

e-Learning Support for Formative Assessment of Coursework

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Abstract:

Our research is on assessment for learning that is conducted with tasks that give students freedom of response and with outcomes that form part of the coursework. We use the term essay-type assessment to summarise these characteristics. Such assessment is linked to higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation and its value is clearly established in the literature. Our research investigates how e-learning can increase the uptake and quality of essay-type assessment. We report on findings from a literature review, a survey and interviews. Our literature review comprised all leading journals in e-learning back to the year 2001 and looked for articles on theory and tools. The survey was conducted at our own university and focused on the use of essay-type assessment in practice, covering both general characteristics and the use of e-learning tools. The interviews were carried out at four tertiary institutions in New Zealand and aimed at gaining an in-depths understanding of issues around current practice, knowledge of assessment theories and tools. Preliminary analysis shows that the e-learning community has largely neglected the educationally important area of essay-type assessment. E-learning effort, and following on from there acceptance, has been largely put into assessment with selection-type items characterised by the multiple choice approach. Some promising e-learning tools for essay-type assessment are now available but the use of these tools is not widespread and consequently, their educational effectiveness has not yet been confirmed. Our findings show the importance of institutional support structures to facilitate the uptake of e-learning tools. This applies in general to e-learning but particularly to assessment, as this is an area in which students do not tolerate computer malfunctions.