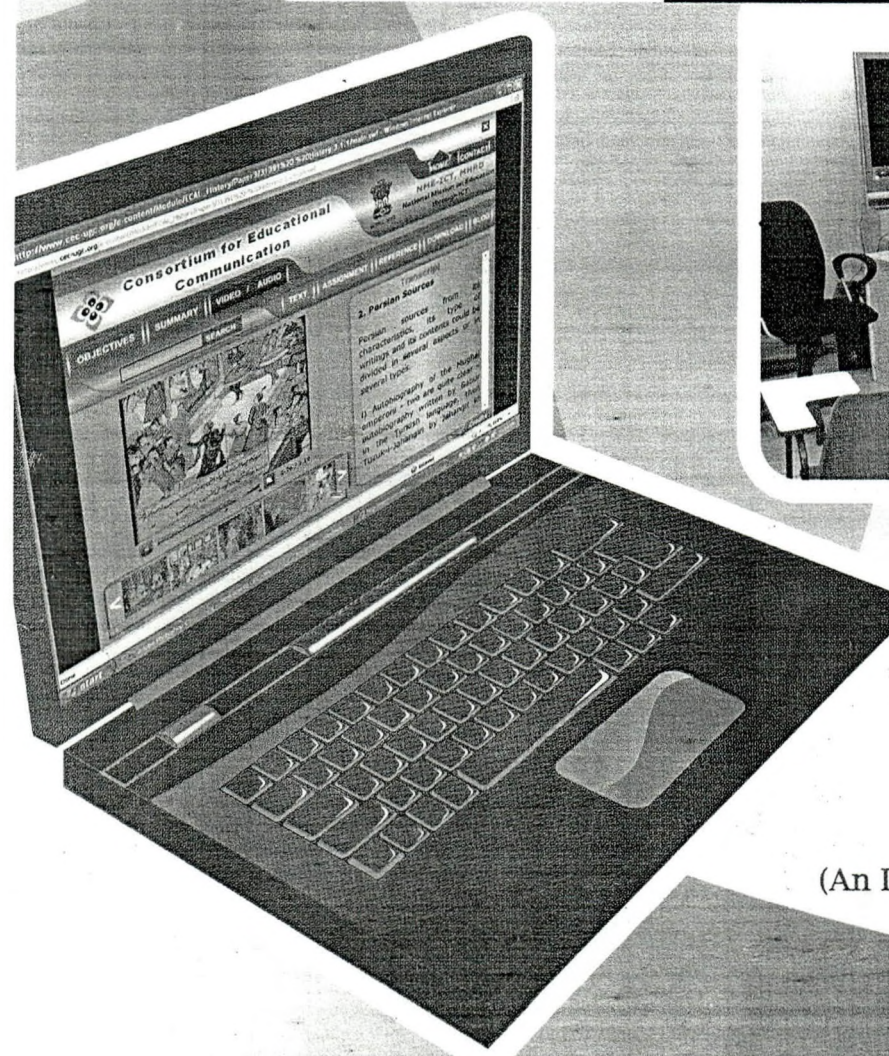
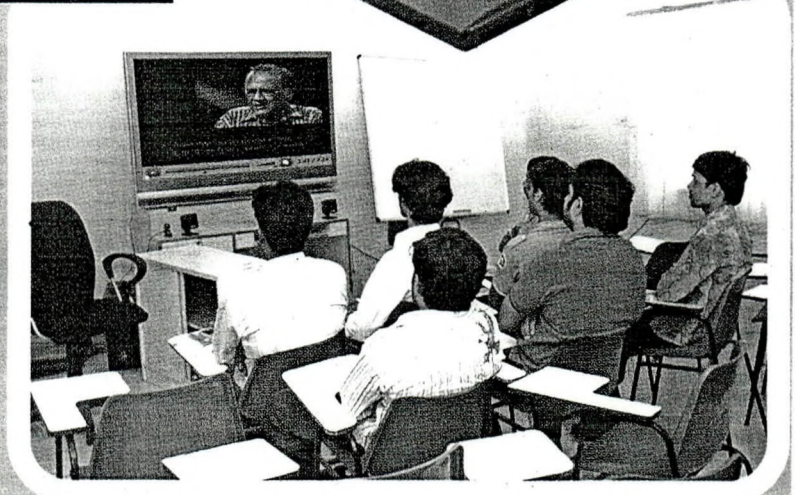


# Virtual education: Issues, Challenges and Prospects



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## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL AND E-PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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The premise of this paper is to bring out the salient features in language assessment with reference to English and French languages in the blended learning environment existing in India. Teachers and scholars today are experimenting with alternative techniques and procedures of evaluation to traditional test which is held at the conclusion of a unit of study. However, researchers have started questioning the adequacy of the single test at the end of the course as no single measure seems capable of estimating the diversity of skills, knowledge, processes, and strategies that combine to determine students' progress. Marks or grades do not adequately capture the level of understanding of the language competence of the students. Thus teachers have begun to incorporate alternative assessment techniques to yield more useful information about students' achievement and classroom instruction. One of these alternative assessment techniques is eportfolio assessment incorporating web based technologies and rubrics.

The aim of this study is to combine research evidence on e-portfolio use with practical feedback from the students in an attempt to develop easy-to-use criteria designed to support active self regulated language learning. The research findings of the study assert that rubrics help students in self-evaluation and peer assessment and establish clear benchmarks for achievement; internet technology such as E-mail, blogs and Web Quest provide a platform for expressing and exchanging meaning in French language learning. In conclusion, this paper summarises current trends in educational assessment and relates these to the assessment of the students' outcomes on language learning; emerging networked technologies that integrate explicit teaching strategies are slowly transforming traditional classrooms into lifelong learning. Demystifying some of the myths that enshroud both face-to-face learning and virtual learning would help educators view reality in clear light.

### Introduction

Performance assessment is best understood as a continuum of assessment formats ranging from the simplest student-constructed responses to comprehensive demonstrations or collections of work over time. Portfolios have a vital role to play in performance assessment. Much has been written about the usage of portfolios in language learning from 1990s. With the increasing integration of technology into school and higher educational contexts, electronic portfolios, or ePortfolios, are gaining currency as formal and informal assessment across disciplines. Juxtaposingly, with ePortfolios, rubrics are also gaining ground as assessment tools; rubrics are set of criteria and standards typically linked to learning objectives. They are being used in countless classrooms to evaluate

an individual work or a student's entire body of work.

A review of the literature has shown that Rubrics have been identified as an important tool for assessing student performance, teacher effectiveness, and program quality. For example, Jonsson & Svingby (2007) reviewed 75 empirical research studies on rubrics and concluded that rubrics had the potential of promoting learning and/or improving instruction because they make expectations and criteria explicit, and also facilitate feedback and self-assessment. In addition, rubrics enhance the reliable scoring of performance assessments, especially if they are analytical, topic-specific, and complemented with exemplars and/or rater training.

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Interviews with teachers who were mentored to use rubrics showed that those teachers found rubrics useful for grading assessments and for conveying assessment expectations to students (Maxwell, 2010).

#### Objectives

1. Enabling learners acquire language learning strategies, develop critical thinking skills, and utilizing current technologies to assist students in their language learning.
2. Construction of Rubrics for Self-assessment and teacher evaluation

#### Sample

The sample comprised of 138 B.Ed students with General English as their II optional and 72 students who have chosen French language for Part B Undergraduate Programme belonging to various streams such as Humanities, Science and Management. All 138 B.Ed students were divided into 3 groups – Traditional Assessment Group, E-Portfolio Assessment Group and E-Portfolio Assessment with Rubrics for the teaching and learning of grammar. French language students were also divided into 3 groups as done in the case of B.Ed but the establishment of criteria for Rubrics alone differed. For B.Ed students, Traditional Assessment was done by the teacher for the traditional way of teaching and learning of grammar and E-Portfolio Assessment was done both by teacher and the students without Rubrics and for the third type Rubrics was used. For French Language learners, the same strategies of assessment were used but they learnt French basically through E-mail, blogs and Web Quest. Common stock phrases in French for communication were identified and made use of.

The instruments that were used for collecting data were:

1. Rubrics used for Teaching and Learning of English Grammar
2. Rubrics used for Teaching and Learning of French

#### Methodology

E-portfolio was used both for evaluating learning processes and learning outcomes. The instructors asked students to provide input on the criteria that should be included in each. This approach enabled the learners to become more comfortable with the use of alternative assessments and helped students understand how they will benefit from alternative assessment and how they can use it effectively. In the present study, Multitrait Rubrics is used as it allows for rating performance on three or four dimensions rather than just one. Multitrait rubrics resemble analytic rubrics in that several aspects are scored individually. However, where an analytic scale includes only conventional aspects such as content, organization, and grammar, a multitrait rubric involves dimensions that are directly related to the topic or work that is being carried out by students. For teaching and learning of English grammar, students were assigned topics based on Wren & Martin Grammar Book and they were also asked to incorporate appropriate pictures that would illustrate the sentence they have chosen as examples. Rubrics used for teaching and learning of English grammar are established with the following criteria:

RUBRICS USED FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Activity	Exemplary	Adequate and appropriate proficiency	Satisfactory but with errors	Incomplete
Points	6 Points	4 Points	2 Points	0 Points
Usage of the structures in contexts and situations	The student has created perfect real world communication contexts and situations and the sentences are error-free	The student has attained proficiency and created appropriate contexts and situations	The student has understood the structural patterns but there is no understanding of the contexts and situations. Writing does not consistently follow appropriate style and/or format.	The student has comprehension of the grammatical patterns. Frequent errors in spelling grammar (such as subject/verb agreement and tense), sentence structure and/or other writing conventions distract the reader.
Creative use of language rather than simple repetition	The student has learnt to use the structure creatively and demonstrates thoroughness and competence	The student has adequate creativity and does not repeat the structures mechanically	The student has understood the grammatical patterns but does not use it creatively. Writing contains numerous errors in spelling, grammar	The student has no understanding of using the language creatively
Usage of pictures to convey the structural patterns	The student has chosen pictures and sentences very effectively	The student has adequate interest in the topic and used appropriate pictures and sentences	The student has shown adequate interest but several errors were found	The student has no understanding and has problems in the usage of the structural items
Successful completion of communication tasks	The student has exemplary mastery over communication	The student has adequate mastery and proficiency in communication.	The student commits lots of errors but is able to communicate	The student is not successful in the completion of the tasks assigned

RUBRICS USED FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FRENCH LANGUAGE

Activity	Exemplary	Adequate and appropriate proficiency	Satisfactory but with errors	Incomplete
Points	6 Points	4 Points	2 Points	0 Points
Usage of the French language in Emails	The student is able to write Emails using French language perfectly and without any error	The student is able to communicate but has not attained proficiency	The student has understood the critical usage of the language but the language is error-ridden	The student is not able to communicate in French and has not understood the usage of the language in real-life situations.
Dynamic usage of blogs for enhancing	The student has created good	The student has created blogs but	The student has understood the usage	The student has not understood the usage of blogs

language skills	quality blogs that are interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments and even message each other	interconnectivity is not achieved	of blogs but is not successful in her attempt	for French language learning and does not come forward to create or use blogs
Use of Web Quest in learning French	The student has effectively and efficiently made use of Web Quest in learning French	The student has interest in Web Quest and has made use of it in enhancing her skills in French	The student has shown adequate interest but is not able to access the information required	The student has not understood and has apprehensions about the usage of Web Quest.

### Results and Discussion

The results indicated that E-portfolio assessment increased student involvement in their assessment and their interaction with other students. The study also threw light on the importance of self assessment and reflection. Charting their own progress with emphasis more on their strengths than their weaknesses enabled students to take ownership of their learning and provided self-direction. It helped instructors emphasize that the point of language learning is communication for meaningful purposes; this kind of assessment gives the instructor multiple ways of measuring progress without increasing the time students spend taking traditional tests.

#### Conclusions

With the rubric as a guide, students learnt to monitor their own progress and make improvements in a timely manner. The primary responsibility for the learning experience rests with the student who must be motivated (have a reason that is important to him/her) to be an effective learner. The teachers used the materials to complete both formative and summative evaluation of progress. The results also indicated that e-portfolio assessment is not completely without any weaknesses; major responsibility of learning falls on the students. Motivated learners do well but unmotivated students found it a formidable task and some students never completed the tasks. Lack of IT infrastructure and lack of adequate computer knowledge in students are some of the

impediments that were faced in blended learning situations as existent in India. The research findings of this kind strengthen the need for performance assessments in Indian classrooms.

This research paper investigates language assessment in terms of teaching and learning of English grammar and French. An attempt is made here to show that self-assessment serves as a learning strategy and further research may provide conclusive evidence. This study is the result of a collaborative effort by the two authors, Dr. V. Hema Nalini and Ms. Jeevartnam. G. The definition of the research questions, the review of literature, the preparation of the rubrics for self assessment as well as an evaluative tool by the teacher, the discussion of the limitations of the study and the conclusion with recommendations were shared equally by the authors.

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