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BOOK REVIEW



***Technology-assisted Language Assessment in Diverse Contexts: Lessons from the Transition to Online Testing During COVID-19.* Edited by Karim Sadeghi (2023). (xxi+251 Pages). Taylor & Francis. ISBN:978-1-032-11769-0.**

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With the sudden and unprecedented emergence of COVID-19 in 2020, the need for secure online assessments that yield reliable and valid interpretations of test scores has become of vital importance. This edited book entitled *Technology-Assisted Language Assessment in Diverse Contexts* is an attempt to provide insight into test developers, test-users, test-takers, and teachers' experiences and practices across various settings during the emergent technology-assisted language assessment amid COVID-19. Upon reading the book authored by a cohort of both emerging and seasoned researchers in the field of second language assessment, one may recollect the challenges we encountered when we were compelled to shift all testing operations to an online format in response to the sudden onset of the pandemic. We collectively faced unprecedented difficulties and apprehensions regarding the new testing environment, construct and scoring validity, fairness, reliability, test administration, and security. Adapting pen-and-pencil tests to online test administrations ensued a sense of discomfort among all parties involved. This book is an account of such challenges and the lessons learned for the future.

The book is organized into three sections and sixteen chapters that aim to provide a lucid account of technology-assisted language assessment in various settings. Chapters in Section I address theoretical and methodological considerations pertaining to online second language (L2) assessment. Section II is devoted to studies of reactions to L2 Assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic and chapters in the final Section pertain to the management of L2 assessment during times of crisis as well as future research directions. Each chapter represents a distinct context of technology-enhanced language assessment and offers lessons for the post-pandemic.

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The editor's introductory chapter provides an overview of technology-assisted language assessment (TALA). This chapter offers a comprehensive introduction to the field of TALA, delves into the historical background, benefits, and challenges associated with digital assessment and outlines the volume's structure. Chapter 2 written by Tony Clark, Martine Holland, and Richard Spiby centers on the online assessment encounters of test takers who undergo the IELTS Indicator examination, as well as the evaluators' perspectives immediately after the test and one year later. The study investigated the user experiences of the Video Call (VC) at-home speaking test component. According to the feedback received from the test-takers, taking the test at home provided a more comfortable environment, minimized distractions from fellow test-takers, lowered anxiety levels attributable to the familiarity of their surroundings, and the convenience of not having to travel. On the other hand, examinees worried about possible technology lapses and lack of communication between the test center and test-takers. Yet, the results indicated that the examiners expressed satisfaction with the procedure.

In Chapter 3, Emma Bruce and Helena Stokounis propose that emergency remote assessment (ERA) can serve as a catalyst for the implementation of long-awaited adaptations in assessment practices, resulting in the emergence of innovative, digital, and more authentic forms of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This is made possible by the loosening of test-security regulations, which has been approved by the government. They base their discussion on their study findings in 2021 and discuss the challenges, strategies, and opportunities during the pandemic in the United Kingdom EAP context.

In the next chapter, Hossein Farhady claims that the Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) approach, which has been previously discussed in academic literature presents a promising solution to the challenges associated with online testing. Making a distinction between psychometrically oriented and "edometrically oriented assessment", a concept coined by him, the author describes the shift from product-oriented assessment to process-oriented assessment. The chapter reports on the author's application of LOA in his graduate and undergraduate classes in Turkey, with the finding that students did not perceive any noteworthy changes in their study habits or learning outcomes as a result of the transition to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Eric Voss in the next chapter identifies frameworks that have been employed for the purpose of gathering validity evidence in the context of online language assessments amid COVID-19. The author posits that certain assessments have gathered evidence of validity without the use of a validity framework. In this regard, the author elucidates how evidence of argument-based validity could be collected for online assessments. The chapter also discusses that the successful implementation of assessments mandates the provision of technological assistance that is customized to the distinct demands of assessments.

In Chapter 6, Mahmoud Amer and Maria J. Cabrera-Puche discuss the potential of mobile devices as a cost-effective substitute for computer-based evaluations. According to the authors, as mobile devices are equipped with distinctive pre-installed tools that can be utilized to modify assessments, they may be considered a feasible approach to promoting equity and mitigating construct-irrelevant variance as they do not necessitate computer literacy skills. For this reason, the researchers have developed software for mobile applications enabling the implementation of computer adaptive placement testing. The researchers also emphasize the importance of placement assessments that are flexible enough to accommodate a range of language learners, including those with heritage backgrounds and those situated in diverse contexts, while utilizing the resources at hand both for low- and high-stake exams.

The second Section commences with a research study conducted by Martin East, Deborah Walker-Morrison, and Viviane Lelièvre-Lopes within the tertiary setting of New Zealand. The study focuses on L2 French writing and speaking assessments adopting a mix-and-match approach. As assessments that are tailored to function in a specific medium may exhibit different test quality features when administered through an alternative medium and mode, the researchers conducted an inquiry into the validity, reliability, and fairness of digital versions of the on-site tests. They reported that the maintenance of validity, reliability, and fairness in online assessments cannot be achieved through a one-size-fits-all approach.

The study presented in Chapter 8 by Isabel Balteiro examines strategies and changes that transpired during the pandemic lockdown, which had an impact on the competencies and content assessed, criteria utilized, and types of tasks employed in the evaluation process as well as students' attitudes and perceptions towards English assessments in Universidad de Alicante in Spain. The results of the study suggest that while there were certain concerns related to stress and anxiety, students generally exhibited favorable attitudes toward online instruction. However, students who academically performed better reported unfavorable attitudes towards online assessments. The researcher concludes that higher education institutions should allocate resources to enhancing teachers' digital literacy.

The main focus of Bahiyyih Hardacre's Chapter is to investigate L2 writing skills development and performance among undergraduate students in the Southern California region during the lockdown. In this qualitative case study, the researcher scrutinized the overall achievement of student learning outcomes and self-evaluations in a course that involved three instructors who adjusted writing instruction and assessment to suit an online learning environment. Not only did all participants unexpectedly demonstrate high proficiency in attaining the nine learning outcomes but also overall success was higher than in previous years. Additionally, overall student perceptions were positive.

Like Chapter 6, in Chapter 10 Reza Neiriz, Shireen Baghestani, Ananda Astrini Muhammad and Jim Ranalli delve into the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the administration of the English Placement Assessment (EPT), with a specific emphasis on ensuring fairness for all test takers. The researchers have directed their attention towards the writing and oral communication components of the EPT at Iowa State University, utilizing Kunnan's (2004, 2008) Fairness Framework as a basis for their analysis. Focusing on construct representation, test conditions and test security for the EPT battery, the research results conclude that remote assessment presents both benefits and drawbacks. In contrast to the study described in Chapter 6, which places emphasis on both written and spoken communication, the subsequent chapter presents research solely on the speaking component. Integrating data-driven learning (DDL) and assessment, Maria Luisa Carrio-Pastor in Chapter 11 presents the creation of a repository of digital objects in English on DDL. Assessment based on 10-minute recorded presentations of EFL learners of Spanish students based on data-driven learning with a multi-modal perspective resulted in positive student feedback.

Section III commences with a chapter on the "*Test usefulness of e-portfolios*" penned by Ricky Lam. The study explores the efficacy of a contextualized e-portfolio program using four key aspects of test usefulness (Bachman and Palmer, 1996) viz. validity, reliability, washback, and practicality. The author proceeds to offer savvy suggestions pertaining to portfolio evaluation in preparation for unforeseen emergencies that may necessitate the implementation of an online assessment. While Lam utilizes only four components of Bachman and Palmer's Test Usefulness Framework, Shishi Zhang and Talia Isaacs in the next chapter employs six qualities of the same framework namely reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactivity, impact, practicality, and accessibility. Chapter 13 delves into the applications of videoconferencing, with a specific emphasis on its implications for evaluating interactional and pragmatic proficiency as an integral component of oral

communication. This chapter ends with the researchers' optimistic remarks regarding the potential of videoconferencing as a means of assessing a wide-ranging speaking construct, while also being readily available to all stakeholders and economically viable. Despite the challenges the pandemic brought, the next two chapters see the pandemic as presenting a new opportunity for innovation. Chapter 14 by Ana Maria Ducasse probes into the impact of the pandemic on assessment practices and explores the perspectives of learners regarding online assessments in a case study in the Australian context. Consistent with findings from other studies cited in this volume, participants in Ducasse's research hold both favorable and unfavorable views with respect to online assessments. Akiko Imamura, Catherina Ryu, and Mariko Kawaguchi in Chapter 15 also underscore that the challenging circumstances brought about by the pandemic have presented a prospect for the creation of a new assessment system. This is the third study pertaining to placement tests in this volume which was a pilot study with the objective of developing a cost-effective and sustainable online Japanese placement test. The study also seeks to evaluate the efficacy of the test in distinguishing students' language proficiency in accordance with the Japanese curriculum. The researchers ended up with a novel single placement system for all levels. Finally, in the last chapter, the editor Karim Sadeghi provides a summary of the insights gained and missed opportunities identified from the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

All in all, the book provides valuable insights into post-pandemic TALA and accomplishes its primary objective of providing a comprehensive snapshot of language assessment in times of COVID-19. It presents challenges and various solutions suggested and applied by members of the testing community and practitioners. The implementation of remote instruction and assessment has been depicted in the volume to offer many benefits as well as entailing threats, some of which are as follows. Initially, notwithstanding the various obstacles posed by the sudden shift to remote assessments, educators and assessment experts demonstrated ingenuity in devising innovative approaches to adjusting to novel circumstances. Still, it is imperative for educators and assessors to be equipped for any unforeseen circumstances that may require remote instruction and assessment. Yet, we should acknowledge technology lapses as they are inevitable and unavoidable. Last but not least, almost all authors draw attention to the lack of practitioners' assessment literacy and this issue should potentially be resolved given that it is highly likely that remote assessments will remain a prevalent practice. Not only practitioners but all members of the education community must possess a sound understanding of the relevant technological tools and processes due to the increasing likelihood of remote assessments becoming a fundamental aspect of educational settings, which may take the form of automated test generation and evaluation. As a final thought, in order to enhance the overall coherence of the book, it may be advisable to relocate chapter 13 to section II, given its focus on perceptions.

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