multiple-choice, multiple-response, numeric entry, slider, and hot spot). Although this test format enables easy marking, it is of little pedagogic value as it focuses on surface learning. Moreover, it provides limited opportunity

for students to demonstrate such skills as debating, reasoning, creating, etc. Constructed response formats such as online discussions, e-portfolios, role plays, and wikis which offer a richer tapestry for learners to demonstrate their learning in holistic ways are rarely used within the institutions. In fact, some teachers interviewed attempted these formats in an unofficial and inconsistent manner, which threatens the validity of assessment. Moreover, the reliability of closed-ended choice question types is also questionable because of the percentage of guessing the right answer.

Debates around assessment have proposed the idea of increased student ownership of and options with assessment. For instance, Boud (1995, p.5) claimed that “what is important are learning outcomes, no matter how they [are] achieved”. This viewpoint is in agreement with the idea of equivalent ways of demonstrating learning outcomes (McClenaghan et al., 2006). In other words, students can use different methods to show their understanding (Hanafin et al., 2007). In the principles of good feedback of Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) it is proposed a stress of assessment on the increased student control. Rather than traditional assessment, online assessment tasks are said to be more reflective of constructivist philosophy and educational theory as well as authentic learning principles (Northcote, 2003). With the help of technology, e-assessment practices offer students a flexibility to demonstrate their learning in

their preferred way. Nevertheless, the e-assessment tasks offer a wider choice for teachers or test designers rather than for students. In fact, the students interviewed reported they took the tests on computers set up by the teachers, and there was only one test format, the multiple-choice, for all students throughout the course. In this case, the control of assessment is still in the teachers’ hand, not the students. Moreover, with the privilege to choose the test format for students, teachers usually employs technology to implement the assessment tasks which are easy to design, easy to mark, and reusable among different students. This is evident in the abundance of “old” assessment items displayed in a “new” style (Northcote, 2003). Multiple-choice questions once appearing on paper are now shown on the computer screen. Thus, the pedagogical advantage of e-assessment is hindered. E-assessment tasks are abused for ensuring teachers’ convenience rather than for enhancing student’s learning process.

2.2. Economic Issues

The implementation of e-assessment requires investments in electronic equipment, reliable software, network and database infrastructure, human resources, and expertise. It also requires adequate time in developing tests. Additionally, there are costs related to maintenance, secrecy, security, and trouble-free operations. All these costs seem to make e-assessment more expensive than traditional one. However, once e-assessment is put into use, it would lessen the workload in terms of operating and

scoring. Moreover, the test items can be reusable from year to year in different combinations (Ridgway et al., 2004). Interestingly, the costs of e-assessment are worth spending especially in case of distance learning. If e-assessment is not available, the collection of assessment data in distance learning must require traveling which would consume even more costs, time, and effort. In general, the investment in e-assessment might be costly, but the effectiveness it affords the stakeholders in the long run is very promising.

2.3. Technical Issues

For e-assessment to be effective, reliable hardware, server, software, network, power systems, etc. must be ensured. Reliable and valid results can only be achieved if those elements are stable. Moreover, the technical support must be available for students and teachers when problems arise. Similarly, adequate level of technical support must be ready for the maintenance of the integrity and security of the complex delivery systems. Additionally, technical policies, data management, operational security, and technical support should be present altogether for the sake of wide-scale adoption of e-assessment across an institution or synchronization among multiple testing locations (Elsakowa et al., 2019).

2.4. Administrative Issues

The continual administration of e-assessment involves many tasks such as administering tests, monitoring testing

processes, keeping records of learners' results, tracking records, maintaining security procedures, etc. These tasks require adequate staff with proper training to ensure the validity of assessment. For example, some students interviewed revealed a case when solutions to the test questions were displayed on the screen as the supervisor started delivering the test. Since the supervisor was not well-trained, she had to wait for the technician to come and solve the issue. Meanwhile, the students had a chance to remember several answers.

2.5. Social Issues

In Vietnam, the acceptance of e-assessment is limited to distance learning situations. Other cases of e-assessment are only seen in exams to obtain international certificates. For academic institutions, assessment in online contexts is not fully supported by the management. Therefore, the teachers who want to employ e-assessment would have to create their own assessment tools. Some multiple-choice tests can be implemented in the language laboratory where each student sits at a separate computer to do the test without reference to any sources such as textbooks or web pages. Hence, the test intended to take e-assessment form turns out to be computer-assisted only. Except for the fact that texts are displayed on the screen instead of on paper and marking is automated, every other factors such as testing location, testing time, and testing procedures are the same as those of traditional assessment. Most students interviewed felt no difference when taking

such tests. For teachers at an institution, designing those tests was time-consuming as teachers had to create the test content and making use of technology themselves. Teachers who had no relevant knowledge about technology could only dream of making such tests. Furthermore, the implementation of the test was limited as there was only one room with computers. Additional issue was the need to divide students into groups to take the test at different time due to the limited number of computers in this room.

While receiving little or no support when attempting e-assessment, the teachers face another problem. That is, as revealed by colleagues, teachers' salary does not deserve the effort of designing and implementing e-assessment. Therefore, some teachers chose not to try this new trend for fear of wasting too much time and effort (Bennet et al., 2008).

2.6. Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are extremely important in assessment, especially e-assessment. First of all, the issue of inequity or unfairness may be embedded within the use of e-assessment. Since the ability to respond electronically can affect a student's capacity to succeed in e-assessment, students with low level of computer literacy will be put at a disadvantage. Indeed, students high in computer anxiety will under-perform in computer-based versions of assessment (Brosnan, 1999). Moreover, Noyes et al. (2004) suggested that lower-performing individuals will be disadvantaged

compared to higher-attaining students because a greater workload and additional effort is required to complete a computer-based test. Second, disruptions of assessment service due to loss of power, equipment failure, software malfunction, network failure, and/or poor administration may cause mental composure for students in addition to loss of time and data. Third, in off-campus assessment, the cooperation of several students on finding out the solutions to test items might not be controlled. Plagiarism is also the concern of e-assessment practitioners. Fourth, the moral issue as to the possibility that expert computer users, hackers, or even teachers/test designers could gain access to, manipulate, copy, and misuse the answer scripts (Sangi & Malik, 2007).

3. A Balanced Approach to Online Assessment

For e-assessment to be successfully implemented, there must be a close collaboration among all major stakeholders: the students, teachers, and institution. Each stakeholder holds the responsibility of contributing to the development of effective assessment. For example, the institution creates an environment where e-assessment is encouraged as well as invests adequately in technology, expertise, training, and infrastructure to enable e-assessment. The teachers are mainly engaged in the process of test design, scoring, and giving feedback. The students participate in the test completion, giving feedback to peers

and to teachers, tracking their own learning performance, etc. Since every party has their own role, their failures in completing their duty would cause unexpected disruptions or problems to the whole process of e-assessment implementation.

Assuming that all stakeholders are actively engaged in the assessment, there are several considerations they should take into account to achieve a balanced approach to online assessment. First, flexible assessment formats should be administered. The stress is put on a varied assessment diet, rather than a single solution for all situations (Irwin, 2007). A qualitative-style assessment where a balance of tasks is offered to assess all levels of deep and surface learning outcomes should be developed. Second, the choice of online assessment techniques should not be primarily guided by one's enthusiasm for e-assessment trial or the concern regarding the current lack of resources in the education sector. The decision should be based on pedagogical stance with a careful consideration of the needs of students and a reflection on the intentions of the content in the courses. A balanced outlook can surely lead to a balanced use of varied and high quality online assessment strategies (Northcote, 2003). Third, the balanced e-assessment model development should be an ongoing process, not episodic. All stakeholders should contribute to the preparation, implementation, reflection, revision, and development of the model. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to

limiting the social and ethical issues of e-assessment.

Based on the aforementioned perspectives towards the issue, this paper aims to answer the following research question:

What are the impacts of social networks as an alternative assessment tool in EFL classroom?

II. METHODOLOGY

1. Settings and participants

The study was conducted during a period of fifteen weeks in a classroom of business writing classroom with the participation of 40 fourth-year students at Ho Chi Minh University of Education. The language proficiency of the participants ranged from B2-C1 in Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR). The reason why those participants were chosen was that they had had primary previous experience from the pre-internship in a variety of companies in Ho Chi Minh City. The study lasted for twelve weeks.

At the beginning of the course, the teachers introduced the course outcome which aimed at producing a labor contract of random business areas in Vietnam. The entire students were divided into eight groups of five members. Each group had their own right to decide the area of business to conduct the project. In every project, two members had to imitate a discussion between an employer and a candidate for employment to discuss the details of the labor contract with the

provision of contract templates from the teachers. Subsequently, the discussion and the final labor contract were required to be uploaded onto a Facebook group to receive comments and feedback from teachers and other classmates.

2. Methods

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was utilized to analyze both subjective and objectives elements in the study

The project of labor contract writings

In the presence of primary experience in business writing, the recorded videos of discussion and students' products were compulsory to be available for every member of the class to give comments on the outcome of each group on Facebook. It was advisable that students could consult with other skilled workers in the company or get their permission to join a real interview of employment.

The data would be analyzed based on the outcome of the projects and the participation of class members during the course. The project is assessed based on four criteria: 1)Content and Register; 2) Language proficiency; 3) Practicality and Applicability; 4) Visual aids and Creativity.

Portfolio

A classroom E-portfolio was used to take notice of students' performance and difficulties in classroom for further

analysis of the digital assessment. During the period of the project-based activities, students posted their concerns and limitations in conducting the teamwork to gain peer support and teachers' pieces of advice, all comments and interactions were recorded in the portfolio on a weekly basis. Subsequently, teachers could briefly gather the information about learners' improvements and their speed over the time.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire of fifteen questions was delivered to each student to investigate their attitudes to the impacts of project-based learning in business courses and what difficulties they had to tackle during the time of the projects. A total number of fifteen questions were collaborated with ten open questions in the questionnaire. The five-point Likert scale was applied in the study to investigate learners' attitudes with five options including "strongly agree", "agree", "neutral", "disagree", and "strongly disagree"

III. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The implementation of project-based learning in business course at Ho Chi Minh University of Education, Vietnam showed a number of positive influence in terms of the degree of fulfilment of the learning outcomes, learners' interactions, and optimistic perspectives.

1. The project submissions and scores

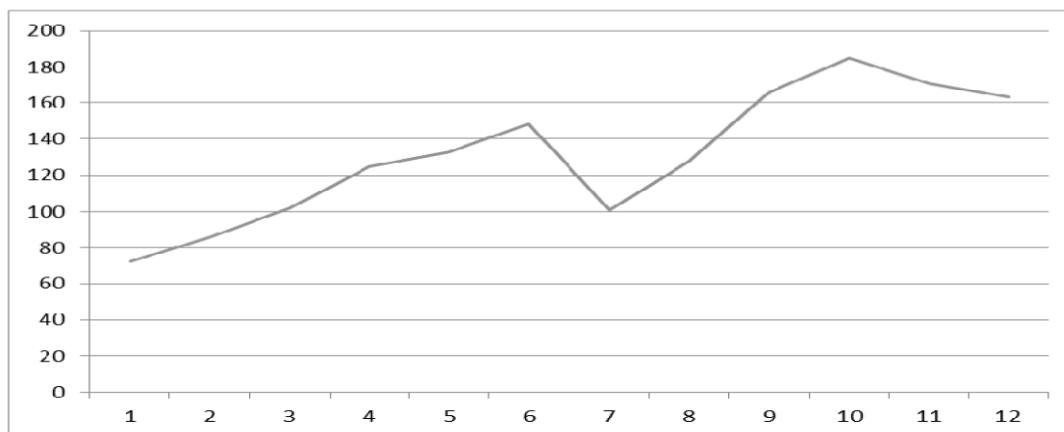
Group No.	Business sector	Scores
1	English Center	8.0
2	Overseas Study Company	6.5
3	English Center	7.5
4	Logistics	8.0
5	Social Media	8.5
6	Translation and Interpretation	7.0
7	Translation and Interpretation	7.5
8	Overseas Study Company	7.0

Table 1: Project submissions

The table 1 illustrates the products from eight groups after the course of twelve weeks. It can be seen that the majority of groups achieved good scores from 7.0-8.0. In particular, the highest performance referred to Group 5 with the topic of Social Media at 8.5 whereas the lowest one was Group 2 of Overseas

Study at 6.5. Moreover, there were two groups that reached 7.5 in Translation and Interpretation as well as English Center. In addition, Group 1 of English Center and Group 4 of Logistics got 8.0 at the same time.

2. The frequency of interactions over the period

*Figure 1: Learners' interactions*

The line graph demonstrates the changes in the number of interactions collected from social networks throughout the course. In general, the frequency of interactions showed a considerable increase over the period. In week 1, there

were 72 interactions recorded and then this figure went up dramatically during the next six weeks to 148 interactions. However, the data experienced a rapid drop to 101 in week 7. Subsequently, there was a significant rise to 185 until

week 10 and the number plummeted slightly to 163 at the end of the course.

3. Learners' attitudes towards PBL in business writing

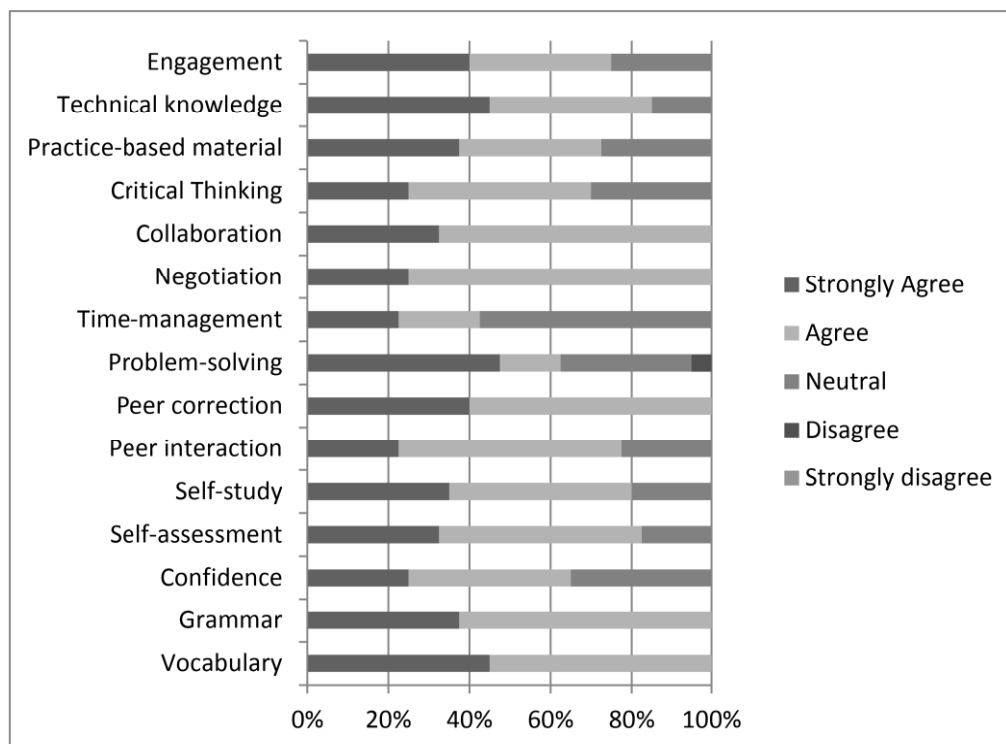


Figure 2: Learners' attitude to the efficiency of PBL in business writing

The figure 2 illustrates learners' perception to the effectiveness of online assessment in PBL in business writing. It is obvious from the data that the majority of participants showed their agreement on the contribution of project-based learning in business writing courses with online assessment. There were the complete agreement received from vocabulary, grammar, collaboration, negotiation, and peer correction. However, the percentage of neutral attitude was highest in time management at 57.5%. It is worth pointing out that a tiny fraction of 5% expressed the disagreement with the effectiveness of problem solving skill.

IV. DISCUSSION

The application of social networks as a medium of assessment has shown positive effects on evaluation of learners' performance and certain untestable elements outside academic classroom. The model of project-based language learning requires the investment of group collaboration among members to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the course. As a result, most of groups strongly fulfilled the criteria of business writing courses

In addition, social networks provide teachers with an opportunity to assess learners' engagement throughout the course. The frequency of weekly

interactions among class member were recorded and teachers can make use of the number of times learners discuss or exchange ideas with each other to figure out how much interested they are in particular discussion topics. It is shown from the study that the new model encourages the interactions among learners with the evidence of an increase in the frequency of interactions. However, learners could not consistently follow the course due to the distraction of other factors such as other subjects and health conditions. Hence, there was a drop at the middle of the study learners' interactions.

Moreover, the implementation of social networks reduces the burden of conventional teaching approaches that commonly requires strict summative test. The new model allows teachers to follow, assess, and support learners along with the course based on language skills and soft skills. Language proficiency is not only enhanced and strengthened after formal examinations but also consolidated during classroom activities and homework in the presence of explicit expressions of ideas and discussion in the online forum. As a result, teachers are able to figure out learner's level of competency and limitations in target language reproduction in order that they could provide immediate support to learners. The online forum creates an opportunity for learners to show their grammatical structures and lexical resource in the field, especially the terminology. Hence, teachers could realize and estimate learners' strengths and weaknesses related to language

competence to propose measures to upgrade their levels.

In addition, personal interventions inclusive of critical thinking, self-study, self-assessment, confidence, problem-solving skill, and time-management are stimulated through the new approach. Thanks to the availability of E-portfolio, teachers could give learners' comments on what they were supposed to improve or achieve during and after the course. Thus, the performance and development were recorded to indicate whether learners were changing in positive or negative ways. Furthermore, observation of learner's discussion on the online forum was beneficial to realize and understand the approach in which learners cognized an issue or how much they acquired the lessons. Accordingly, the ability to perform critical thinking could be shown via how learners react to a matter, how they absorb the knowledge, how they discuss and negotiate with their peer, and how they find the solutions to tackle the problems. It is worth pointing out that the way learners express their ontology and personality was also indicated via their discourse structures and metaphors.

Another benefit could be attributable to negotiation, collaboration, peer interaction, peer correction, and engagement. Due to the lack of a sufficient amount of time in classroom to allow individual interactions, this innovative approach created a chance for learners to learn from their peer. Group work is deemed an ideal activity for students to collaborate with each other; then, they could exchange ideas, learn

strengths and avoid personal limitations. Additionally, a huge number of mistakes were eliminated when learners spent time on reading others' papers and learn from their errors that were highlighted by teachers. The number of interactions was an indicator for teachers to decide the degree of involvement learners had in classroom and group activities to adjust their teaching methods.

VI. IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The implementation of online assessment is a promising method to assess the way learners revise, understand, and develop their understanding outside classroom. The ultimate benefit is that their language proficiency will be strengthened and enhanced via interaction and self-autonomy with the support of teachers. This method allows teachers to understand learners' limitation and learning styles to find out the appropriate teaching approaches. In addition, several soft skills will also be built to equip learners with sufficient confidence and competency to join the job market.

Nonetheless, the study still experiences various limitations. First, the study was conducted in only three months, so it was difficult to fully assess individual identities in learning activities. Second, cheating is unavoidable and unpredictable in this new method because there is no evidence to show whether they received external support or not. Finally, some students were not used to this new method of formative to adapt to new learning

styles. Therefore, the beginning of the study was not considered effective to all learners.

VI. CONCLUSION

Together with the development of ICT, e-assessment has emerged, offering promising practices to improve the quality of measuring learning outcomes. Despite the benefits e-assessment affords its stakeholders, assessment in online contexts also raises issues related to pedagogical, administrative, technological, social, and moral aspects. A balanced approach in which flexible assessment formats are employed might help lessen possible drawbacks of e-assessment. It is required that the active collaboration from all stakeholders is the prerequisite condition of e-assessment implementation following this approach. Moreover, the ongoing efforts of all parties to enhance the e-assessment model is necessary.

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