

TEACHERS' TPACK: EVALUATING THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ONLINE ASSESSMENT IN K-12 SCIENCE INSTRUCTION

Uchenna Kingsley Okeke, & Sam Ramaila

Department of Science and Technology Education, University of Johannesburg (South Africa)

Abstract

The transition to online learning has prompted a critical re-evaluation of assessment methods in K-12 science education, particularly in secondary school physics. This paper examines the evolution of online assessment, its potential benefits, and associated challenges. We provide an overview of traditional assessment methods in science education, discussing their strengths and limitations. The integrative methods for review of literature were adopted to examine and comprehend the definitions and descriptions and approaches to TPACK. Studies. The discussion then shifts to online assessment, highlighting its advantages and comparing it to traditional approaches. Various online assessment tools and platforms available to educators are explored, alongside considerations such as technical issues, academic integrity, and meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, this paper examines opportunities offered by online assessment, including leveraging data analytics, enhancing formative assessment, increasing student engagement, and enabling personalized assessments. Best practices for designing effective online assessment tasks are provided, emphasizing faculty development and training. Grounded in the Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, this paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on online science education assessment practices, offering insights for educators optimizing assessment strategies in digital environments.

Keywords: *TPACK, science instruction, online assessment.*

1. Introduction

The integration of Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) in digital-based learning is a crucial 21st-century teaching skill. Modern society's increasing reliance on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has driven transformations in educational objectives, student learning needs, and workforce skill requirements (OECD, 2016; Freiberger, 2017). According to Santos and Castro (2021), TPACK enhances instructional delivery by integrating technology into classroom practices. The TPACK framework consists of three core components: technology, pedagogy, and content. Studies (e.g., Yeh, Lin, Hsu, Wu, & Hwang, 2015; Memiş, Et, & Sönmez, 2023) emphasize the growing importance of developing TPACK in teacher education programs. The shift to online learning environments has necessitated incorporating online assessment practices. Assessment plays a vital role in student learning experiences, instructional effectiveness, curriculum evaluation, and school performance (Brown, 2022). Effective assessments support formative improvements and summative evaluations of teachers, schools, and administrations. Given the significance of assessment, this paper explores its historical evolution, current practices, and future possibilities.

2. Objectives

This study is framed within the TPACK framework and examines the evolution, benefits, and challenges of online assessment in K-12 science education. Specifically, it addresses:

- The concept of assessment and its impact on learning objectives.
- Traditional assessment and common types used in science education.
- Online assessment, its rationale, and common tools in K-12 science instruction.
- Challenges and benefits of online assessment.
- Guidelines for designing effective online assessments.

3. Methodology

The integrative review of literature was adopted to examine and comprehend the definitions and descriptions and approaches to TPACK. Studies such as Torracco (2005) and Whittemore and Knafl (2005) identified integrative review as a particular review method which analyzes and synthesizes literature with the purpose of broadly comprehending the particular topic. These methods of review are suitable for re-evaluating studies on emerging topics in diverse disciplines such the integration of technology to instructional activities, so that robust comprehension of the discussion, analysis and application of TPACK in literature could be achieved.

4. Discussion

4.1. The concept of assessment and its impact

Assessment has been variously defined in literature. Wessel (2024) describes it as the systematic collection and analysis of data to infer student learning outcomes, instructional effectiveness, and curriculum efficacy. Amua-Sekyi (2016) considers assessment a set of activities undertaken by teachers and students to generate evidence for improving instructional practices. This includes assignments, quizzes, term papers, reports, hands-on exercises, and discussions. Yang, Chiu and Yan (2021) asserts that assessment provides immediate feedback to teachers, enabling them to tailor instruction to students' learning styles and needs. Over time, assessment has evolved from traditional methods such as pencil-and-paper tests (Atasoy & Kaya, 2022) to technologically integrated approaches. This evolution necessitates a comparative analysis of traditional and online assessment practices.

4.2. Assessment approaches in science education: a comparative analysis of traditional and online methods

In science education, assessment plays a crucial role in measuring student learning, guiding instructional decisions, and ensuring that students meet curriculum standards. Traditional assessment methods, such as standardized tests, multiple-choice exams, essays, and laboratory reports, have long been the standard in education. These assessments provide structured and reliable evaluations of students' knowledge and skills, offering several advantages, including:

Reliability: Traditional assessments, especially standardized formats, ensure consistency in the evaluation of student performance, providing comparability across diverse student populations.

Ease of Implementation: The familiarity with traditional assessment methods makes them relatively straightforward to implement. Teachers and students are accustomed to these formats, reducing the need for extensive training or resources.

Curricular Alignment: Traditional assessments are closely aligned with curriculum standards and learning objectives, making it easier to gauge whether students have mastered the material.

However, traditional assessments also have significant limitations:

Limited Feedback: These methods often result in delayed feedback, which can hinder real-time adjustments in student learning. Without timely corrections, students may continue to misunderstand key concepts.

Fixed Assessments: Traditional assessments typically follow a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to accommodate the diverse learning styles and individualized learning paths of students.

Memorization over Understanding: Rote memorization is often emphasized, which may undermine deeper, conceptual understanding and critical thinking. Students might perform well on tests but lack the ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts.

4.3. The rise of online assessment in science education

In recent years, online assessment has emerged as a powerful alternative to traditional methods. With the integration of digital tools, online assessments offer dynamic, interactive, and data-driven evaluation systems that can enhance learning and teaching experiences. The rationale for embracing online assessment includes several key benefits:

Enhanced Engagement: Online tools, with their interactive features, create more engaging learning environments that are accessible to a wider range of students. Through gamified elements and interactive simulations, students are encouraged to participate actively in the learning process.

Immediate Feedback: Automated grading systems in online assessments provide real-time feedback to both students and teachers, enabling timely interventions and adjustments to instructional strategies.

Personalized Learning: Adaptive assessments adjust the difficulty level based on the student's performance, ensuring that the content is appropriately challenging for each learner.

Common online assessment tools used in K-12 science education include platforms like Google Forms and Microsoft Forms for multiple-choice and short-answer questions, as well as Kahoot, and Quizizz, which offer gamified assessments that boost student engagement. Learning management systems such as Moodle and Blackboard support quizzes, assignments, and discussions, while interactive tools like PhET Simulations enable students to engage with virtual science experiments and assessments, enhancing their understanding of scientific concepts.

4.4. Challenges and limitations of online assessment

Despite its many advantages, online assessment is not without its challenges. Some of the key obstacles include:

Technical Limitations: Issues such as poor internet connectivity and lack of access to digital devices can hinder the effective implementation of online assessments, particularly in under-resourced settings.

Academic Integrity: The anonymous and remote nature of online assessments raises concerns about cheating, plagiarism, and unauthorized assistance, requiring additional safeguards to maintain fairness.

Student Engagement Variability: Online learning environments require self-regulation, and not all students possess the necessary skills to stay engaged and motivated, potentially leading to disengagement and lower performance.

Assessment Design Complexity: Designing effective online assessments requires careful planning. Teachers must consider the variety of question types, the integration of interactivity, and the feedback mechanisms to ensure that assessments are both effective and engaging.

4.5. Benefits of online assessment

Despite these challenges, online assessments offer several distinct advantages over traditional methods:

Scalability: Online platforms allow educators to assess large numbers of students simultaneously, which is particularly useful in larger classrooms or remote learning environments.

Automated Grading: The automation of grading processes reduces the workload on teachers and enhances efficiency, allowing them to focus on providing personalized feedback and support.

Data-Driven Insights: Learning analytics from online assessments provide educators with actionable insights into student performance, helping them identify trends, areas for improvement, and instructional gaps.

Formative Feedback: Online assessments enable continuous, formative assessments that support adaptive learning. Students can receive ongoing feedback, which helps them improve and refine their skills over time.

4.6. Best practices for designing effective online assessments

To maximize the benefits of online assessment in science education, educators should follow these best practices:

Align Assessments with Learning Objectives: Ensure that online assessments are designed to measure the intended learning outcomes, helping students focus on mastering key concepts.

Incorporate Multiple Assessment Types: A mix of assessment formats, including quizzes, assignments, discussions, and interactive simulations, can cater to various learning styles and preferences.

Leverage Data Analytics: Utilize the data provided by online platforms to monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly, identifying areas where students may need additional support.

Ensure Academic Integrity: Incorporate tools like plagiarism detection software, randomized question banks, and proctoring features to maintain the integrity of online assessments.

Provide Clear Instructions and Feedback: Ensure that students understand the expectations for assessments and receive clear, timely feedback to support their learning journey.

Both traditional and online assessment methods have unique strengths and limitations, and the key to effective science education lies in selecting the right approach for the specific context and learning objectives. While traditional assessments offer reliability and ease of implementation, online assessments bring enhanced engagement, immediate feedback, and personalized learning opportunities. By carefully integrating both methods and adhering to best practices for assessment design, educators can foster a more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all students.

5. Conclusion

The integration of online assessment in K-12 science education presents both opportunities and challenges. While online assessments offer benefits such as scalability, immediate feedback, and data-driven insights, they also raise concerns about technical access, academic integrity, and engagement variability. Grounded in the TPACK framework, this paper highlights the need for professional development to equip educators with the necessary skills to design and implement effective online assessments. Future research should explore best practices for balancing traditional and online assessment methods to optimize learning outcomes.

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