

Assessment of Online Discussion: Collecting Discussion Content and Generating Analysis Data for Assessment and Feedback.

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Online asynchronous discussion offers great educational opportunities to distance learners as well as bringing benefits to supplement in-class instruction. The use of online discussion forums empowers teachers to emphasize social aspect of learning and promote in-depth discussions even when students are at a distance. Assessment is an essential part of teaching and learning and assessment of online discussion has been challenging to teachers and online instructors. Assessing students' development and achievement via discussion tends to be difficult and the amount of work involved in collecting relevant information for grading can be overwhelming to teachers.

This study provides a new approach to addressing the assessment of online discussions, by automating the collection of discussion data and by generating input into the assignment module of the Learning Management Systems (LMS). Based on teachers' pre-selected criteria, discussion information which describes individual participation and group interactions are collected and submitted as assignments for assessment. This new approach is intended to reduce the time and effort that teachers spend on collecting relevant data for assessing online discussion contributions. It also generates artefacts, composed of discussion contributions, participation and interaction data, that are returned to students and underpin the marking feedback. The criteria defined for the selection of discussion data and the generation of data on participation and interaction reflect best practices as suggested in the research literature.

A research tool implementing this new approach for the assessment of online discussions has been implemented for the Moodle LMS.