


Chapter 10

Upholding Classroom– Based Assessment Fairness in Times of COVID–19: Voices From Test–Takers

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ABSTRACT

Fairness and justice are two critical aspects to be considered while evaluating language assessments. The ranging pandemic worldwide, however, has posed immediate challenges to face-to-face teaching and classroom-based assessment, particularly for those employing traditional paper-and-pencil exams. Very little is known about teachers' assessment practices and such practices' usefulness in maintaining classroom-based assessment fairness in the time of COVID-19. As a response, this chapter explored teachers' assessment practices, teachers' strategies for upholding assessment fairness, and students' perceptions of such strategies' effectiveness in maintaining assessment fairness, from the standpoint of test-takers. Interview data suggested that teachers did consider fairness and justice issues when designing, developing, and administering classroom-based assessments in times of COVID-19, such as diversifying the assessment forms. The results call for sophisticated designs of assessment forms to maintain assessment fairness from test-taker perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

The sudden outbreak of the novel coronavirus (i.e., Covid-19) worldwide in 2019, along with the following three years, has brought a series of unifying challenges and uncertainties globally, such as survival and business crises. Among them, the education sector has been affected in an unexpected manner (Ferretti et al., 2021). Traditional face-to-face teaching, for example, has been forced to be suspended, transforming

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5083-3.ch010

and moving to the online teaching era. That being said, assessment, a major component of classroom teaching, is also being moved to the virtual environment. Such a shift in teaching mode (i.e., from face-to-face teaching to online teaching), according to Zhang et al. (2021), would have long-term influences on classroom-based assessments. Researchers, besides, have already noticed that online teaching would pose challenges to the effectiveness, fairness, and justice of teachers' formative and summative assessment practices (Phakiti & Isaacs, 2021). To uphold the classroom-based assessments' usefulness and fairness, teachers worldwide have implemented a selection of measures, including, but not limited to, adopting alternative assessment forms and introducing the whistleblower strategies.

Fairness and justice, in fact, are two crucial components in evaluating language assessments, whether large-scale assessments or classroom-based ones (Kunnan, 2004, 2014, 2018). Though a major thread of previous research has focused on considering and maintaining the fairness and justice of large-scale, high-stakes assessments (e.g., International English Language Testing System: IELTS), scholars (Wallace, 2018; Wallace & Qin, 2021) have also underscored the critical importance of upholding fairness and justice of low-stakes assessments (i.e., classroom-based assessment in this case). Prior studies, in addition, often paid attention to teachers' face-to-face assessment practices. Very little is known about their assessment practices in the time of Covid-19. Moreover, existing studies on teachers' assessment practices during the pandemic are mostly from the standpoint of in-service teachers (e.g., Zhang et al., 2021). Few of them have depicted the assessment scene in Covid-19 from test-takers perspectives. Test-takers (or learners), on the other hand, are a growing group of stakeholders in the language assessment field, as highlighted in the notions of learning-oriented assessment, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning (Hill, 2017). Turner and Purpura (2017) also contended that classroom-based assessments were facilitated by the interaction between teacher and students in terms of culture and values. Together, exploring teacher's assessment practices and such practices' effectiveness in upholding assessment fairness in times of Covid-19 from the standpoint of test-takers is warranted.

As a response, the current study, with an exploratory qualitative design, address the following three research questions:

1. According to the test-takers, what types of assessments did their instructors use during the pandemic?
2. According to the test-takers, how do their instructors uphold assessment fairness and justice during the pandemic?
3. According to the test-takers, how do they evaluate the effectiveness of their instructors' assessment practices in terms of assessment fairness and justice?

The current research will have pedagogical and theoretical implications. Pedagogically, the present study will inform assessment pedagogy in Covid-19, shed enlightenment on upholding classroom-based assessment fairness during the pandemic, and encourage teachers to take test-takers concerns into consideration when designing assessment activities. Theoretically, the research will address two lines of scholarly inquiry: research into investigating language assessment literacy from the test-takers perspective (Lee et al., 2021; Inbar-Lourie, 2017) and research into studying the relationship between fairness and justice in classroom-based assessment contexts (Wallace, 2018).

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