

Introduction

Assessment has long been a cornerstone of education, serving as a mirror that reflects both the effectiveness of instruction and the depth of student learning. In the realm of English as a Foreign Language ([EFL](#)) and English as a Second Language ([ESL](#)) classrooms, assessment takes on an even more pivotal role. It not only gauges students' linguistic proficiency but also provides invaluable insights into their progress, strengths, and areas that need further attention (Swaie & Algazo, 2023). As educators strive to equip students with the necessary skills to thrive in a globalized world, understanding their [language acquisition](#) journey becomes paramount.

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Historically, EFL/ESL assessments were dominated by traditional methods, often characterized by standardized tests and rote memorization. While these methods have their merits, they often fall short of capturing the multifaceted nature of [language learning](#). Language, after all, is not just about grammar rules or vocabulary lists; it's about [communication](#), [cultural understanding](#), and the ability to navigate diverse social contexts (Cheng & Wang, 2008). Recognizing these limitations, there has been a discernible shift in recent years towards more holistic and integrative assessment methods.

Enter the digital age, and the landscape of EFL/ESL assessment is undergoing yet another transformation. The rise of [technology in education](#), accelerated by global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, has ushered in a new era of online assessment (Pu & Xu, 2021). From automated feedback systems to online peer reviews, educators now have a plethora of tools at their disposal. These online methods offer unprecedented flexibility and accessibility, allowing for real-time feedback and a more [personalized learning](#) experience (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

However, as with any paradigm shift, the move towards online assessment is not without its challenges. Ensuring the quality and effectiveness of online feedback, navigating the nuances of digital communication, and addressing potential technological barriers are just a few of the hurdles educators face (Cao et al., 2022). As the EFL/ESL community ventures further into this digital frontier, there's a pressing need to understand, adapt, and optimize these online assessment techniques to truly harness their potential.

In this article, we will explore the various assessment methods employed in EFL/ESL classrooms, delving deep into their advantages, challenges, and best practices. Drawing from recent research and expert insights, we aim to shed light on the evolving landscape of [language assessment](#) and chart a path forward for educators and learners alike.

The Evolution of Assessment in EFL/ESL Classrooms

The journey of assessment in EFL/ESL classrooms has been marked by continuous evolution, reflecting the changing dynamics of education, technology, and societal needs. Historically, the assessment landscape was dominated by traditional methods, which, while foundational, had their set of limitations.

Traditional assessment methods in EFL/ESL classrooms primarily revolved around standardized tests, quizzes, and written examinations. These methods, often summative, aimed to evaluate students' knowledge

and skills at the end of an instructional period (Cheng & Wang, 2008). While they provided a structured and uniform way to measure linguistic proficiency, they often emphasized rote memorization and regurgitation of information. The focus was largely on the product of learning – the final score or grade – rather than the process of learning itself.

One of the inherent limitations of such traditional methods was their inability to capture the holistic nature of language learning. Language acquisition is a complex interplay of various skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – each intertwined with cultural nuances, contextual understanding, and personal experiences. Standardized tests, with their rigid formats and predetermined answer keys, often failed to assess these intricate layers of language learning. Moreover, they offered limited feedback, providing students with a numerical score but little insight into their strengths, weaknesses, or areas for improvement (Swaie & Algazo, 2023).



As the limitations of traditional methods became increasingly evident, the

EFL/ESL community began to explore alternative assessment approaches. The turn of the century saw a growing interest in formative assessments, portfolio-based evaluations, and performance tasks, which aimed to assess students in more authentic and meaningful contexts (Singh et al., 2022).

The advent of technology further revolutionized the assessment landscape. With the proliferation of [digital tools](#) and platforms, online assessment methods began to gain traction. These methods, ranging from online quizzes and e-portfolios to automated feedback systems and peer reviews, offered a level of flexibility and personalization previously unattainable (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021). For instance, online platforms enabled real-time feedback, allowing students to receive immediate input on their performance and make necessary adjustments. Additionally, digital tools facilitated collaborative assessments, enabling peer interactions and group evaluations in virtual spaces (Cao et al., 2022).

However, the true potential of online assessment methods was realized during the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. With educational institutions worldwide transitioning to remote learning, online assessments became the norm rather than the exception. Teachers, previously reliant on face-to-face interactions, had to adapt and innovate, exploring new ways to assess students in virtual environments (Pu & Xu, 2021).

The evolution of assessment in EFL/ESL classrooms mirrors the broader shifts in education and technology. From traditional paper-and-pencil tests to dynamic online platforms, assessment methods have continuously evolved to meet the changing needs of learners and educators. As we move forward, it's imperative to strike a balance, harnessing the strengths of both traditional and online methods to create a comprehensive and effective assessment ecosystem.

Online Peer Feedback: A Double-Edged Sword?

Online peer feedback (OPF) has emerged as a prominent assessment tool in EFL/ESL classrooms, especially with the increasing integration of technology in education. While it offers several advantages, it also presents unique challenges, making it a double-edged sword in the realm of language assessment.

Benefits of Online Peer Feedback

1. Overcoming Cultural Barriers: One of the most significant advantages of OPF is its ability to transcend cultural barriers, especially in contexts where face-saving is paramount. In many Asian cultures, for instance, direct criticism or confrontation can be perceived as impolite or disrespectful, making face-to-face feedback a delicate endeavor (Cao et al., 2022). OPF, with its virtual interface, provides a buffer, allowing students to give and receive feedback without the immediate pressure of face-to-face interactions. This can lead to more honest, constructive critiques, fostering a culture of open communication and mutual respect.

2. Improved Writing Performance: Research has consistently shown that OPF can lead to enhanced writing performance. By engaging in the feedback process, students not only receive insights into their work but also develop [critical thinking](#) skills as they evaluate others' writings. This dual role – as both the giver and receiver of feedback – promotes deeper engagement with the content, leading to improved writing outcomes (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

3. Enhanced Learning Environment: OPF creates a [collaborative learning](#) environment where students learn from their peers' perspectives, experiences, and insights. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of community, making the learning process more interactive and engaging. Furthermore, the asynchronous nature of online feedback allows students to process the feedback at their own

pace, reflect on it, and incorporate it effectively into their revisions (Cao et al., 2022).

Challenges of Online Peer Feedback

1. Varying Quality: One of the primary concerns with OPF is the varying quality of feedback. Unlike instructor-driven feedback, which is based on expertise and experience, peer feedback can be inconsistent. Some students might provide detailed, constructive critiques, while others might offer generic or superficial comments. This inconsistency can lead to confusion and, in some cases, misdirection (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

2. Potential for Face-Saving: While OPF can mitigate direct face-threatening situations, the potential for face-saving still exists. Students might be hesitant to offer critical feedback, fearing backlash or negative perceptions from their peers. Conversely, some might take offense to critiques, perceiving them as personal attacks rather than constructive feedback (Cao et al., 2022).

3. Need for Proper Training: To harness the full potential of OPF, both instructors and students need adequate training. Instructors must guide students on how to provide constructive feedback, emphasizing the importance of specificity, clarity, and respect. Students, on the other hand, need to be trained to receive feedback gracefully, viewing it as an opportunity for growth rather than a critique of their abilities (Singh et al., 2022).

While online peer feedback offers numerous advantages, it's not without its challenges. For it to be truly effective, a balanced approach is essential, one that recognizes its potential while addressing its limitations. With proper guidance, training, and a collaborative mindset, OPF can be a powerful tool in the EFL/ESL assessment arsenal.

The Power of Automated Feedback

In the digital age, the realm of EFL/ESL assessment has witnessed the rise of a powerful tool: automated feedback systems. These systems, driven by advanced algorithms and artificial intelligence, offer a new dimension to the feedback process, promising efficiency, objectivity, and consistency. But like any tool, automated feedback comes with its set of benefits and limitations.

Online Automated Feedback Systems

Automated feedback systems are digital platforms that evaluate student submissions and provide instant feedback without human intervention. These systems analyze inputs—often written assignments—against predefined criteria or benchmarks, generating feedback based on the analysis. With advancements in [natural language processing](#) and machine learning, these systems have become increasingly sophisticated, capable of assessing complex linguistic structures, grammar, vocabulary, and even aspects of coherence and cohesion (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).



ONLINE FEEDBACK

- Instant Responses
- Overcomes Barriers environment
- Diverse Perspectives
- Consistency & Objectivity
- Interactive Learning
- Data-Driven Insights
- Flexibility

Benefits of Automated Feedback

1. Instant Feedback: One of the standout advantages of automated systems is the immediacy of feedback. Students no longer have to wait for instructors to grade their assignments; they receive feedback almost instantly upon submission. This rapid turnaround can be especially beneficial for iterative tasks, allowing students to make immediate revisions and improvements (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

2. Objective Assessment: Automated systems, being devoid of human emotions or biases, offer a level of objectivity that's hard to achieve with human evaluators. They assess submissions based on predefined criteria, ensuring that every assignment is evaluated on the same parameters, irrespective of external factors like instructor mood, fatigue, or personal biases.

3. Consistent Criteria: Consistency is another hallmark of automated feedback. Whether it's the first assignment or the hundredth, the system will evaluate each submission based on the same set of criteria, ensuring

uniformity in feedback. This consistency can be particularly beneficial in large classes or courses with multiple instructors, ensuring that all students are assessed on the same standards (Cao et al., 2022).

Limitations of Automated Feedback

1. Lack of Human Touch: While automated systems excel in objectivity and consistency, they lack the human touch intrinsic to traditional feedback methods. Feedback, especially in language learning, is not just about pointing out errors; it's about encouragement, motivation, and personalized guidance. Automated systems, no matter how advanced, cannot replicate the empathy, understanding, and context-awareness of a human instructor (Singh et al., 2022).

2. Potential for Overlooking Nuances: Language is inherently nuanced, with layers of meaning, tone, and context. While automated systems can assess structural and grammatical aspects effectively, they might overlook subtleties like sarcasm, humor, or cultural references. Moreover, they might not be adept at evaluating creativity or originality, focusing instead on conformity to predefined criteria (Cao et al., 2022).

Automated feedback systems represent a significant advancement in EFL/ESL assessment, offering a blend of efficiency, objectivity, and consistency. However, they are not a replacement for human evaluators but rather a complement. For a holistic assessment approach, a combination of automated feedback and human evaluation—each leveraging its strengths—can offer the most comprehensive and effective feedback mechanism.

Teacher-Driven Online Feedback: The Gold Standard?

In the diverse landscape of EFL/ESL assessment, teacher-driven online feedback holds a special place. While automated systems and peer reviews bring their unique advantages to the table, feedback from a

seasoned instructor remains invaluable. With the integration of technology in education, teachers have transitioned from traditional face-to-face feedback to online platforms, but does this digital shift enhance or diminish the gold standard status of teacher-driven feedback?

Effectiveness of Teacher-Provided Online Feedback

Teacher-provided online feedback combines the expertise and nuance of an experienced educator with the convenience and flexibility of digital platforms. Such feedback is often comprehensive, addressing not only linguistic accuracy but also content, organization, and style. Teachers, with their deep understanding of individual student needs, can tailor their feedback to address specific challenges, provide encouragement, and suggest targeted resources for improvement (Cheng & Wang, 2008). Moreover, the asynchronous nature of online feedback allows teachers to provide more detailed and thoughtful responses, free from the time constraints of a classroom setting.

Comparison with Peer and Automated Feedback

While peer feedback offers diverse perspectives and promotes collaborative learning, it may lack the depth and expertise inherent in teacher feedback. Peers, being learners themselves, might not always identify subtle errors or provide advanced suggestions for improvement. Automated feedback, on the other hand, excels in consistency and speed but may overlook the nuances and context-specific aspects of language (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021). In contrast, teacher-driven feedback strikes a balance, offering detailed, personalized, and context-aware insights that are grounded in pedagogical expertise.

However, it's essential to note that each feedback method has its place in the EFL/ESL classroom. While teacher feedback is invaluable for in-depth analysis and guidance, peer feedback fosters collaboration and [self-assessment](#), and automated feedback provides quick checks and

consistent evaluations. The key lies in integrating these methods effectively, ensuring that students benefit from a holistic feedback ecosystem (Singh et al., 2022).

The Importance of Teacher Training for Online Feedback Provision

The shift to online feedback provision requires more than just familiarity with digital platforms; it demands a rethinking of feedback strategies to suit the online medium. Teachers need training to harness the full potential of online tools, ensuring that their feedback is clear, actionable, and engaging in a digital format (Cao et al., 2022). This includes understanding the capabilities and limitations of online platforms, incorporating multimedia elements like audio or video feedback, and fostering interactive feedback discussions.

Moreover, with the rise of hybrid or [blended learning](#) models, teachers need to seamlessly integrate online and offline feedback methods, ensuring consistency and continuity in their assessment approach. Professional development programs, workshops, and peer-sharing sessions can equip teachers with the skills and strategies needed for effective online feedback provision (Cheng & Wang, 2008).

While the medium of feedback provision has evolved with technological advancements, the essence of teacher-driven feedback remains unchanged. It continues to be a gold standard in EFL/ESL assessment, offering depth, expertise, and personalized guidance. With proper training and strategic integration of various feedback methods, educators can ensure that their students receive the comprehensive and effective feedback they deserve.

The Role of Technology in EFL/ESL Assessment

The integration of technology in education has transformed the way we approach teaching and assessment, especially in the field of EFL/ESL. As

digital tools and platforms become increasingly sophisticated, they offer new possibilities and challenges for language assessment, reshaping traditional paradigms and introducing innovative methods.

The Rise of E-Assessment Tools and Platforms

E-assessment, or electronic assessment, refers to the use of technology to design, administer, and evaluate learning assessments. In the context of EFL/ESL, e-assessment tools have evolved from basic online quizzes to intricate platforms that can evaluate various [language skills](#), from [reading comprehension](#) to spoken fluency (Pu & Xu, 2021). These platforms leverage advancements in artificial intelligence, speech recognition, and natural language processing to provide accurate and comprehensive evaluations. For instance, some tools can analyze a student's spoken response, evaluating [pronunciation](#), fluency, and coherence in real-time.

Benefits of Technology-Driven Assessment

1. Accessibility: One of the most significant advantages of e-assessment is its accessibility. Digital platforms break down geographical barriers, allowing students from around the world to access standardized assessments from the comfort of their homes. This is especially beneficial for remote learners or those in regions with limited educational infrastructure (Singh et al., 2022).

2. Flexibility: E-assessment tools offer unparalleled flexibility in terms of timing, pacing, and format. Students can take assessments at a time that suits them, revisit sections if needed, and even choose from various assessment formats, from multiple-choice questions to interactive simulations (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

3. Data-Driven Insights: Technology-driven assessments generate a wealth of data, providing detailed insights into student performance. Beyond just a score, these platforms can offer feedback on specific areas

of strength and weakness, track progress over time, and even predict future performance based on past trends. Such data-driven insights can inform personalized learning paths, ensuring that instruction meets individual student needs (Cao et al., 2022).

Potential Challenges of Technology-Driven Assessment

1. Technological Barriers: While e-assessment offers numerous advantages, it also presupposes access to reliable technology. Students in regions with limited internet connectivity or those without the necessary devices might find it challenging to access online assessments. Moreover, technical glitches, software incompatibilities, or cybersecurity threats can disrupt the assessment process (Cheng & Wang, 2008).

2. Risk of Over-Reliance: There's a potential danger in over-relying on technology-driven assessments at the expense of human judgment. While automated systems are consistent and objective, they might lack the nuance and contextual understanding that human evaluators bring. For instance, an automated tool might penalize non-standard dialects or cultural references, overlooking the richness and diversity of language use (Singh et al., 2022).

Technology plays an instrumental role in reshaping EFL/ESL assessment, offering tools that are accessible, flexible, and data-driven. However, it's essential to approach e-assessment with a balanced perspective, harnessing its strengths while being mindful of its limitations. By integrating technology with traditional assessment methods and ensuring equitable access, educators can create a comprehensive assessment ecosystem that truly serves the diverse needs of [EFL/ESL learners](#).

Best Practices for Implementing Online Feedback

The digital transformation of education has brought online feedback to the forefront of EFL/ESL assessment. While this mode offers numerous

advantages, its effectiveness hinges on its implementation. To harness the full potential of online feedback, educators must adhere to best practices that ensure feedback is not just informative but also constructive, actionable, and tailored to individual needs.

Ensuring Feedback is Constructive and Actionable

Constructive feedback goes beyond merely pointing out errors; it provides insights into why something is incorrect and offers suggestions for improvement. For online feedback to be truly effective, it should:

- **Be Specific:** General comments like “Good job!” or “Needs improvement” lack clarity. Feedback should pinpoint exact areas of strength or weakness, such as “Your use of transitional phrases enhanced the coherence of your essay” or “Consider revising this sentence for clarity” (Cheng & Wang, 2008).
- **Offer Solutions:** Instead of just highlighting errors, feedback should provide recommendations or resources to address them. For instance, linking to a grammar tutorial or suggesting a vocabulary enhancement tool can guide students toward actionable improvements (Singh et al., 2022).

Balancing Automated and Human-Driven Feedback

While automated feedback offers speed and consistency, human-driven feedback brings nuance and personalization. Striking a balance between the two can optimize the feedback process:

- **Use Automated Feedback for Preliminary Checks:** Before students submit their assignments, they can use automated tools for grammar, spelling, and basic structural checks. This allows them to correct fundamental errors and refine their work (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).
- **Rely on Human Feedback for In-Depth Analysis:** For aspects like

content quality, argument coherence, or cultural nuances, human evaluators are irreplaceable. Teachers can provide insights into these intricate areas, offering feedback that's context-aware and tailored to individual needs (Cao et al., 2022).

Training and Resources for Teachers and Students

The shift to online feedback requires both teachers and students to adapt to new tools, platforms, and feedback dynamics. Proper training and resources can facilitate this transition:

- **Professional Development for Teachers:** Workshops, webinars, and courses can equip teachers with the skills to provide effective online feedback. Topics can range from using specific e-assessment tools to strategies for ensuring feedback is engaging and interactive in a digital format (Cheng & Wang, 2008).
- **Guidance for Students:** Students, especially those new to [online learning](#), might need guidance on how to interpret and act on online feedback. Orientation sessions, tutorials, or feedback guides can help students understand the feedback process, the tools involved, and the steps they should take post-feedback (Singh et al., 2022).
- **Feedback Platforms with Collaborative Features:** Platforms that allow for interactive feedback, where students can ask questions, seek clarifications, or engage in feedback discussions, can enhance the feedback experience. Such collaborative features foster a feedback dialogue, making the process more dynamic and learner-centric (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

Online feedback, when implemented thoughtfully, can be a powerful tool in EFL/ESL assessment. By ensuring feedback is constructive and actionable, balancing automated and human-driven inputs, and providing adequate training and resources, educators can create a feedback ecosystem that is responsive, effective, and tailored to the digital age.

Conclusion

The journey of language acquisition, particularly in the realms of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL), is intricate, multifaceted, and deeply personal. At the heart of this journey lies assessment—a compass that not only gauges the depth of linguistic understanding but also charts the path forward, illuminating areas of strength and highlighting avenues for growth. As we've explored in this article, the landscape of EFL/ESL assessment is undergoing a transformative shift, propelled by technological advancements and the evolving needs of the global learner community.

The traditional paradigms of assessment, characterized by standardized tests and face-to-face evaluations, have served as foundational pillars for decades. While they offer structure and uniformity, their scope is often limited, capturing only a snapshot of the learner's linguistic capabilities (Cheng & Wang, 2008). Recognizing these limitations, there has been a discernible move towards more holistic, integrative, and technology-driven assessment methods.

Online feedback, in its various forms—be it peer-driven, automated, or teacher-led—has emerged as a potent tool in this new assessment arsenal. When implemented thoughtfully, online feedback transcends the barriers of time and space, offering real-time, personalized, and data-driven insights. It combines the immediacy of automated systems with the nuance and expertise of human evaluators, creating a feedback ecosystem that is both comprehensive and tailored to individual needs (Lv, Ren, & Xie, 2021).

However, the true potential of online feedback is realized not just by integrating technology but by ensuring that the feedback is constructive, actionable, and learner-centric. As we've discussed, feedback should be specific, offering clear insights into areas of strength and weakness. It should provide solutions, guiding learners towards resources or

strategies that can help them improve. Most importantly, it should foster a feedback dialogue, creating an interactive space where learners can ask questions, seek clarification, and actively participate in their assessment journey (Cao et al., 2022).

As we stand at the crossroads of traditional and digital assessment methods, educators must stay updated with the latest tools, techniques, and best practices. The world of EFL/ESL assessment is dynamic, with new platforms, algorithms, and methodologies emerging regularly. By embracing continuous learning and professional development, educators can ensure that they harness the full potential of these tools, offering feedback that is not just informative but also transformative (Singh et al., 2022).

In closing, the importance of effective assessment in EFL/ESL classrooms cannot be overstated. It's the beacon that guides the language learning journey, ensuring that every learner, irrespective of their background, abilities, or aspirations, receives the guidance, support, and feedback they deserve. As we venture further into the digital age, let's approach assessment with an open mind, a curious spirit, and a commitment to excellence, ensuring that every learner has the tools, resources, and feedback they need to thrive in a globalized world.

FAQs

1. What is the importance of assessment in EFL/ESL classrooms?

Answer: Assessment in EFL/ESL classrooms is crucial as it provides teachers with valuable information about their students' [language proficiency](#) and progress. It helps educators tailor their teaching methods to better suit the needs of their students and ensure [effective language learning](#).

2. How has the approach to EFL/ESL assessment evolved?

Answer: Traditional assessment methods often focus on rote memorization and standardized testing. However, with advancements in technology and pedagogical research, there has been a shift towards more dynamic and interactive online assessment methods that prioritize real-world language use and [communicative competence](#).

3. What are the benefits of online peer feedback in EFL/ESL classrooms?

Answer: Online peer feedback can help overcome cultural barriers, improve writing performance, and create an enhanced learning environment. It allows students to receive diverse perspectives and promotes collaborative learning.

4. Are there challenges associated with online peer feedback?

Answer: Yes, challenges include varying quality of feedback, potential for face-saving (avoiding criticism to maintain harmony), and the need for proper training to ensure feedback is constructive and beneficial.

5. How do automated feedback systems compare to human feedback?

Answer: Automated feedback systems offer instant feedback, objective assessment, and consistent criteria. However, they may lack the human touch and can overlook nuances in language use that a human evaluator

might catch.

6. Is teacher-provided online feedback considered the best form of feedback?

Answer: While teacher-provided feedback is highly valued due to its expertise and understanding of individual student needs, it's essential to balance it with other forms of feedback. The effectiveness largely depends on the training teachers receive and how they implement the feedback.

7. How has technology influenced EFL/ESL assessment?

Answer: Technology has led to the rise of e-assessment tools and platforms, making assessments more accessible, and flexible, and providing data-driven insights. It has revolutionized the way assessments are conducted, offering more interactive and personalized evaluation methods.

8. Are there any drawbacks to relying heavily on technology for EFL/ESL assessment

Answer: Potential challenges include technological barriers, especially in areas with limited resources, and the risk of over-reliance, which might lead to neglecting essential human aspects of teaching and assessment.

9. What are some best practices for implementing online feedback in EFL/ESL classrooms?

Answer: It's essential to ensure feedback is constructive and actionable, balance automated and human-driven feedback, and provide adequate training and resources for both teachers and students.

10. Why is it crucial for educators to stay updated with the latest assessment tools and techniques?

Answer: The field of EFL/ESL is continually evolving, with new research, tools, and methodologies emerging. Staying updated allows educators to provide the most effective and relevant instruction and assessment, ensuring students receive the best education possible.

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