STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE APPS USED IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

Oxana STANȚIERU, *Master of Arts, Lecturer,*
Alecu Russo Balti State University,
oxana.stantieru@usarb.md

Abstract: Following a student's academic progress presents its own set of difficulties in the age of digital learning. With modern digital assessment tools, learning can be engaging and dynamic in this new setting. Educators and learners can evaluate each other's advancement and determine how well each has mastered a specific module or lesson with the help of these online assessment platforms. With a host of advantages like flexibility, personalization, and engagement, these online apps offer a more effective and efficient means of evaluating student learning and receiving real-time feedback. Primarily pinpointing the distinction between *assessment* and *evaluation*, the article provides a critical analysis of online apps that make the assessment of students' grammar proficiency a creative and productive process.
Keywords: assessment, evaluation, grammar proficiency, apps, assessment principles.

Assessment and *evaluation* are crucial components of education regardless of a students' educational stage, from preschool to college, being the teachers' most effective tool to ascertain students' learning outcomes and to further relate them to grade-level learning standards. Though *assessment* and *evaluation* are two distinct but interconnected processes that involve gathering information about students' learning progress, performance, and achievements, it is common practice in education to use these concepts interchangeably. While they are related, they serve different purposes within the educational context.

Assessment can be defined as information gathering and analysis about student performance and learning, frequently with the goal of making decisions regarding teaching and learning (Gronlund, Waugh, 2009). It is a formative process that is ongoing and focuses on the development of skills and knowledge over time. Brown defined assessment as "any act of interpreting information about student performance, collected through any of a multitude of a means or practices" (Brown, 2004, p. 304).

Evaluation, on the other hand, is a summative process that focuses on the overall quality of student learning and achievement at a particular point in time (Gronlund, Waugh, 2009), a process of "delineating, obtaining, providing, and applying descriptive and judgmental information for the purpose of making decisions" (Stufflebeam, 2001, p. 31). Consequently, based on the findings of assessments, *evaluation* entails making decisions regarding the efficacy of instruction.

So, *assessment* refers to the ongoing process of collecting data and information about students' learning, involving various methods and tools to gauge students' understanding, skills, and knowledge within specific learning objectives or standards. In contrast, *evaluation* is a broader process that involves making judgments or interpretations based on the data gathered through assessment. It focuses on interpreting the information collected and making decisions about various aspects of education, including student learning, curriculum effectiveness, teaching methodologies, and educational programs.

If we try to identify some important differences between the concepts under discussion, we could start with *timing* and *purpose*. The goal of *assessment* is to gauge students' progress and learning by giving them continuous feedback both at the end of a term (summative) and during the learning process (formative). Making decisions about the efficacy of the educational system, its initiatives, or its methods is part of the evaluation process. Our practice has proved that *assessment* provides feedback for immediate improvement in learning, while *evaluation* informs decision-making processes for improving educational practices, policies, or programs.

Both *assessment* and *evaluation* are critical in the educational landscape, as they inform teaching strategies, curriculum development, and overall educational quality. They work together to ensure effective learning outcomes for students while improving the educational system as a whole.

Assessing and *evaluating* grammar proficiency both involve examining a learner's grasp of grammar, but they occur at different stages and serve different purposes in the educational process.

Assessment of grammar proficiency happens throughout the learning process and is generally continuous and formative. This ongoing assessment occurs during:
– *Instructional Periods,* when teachers assess grammar proficiency during regular classroom activities, exercises, homework assignments, quizzes, and discussions. These assessments help identify students' strengths and areas needing improvement as learning progresses;
– *Learning Units,* when assessments are integrated into learning units or lessons to gauge how well students are understanding and applying grammar concepts taught during specific periods;
– *Practice Sessions,* when students' grammar proficiency is assessed during practice sessions, through exercises or tasks designed to reinforce grammar rules.

Thus, assessment of grammar proficiency occurs continuously during the learning process, aiming at providing continuing feedback to improve learning. It is often formative, focusing on improvement and constant adjustments, enhancing understanding progress and adapting teaching methods.

Given the significance of assessment for all participants involved in the educational process, we would like to emphasize the need of assessment principles. They promote efficient teaching methods, active student participation, and ongoing educational development, all of which eventually result in better learning outcomes for students.

Validity is the first principle, which conditions that evaluation instruments should measure the issues they are supposed to. According to Bachman and Palmer, "validity is the most fundamental consideration in the design and use of tests" (Bachman, Palmer, 2010, p. 25). The effectiveness of a test in measuring its objectives determines its validity. When analysing *validity*, one considers the connection between test performance and other forms of performance in various contexts (Bachman, 1990). Besides, *validity*, as defined by Brown, is the degree to which inferences made from assessment data are relevant, meaningful, and useful in light of the assessment's intended use (Brown, 2004). Likewise, *validity* pertains to the interpretation and application of assessment outcomes (Gronlund, Waugh, 2009).

Reliability is another principle that deals with the stability and consistency of assessment outcomes. A reliable assessment yields consistent results when provided in a comparable setting. As Brown has pointed out that "reliability is the consistency of test scores over time, across rates, or across versions of the same test" (Brown, 2004, p. 22).

Authenticity, which highlights the importance and practicality of assessments, is another principle. Real-world scenarios and assignments that students might come across outside of the classroom are reflected in authentic assessments. According to Hughes, "authenticity is crucial for language assessment because it ensures that the tasks are meaningful and relevant to learners' needs" (Hughes, 2003, p. 85).

Another essential assessment principle is *transparency*, which guarantees that students are aware of the evaluation criteria, expectations, and scoring procedure. Along with rubrics or grading guidelines, students should receive clear and explicit instructions. Therefore, students can self-evaluate and improve their work when there is transparency about what is being assessed and how it is being done. Indisputably, transparency in grammar assessment is beneficial because it fosters learning, equity, and clear expectations communication. It is one of the tenets that supports the assessment process's general efficacy.

Various methods can be used to evaluate grammar, depending on the learning objectives, educational setting, and desired level of in-depth analysis. Some common forms of grammar assessment include:
- ✓ *traditional tests* (multiple-choice, true/false, and fill-in-the-blank questions) covering a range of topics, from basic grammar rules to more complex structures;
- ✓ *writing assignments* (essays, paragraphs, or short-answer questions) evaluating not only knowledge but also the ability to apply grammar rules in context;
- ✓ *editing exercises* (a passage with grammatical errors that should be identified and corrected) measuring both recognition and application of grammar rules;
- ✓ *speaking assessments* (grammar-focused tasks, such as describing processes, giving instructions, or participating in conversations, etc.) evaluating the ability to use grammar in real-time communication;
- ✓ *project-based assessments* allowing for a more holistic evaluation of language skills;
- ✓ *peer review*, a collaborative approach, promoting peer learning and multiple perspectives;
- ✓ *portfolio assessment* providing a comprehensive view of language development over time;
- ✓ *interactive assessments* (interactive quizzes, games, or online exercises that focus on grammar concepts) engaging students in a more dynamic and interactive learning experience.

Undeniably, manually grading homework, tests, and quizzes can be time-consuming, thus leading to human error. Fortunately, there are a variety of assessment apps available for

teachers that ease this sophisticated, but unavoidable process, simultaneously confronting the teachers with a very difficult dilemma of defining what app is more appropriate in a particular case.

Further we present a comparative analysis of most accessible apps and platforms that teachers commonly use for creating grammar assessment forms and tests.

Google Forms and *Microsoft Forms* are the two popular tools for generating surveys, quizzes, and forms, each with their own set of strengths and limitations.

Using *Google Forms,* we experience its user-friendly interface for creating forms and surveys without needing technical expertise. Accessible across devices with an internet connection, it is easy sharing via links, embedding, or sending directly through email. Besides, real-time collaboration allows multiple users to work simultaneously on the same form and, the most important advantage, *Google Forms app*

Figure 1. *Google Forms* vs. *Microsoft Forms*

provides automatic grading for quizzes, especially for multiple-choice questions, saving time for educators. As for the limitations, *Google Forms app* possesses limited options for customizing form design compared to dedicated survey tools and might lack certain complex question types or advanced functionalities found in specialized survey tools. This app offers basic analytics but might not imply in-depth analysis compared to specialized survey platforms.

A very similar tool is *Microsoft Forms*. Trying this application, we found out that it is seamlessly integrates with other Microsoft tools like *OneDrive* and *Teams* for data storage and collaboration. It also offers a very user-friendly interface with simple form creation and customization options and it generates charts automatically based on responses for easy visualization. A notable advantage could be considered the fact that it uses branching logic to create more complex forms with conditional logic. If we consider the limitations of the app, the lack of some advanced functionalities should be mentioned. Similar to *Google Forms*, it might have limitations in design customization compared to dedicated tools. Sharing options might be less flexible compared to *Google Forms*, especially outside the Microsoft ecosystem.

Though both tools are user-friendly, *Google Forms* might be slightly more intuitive for beginners. Ultimately, the choice between *Google Forms* and *Microsoft Forms* often depends on individual or organizational preferences, existing ecosystem, and specific needs for form creation and data collection. Both have strengths but might have limitations for more advanced or specialized requirements.

Quizizz (https://quizizz.com/) and *Kahoot!* (https://create.kahoot.it) are both popular platforms used for creating interactive quizzes and games in educational settings, each with its unique strengths and limitations. Offering a variety of question types and enabling teachers to track student performance and provide instant feedback, *Quizizz* allows teachers to create engaging quizzes with a game-like interface.

Figure 2. *Quizizz* vs. *Kahoot!*

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The most evident strengths of this app are as follows:

✓ *self-paced learning:* allows students to complete quizzes at their own pace, reducing stress and promoting individual learning speeds;

✓ *gamified learning:* offers a gamified approach with avatars, leaderboard, and memes, making the learning process engaging and enjoyable;

✓ *detailed reports:* provides detailed reports on student performance and progress, offering insights into areas needing improvement;

✓ *flexible question types:* supports a variety of question types, including multiple choice, true/false, open-ended, and more, allowing for diverse assessment;

✓ *customization options:* allows customization of quizzes with images, GIFs, and videos to make learning more interactive.

However, the constant practical employment of *Quizizz* allows us to pinpoint its certain limitations:

✓ *real-time competition:* lacks the real-time competitive aspect found in *Kahoot!*, which some educators and students might prefer;

✓ *less immediate engagement:* while engaging, *Quizizz* might offer slightly less immediate engagement compared to the fast-paced nature of *Kahoot!*.

Kahoot! is another gamified platform where teachers can create quizzes, discussions, and surveys to assess the students' grammar proficiency. It is known to be very interactive and can be used both in classrooms or remotely, focusing on engaging students through competition and quick-paced quizzes.

Our practice proves that among the most obvious strengths of *Kahoot!* are:

✓ *real-time competition:* emphasizing real-time competition and engagement, creating a high-energy classroom atmosphere;

✓ *engaging and interactive:* highly engaging with a simple interface, encouraging active participation and rapid-fire question rounds;

✓ *versatile and social learning:* promoting social learning through group play and discussions, fostering collaboration and teamwork;

✓ *community and content sharing:* offering access to a vast library of user-generated quizzes and games for various grammar subjects and levels;

Still, consistent use of *Kahoot!* permits us to identify a few of its shortcomings:

✓ *Limited self-paced learning:* Kahoot! operates in real-time, which might not cater well to self-paced learning styles.

✓ *Limited question types:* Kahoot! primarily focuses on multiple-choice questions, which might limit assessment diversity compared to platforms supporting various question formats.

✓ *Game pace:* The fast-paced nature might be overwhelming for some students or might not cater to learners who require more time to process information.

Choosing between these two platforms, the teachers should take into consideration that *Kahoot!* is the most appropriate for high-energy, real-time competitive engagement, while *Quizizz* offers a more self-paced and relaxed learning environment. Consequently, some teachers could opt for fast-paced multiple-choice quizzes and the competitive nature of *Kahoot!*, while others might appreciate assessments with varied question formats and the flexibility of *Quizizz*.

Since tests are frequently the preferred method of assessing grammar proficiency due to their *quantifiable results, scalability, efficiency, liability, standardization, etc*. a number of apps centre namely on designing diverse grammar test types.

One of the platforms that offer a wide range of customization options for creating quizzes, including grammar tests is *ProProfs Quiz Maker*. It supports different question types

and provides analytics for performance tracking. Among essential limitation is that detailed analytics and certain design aspects or branding might not be available in lower-tier plans. Besides, depending on the plan, there might be restrictions on the number of quizzes you can create or the number of users who can access them. Nevertheless, these limitations can vary based on the subscription level or the specific requirements the teachers have for their tests.

Another online test creation platform is *Testmoz* (https://testmoz.com/), used primarily by educators to generate and administer online quizzes or tests. It offers a simple interface for creating multiple-choice, true/false, and short answer questions. Users can generate tests without any account, and *Testmoz* provides a unique URL for each test, allowing easy sharing and access.

The platform is designed to be user-friendly, allowing educators to quickly create tests without complex setups, to customize tests by setting time limits, shuffling questions, and randomizing answer choices to discourage cheating. Furthermore, *Testmoz* automatically scores multiple-choice questions and provides instant feedback to test-takers upon completion. Educators can collect and analyse test data, viewing individual and overall performance metrics. Tests created on *Testmoz* can be accessed on various devices with internet connectivity, making it convenient for students to take tests remotely. *Testmoz* is often used in educational settings, especially for formative assessments, quizzes, or smaller tests. However, it might have limitations in terms of more complex question types or in-depth analytics compared to some learning management systems or assessment tools.

Socrative (https://www.socrative.com/) is a real-time assessment tool that enables teachers to create quizzes, exit tickets, and other forms of assessments. This tool emphasizes real-time interaction between teachers and students during assessments, enabling immediate feedback and engagement, supporting various question formats, providing flexibility in assessment creation, including multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and open-ended questions. Both teachers and students appreciate that *Socrative* offers immediate data and reports on student responses, facilitating quick assessment analysis and progress tracking. Consequently, this online platform allows for adaptive learning experiences by adjusting content based on students' responses, catering to individual learning needs.

The choice between *Testmoz* and *Socrative* depends on the teachers' preferences or needs. If real-time interaction and immediate feedback are crucial, *Socrative* might be preferable. However, if simplicity and straightforward test creation are your priorities, *Testmoz* could be a necessary choice. If the teachers consider the types of assessments they plan to create, they take into consideration that *Socrative* offers more varied question types, while *Testmoz* might excel in straightforward test creation. If you require adaptive learning experiences based on students' responses, *Socrative*'s adaptive learning features might be more suitable. Ultimately, the choice between *Socrative* and *Testmoz* depends on factors such as the teaching style, desired features, assessment needs, and ease of use that align with your specific educational goals and preferences. It might be helpful to explore both platforms and see which of them better fits your requirements through trial use or demos.

The above analysed platforms vary in terms of features, accessibility, and user interface, being chosen by teachers depending on their specific needs, such as the types of questions they want to include, ease of use, integration with other tools or learning management systems, and the level of analytics or reporting required. Equally important is the fact that whereas a lot of assessment apps feature automation, others provide learning assistance and extra support for students. Currently, grammar assessments are even more accessible due to mobile devices that have become essential tools for achieving informal language acquisition as a result of the intensively continuous integration of information technology in education.

Evidently, the application software that is downloaded to mobile devices, with its features of intelligence, customization, gaming, and friendliness, overcomes the temporal and spatial constraints of conventional learning approaches and has proven to be very beneficial for language acquisition and learning.

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