

Probing Teachers' Challenges of Online Assessment Practices.

A Case Study: Oran 2 University

دراسة التحديات التي يواجهها الاساتذة في ممارسات التقييم عبر الإنترنت. دراسة
حالة: جامعة وهران 2

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the challenges teachers face in implementing effective online assessment practices. This field research adopted a mixed-method case study design, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to thoroughly investigate and analyse the identified challenges. The target population consisted of 30 teachers from the University of Oran2, Algeria, during the second semester of the academic year 2023. Findings revealed that teachers experience significant technological, pedagogical, and psychological challenges. The results underscore the need for comprehensive support systems in place to improve the effectiveness of online assessments. This includes providing professional development, ensuring adequate technical infrastructure, and establishing clear institutional policies. These results have significant implications for educational practice and policy, pointing out areas that need improvement and suggesting directions for future research.

Keywords: Online assessment, assessment challenges, e-learning, assessment practices, quality of learning.

ملخص باللغة العربية

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في التحديات التي يواجهها الأساتذة أثناء عملية التقييم الفعالة عبر الإنترنت. اعتمد هذا البحث الميداني تصميمًا لدراسة حالة مختلطة الأساليب، باستخدام طرق جمع وتحليل البيانات الكمية والنوعية لإجراء تحقيق شامل وتحليل التحديات التي تم تحديدها. تكونت المجموعة المستهدفة من 30 استاذًا من جامعة وهران 2، الجزائر، خلال الفصل الثاني من العام الدراسي 2023.

تكشف النتائج أن معظم الاساتذة يواجهون تحديات تكنولوجية وتربوية ونفسية كبيرة تحتاج إلى دعم شامل لتحسين فعالية التقييمات عبر الإنترنت. ويشمل ذلك توفير التطوير المهني، وضمان البنية التحتية التقنية الكافية، ووضع سياسات واضحة تدعم الممارسات التعليمية الفعالة.

كلمات مفتاحية: التقييم عبر الإنترنت، تحديات التقييم، التعلم الإلكتروني، ممارسات التقييم، جودة التعلم.

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1- Introduction

Online assessment methods have gained significant attention in recent years, affecting the way teachers assess students' learning outcomes in higher education (Lucky et al., 2019). The shift from traditional face-to-face learning teaching and assessment methods to online learning has stimulated teachers to reconsider the suitability of assessment types within the virtual environment. Online learning has emerged as a powerful tool with the potential to adapt teaching, learning, and assessment processes (Hodges et al., 2020) to the requirements of the digital era (Norton & Cakitaki, 2016). It encourages innovative pedagogical practices, such as multimedia integration, and personalized learning experiences, which prompt students' curiosity and deepen their engagement and understanding.

Various studies indicate that online assessment offers flexibility and accessibility. In contrast to traditional teaching, different teaching strategies and assessment techniques are used to align with the new teaching and learning requirements (Rolim & Isaías, 2019; Almeida & Monteiro, 2021). These tools have the potential to enhance the assessment process by providing real-time feedback to students (Hattie et al., 2014). Moreover, studies have attempted to explain that using effective assessment techniques can improve teachers' understanding of student needs and support. One of the best techniques to be conducted is online assessment, which can take on a new meaning in the field of digital assessment (Vonderwell & Boboc, 2013; Croteau, 2014). Online assessment is defined as "non-traditional methods for students' performance evaluation" (Elaraby, 2022, p. 9). Teachers can create dynamic assessments that cater to individual student needs, fostering a more inclusive and interactive learning environment (Oliver, Lambert & Mason 2019). Additionally, online assessments offer students increased opportunities for practice, self-testing, self-regulation, and self-evaluation. They save time and enable teachers to have more direct interactions with students.

But, the physical separation between teachers and learners in an online setting presents many challenges when evaluating learners' outcomes. As a result, teachers are striving with the need to reimagine assessment strategies (Conrad & Witthaus, 2021) that effectively measure students' learning abilities while accommodating the constraints of distance.

Many studies have investigated the challenges teachers face when implementing online assessment systems. (Helfaya et al., 2019) observe that e-assessment and e-feedback are not well developed and widely used in many universities. Most teachers had limited experience of conducting online assessment (Evans et al., 2020; Fong & Chen, 2019). They often encounter technical challenges when using online assessment platforms, such as compatibility issues with

various devices and software (Bjelobaba, 2021). Additionally, concerns regarding academic integrity in online assessments have been a prominent issue, with teachers struggling to prevent cheating and plagiarism in virtual environments.

Most of the previous studies as well as the current study have revealed that online assessments present several challenges, such as internet connectivity issues, lack of proficiency in using online tools, inadequate technical infrastructure, difficulties in maintaining student engagement, absence of reliable online assessment systems, and an increase in academic dishonesty among learners. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing strategies to support teachers and enhance the quality of online assessment.

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the difficulties EFL teachers encounter when applying online assessment methods to evaluate the learners' progress. By identifying and analysing these challenges, the study aims to provide insights that can inform the development of effective support systems and strategies to improve online assessment practices. To reach these goals, the study sets out to tackle the following research questions:

1. What are the main challenges teachers face in online assessments?
2. How do these challenges impact the assessment process and student learning outcomes?

Following these questions, it is hypothesized that:

1. The integration of online assessment methodologies into the teaching-learning process will result in noticeable improvements in students' learning quality and overall skill development.
2. Online assessment presents unique challenges that can lead to gaps in effectively evaluating and supporting student learning.

2- Methods

This study employs a mixed-method research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges teachers face during online assessment practices. The mixed-method design allows for the triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. Specifically, the study utilizes surveys to gather quantitative data and semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative insights.

2.1 Population and Sample

The participants in this study include university teachers who are currently working and teaching first, second, and third year students. A sample of 30 teachers was selected randomly to participate in the study. Sampling is an important constituent in field research because it is often neither possible nor desirable to collect data from the entire population (Acharya, 2013, p. 330).

The target teachers have different levels of teacher training and professional experience. They have university degree in an area of specialization such linguistics, literature, and civilization. Table 2.1 exhibits the sampling population used in this study.

Table 2.1 Demographic information

Characteristics	Variables	No	Percentage%
Gender	Male	09	30
	Female	21	70
Level	Full Professor	03	10
	Associate professor	18	60
	Assistant professor	09	30
Teaching experience	5-10years	09	30
	10-19 years	18	60
	+ 20years	03	10

Table 2.1 revealed that out of 30 respondents, 70% (21) were female, and 30% (9) were male. The majority of respondents, 70% (21), held a doctorate degree, while only 9 had a magister's degree. Additionally, 70% of the respondents had over 10 years of teaching experience, while only 30% (9) had between 5 to 10 years of teaching experience. These findings suggest that the lecturers in the study had significant experience in conducting assessment practices.

2.2 Instrumentation and Data Collection

2.2.1 Data Collection Methods

Two data collection instruments were adopted in this field study, namely: a survey and a semi-conducted interview protocol. A structured survey was developed to collect quantitative data on teachers' experiences with online assessments. It includes Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions to gather detailed responses. The survey was distributed electronically through email and educational networks. The survey covers various aspects such as technological challenges, pedagogical strategies, institutional support, and the psychological impact of online assessments. Besides, semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conferencing tools to accommodate participants' schedules and geographical locations. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview guide included questions about specific challenges faced, strategies employed to overcome these challenges, and suggestions for improving online assessment practices.

2.2.2 Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis was used to summarize the survey data, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to identify significant differences between subgroups (e.g., grade levels, subjects). Besides, the statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 24 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

On the other hand, the qualitative data was analysed using coding and thematic analysis. The interview transcripts were coded. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the challenges and strategies of online assessments. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data, member checking was employed, wherein participants were asked to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions and interpretations. To facilitate the analysis, each teacher was assigned a code, such as L1, L2, L3, and so on, up to L30.

3- Results

The majority of previous studies and available literature, alongside findings from the current study, have identified several critical challenges and considerations in the implementation of online assessment practices from a teacher's perspective. The following key challenges emerged in response to the question: What are the main challenges you have been facing during online assessment? Teachers have consistently raised five primary issues:

Table 3.1 Challenges Faced Teachers in Online Assessment

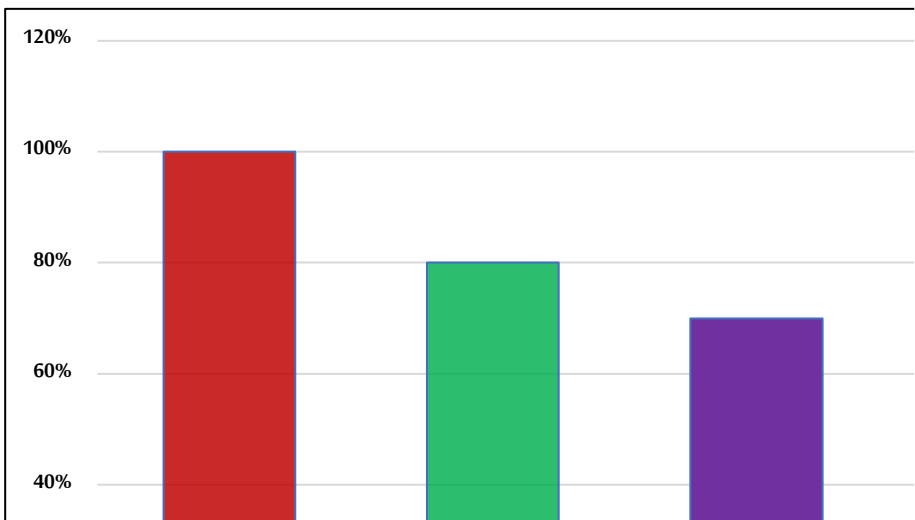
No. Themes and Challenges	Number of Teachers	Percentage
1. Internet cost and connectivity issues	30	100%
2. Poor technical infrastructure	24	80%
3. Students' engagement problems	21	70%
4. Academic dishonesty	18	60%
5. Lack of digital literacy	12	40%

Table 3.1 presents the findings from a survey about teachers' experiences with remote teaching and assessment. The data shows that all teachers (100%) reported facing internet connection issues. They asserted that internet access poses a significant hurdle for both teachers and learners. Inconsistent connections and data limitations can disrupt test-taking, skew results,

and worsen existing educational inequalities. They firmly believe that unreliable and costly internet has become a major barrier to conducting teaching and assessments online.

All respondents claim that teachers and students might experience frequent internet outages or slow speeds that make it difficult to download study materials, participate in virtual classrooms, or complete online tests within designated time frames. Similarly, power outages can interrupt both learning and assessment activities, causing data loss or inability to meet deadlines, which in turn can lead to stress and anxiety among teachers and learners. Such issues may disrupt the assessment process and prevent teachers from accurately evaluating student learning outcomes. It is crucial to address these connectivity challenges to ensure that online and hybrid assessments are accessible, fair, and effective for both teachers and students in the future. Chart 3.1 exhibits the percentage ratio of teachers' challenges when applying online assessment.

Chart 3.1 Percentage Ratio of Teachers' Challenges when Applying Online Assessment



Teachers frequently report that poor technical infrastructure has emerged as a particularly significant barrier. 80% mentioned using outdated hardware and software tools that could hinder online assessment effectiveness. Inadequate access to necessary hardware, such as computers and tablets, severely disrupt the assessment process. This poses a significant challenge for teachers who rely on online platforms for assessments, as they may face difficulties in evaluating study materials. As a result, their performance may be negatively impacted, leading to unfair evaluations and hindering their overall teaching experience.

Students' engagement problems have emerged as a prominent issue in the online assessment environment. Teachers consistently report that keeping students engaged in a virtual learning environment is significantly more challenging than in traditional classroom settings. The absence of physical presence and direct interaction often leads to a noticeable decline in student motivation and participation. 70% of the teachers observed that many students tend to be less active in online discussions, more likely to miss assignments, and generally less responsive during virtual classes.

Academic dishonesty has long been a concern in traditional educational settings, but with the rise of online learning and assessments, the issue has taken on new dimensions. 60% of the respondents reported dealing with academic dishonesty. They considered that the phenomenon of academic dishonesty in online assessment poses a significant threat to the integrity of education. They claimed that the ease with which students can access external resources during exams contributes to the increase in cheating and plagiarism in online assessment settings. With just a few clicks, students can find answers to questions, share information with their peers, or even hire someone else to take the exam for them. This lack of oversight creates a breeding ground for academic dishonesty, undermines the value of assessments, and erodes trust between teachers and students.

Teachers frequently recognize their limited proficiency with digital tools and platforms which hamper the effective administration and completion of online assessment. One of the key issues is mainly their failure to effectively manage and use digital tools and platforms. 40% of the teachers faced the challenge of designing assessments that cater to varying levels of digital literacy among learners. The lack of digital literacy can result in disparities in student performance, as some may struggle with technical aspects rather than focusing on demonstrating their competencies and skills. This creates an inequitable assessment environment that fails to accurately measure students' learning outcomes.

4- Discussion

Implementing online assessments in educational settings has become increasingly common in recent years. With the advancement of technology and the widespread availability of digital tools, teachers can easily create, distribute, and grade assessments, saving valuable time and resources. While online assessments offer numerous benefits such as flexibility, efficiency, and immediate feedback, they also present challenges and complexities that need to be carefully considered. The results of this study illuminate several critical challenges teachers face in the field of online assessment which may significantly impact the teaching-learning process.

4.1 Internet Cost and Connectivity Issues

The lack of clear policies and sufficient training suggests that many institutions were unprepared for the rapid shift to online assessments. Ensuring that teachers have access to the necessary resources and support is crucial for the success of online assessments. The target teachers have reported significant difficulties related to students' internet cost and connectivity. These issues not only affect students' ability to participate in assessments but also disrupt the teaching process itself (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Teachers find it challenging to ensure that all students have equitable access to online assessments, as connectivity problems can lead to interruptions, missed deadlines, and an overall lack of consistency in student participation.

4.2 Poor Technical Infrastructure

The lack of adequate technical infrastructure is another major concern for teachers. Respondents declared that many faculties are ill-prepared and under-resourced for this shift to digital education. Technical glitches or system failures, insufficient bandwidth, and lack of necessary software may hamper the smooth administration of online assessment process and compromise its integrity (Heil et al., 2023).

Teachers often have to spend additional time troubleshooting technical problems, which detracts from instructional time and increases their workload. Higher institutions should prioritize investments in modernizing their technical infrastructure. This includes updating hardware, improving network capabilities, and ensuring that both teachers and students have access to the necessary technological tools (Azevedo et al., 2022).

4.3 Students' Engagement Problems

Engagement is a critical factor that directly impacts the effectiveness of online assessments. Teachers have noted that maintaining student engagement in a virtual environment is significantly more challenging compared to traditional classrooms (Bolliger& Martin, 2018). Lack of physical presence and face-to-face interaction often leads to lower levels of participation and motivation among students. Maintaining motivation and focus during virtual assessments can be particularly challenging for some students, impacting their performance and overall learning outcomes.

To enhance engagement, teachers should incorporate diverse instructional strategies such as interactive multimedia, real-time quizzes, and virtual group activities. Creating a sense of community through regular virtual meetups and collaborative projects can also help keep students motivated and involved (Bolliger& Martin, 2018).

4.4 Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is a prominent concern in online assessments, as the absence of physical supervision makes it easier for students to cheat (Alruwais, Wills, & Wald, 2018). The high percentage of teachers worried about maintaining academic integrity. (60%) highlights the need for innovative assessment strategies that can mitigate cheating, such as open-book assessments, project-based evaluations, and the use of plagiarism detection software.

Teachers struggle with ensuring the integrity of assessments and are often sceptical about the authenticity of students' work in an online setting. Ensuring academic integrity in online assessments requires implementing stringent measures such as proctoring tools, plagiarism detection software, and clear guidelines on ethical conduct. Besides, designing assessments that require higher-order thinking can help mitigate academic dishonesty. Teachers should also emphasize the importance of academic integrity and foster an environment that discourages cheating and plagiarism.

4.5 Lack of Digital Literacy

The finding that 40% of teachers felt inadequately trained suggests a pressing need for more comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on digital literacy and the effective use of online assessment tools. Many teachers may not have received adequate professional development or guidance on how to effectively design, administer, and analyse online assessments. This lack of training can hinder teachers' ability to use technology effectively in their assessment practices and may lead to inconsistencies or inaccuracies in assessment results. (Yigletu et al., 2023) state that professional development and training programs can help teachers acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to implement effective online assessments.

Teachers frequently encounter issues related to students' lack of digital literacy, which affects their ability to manage online assessment platforms effectively (El Hassan, 2023). This digital divide is a barrier for both teachers and students who may not be adequately trained in using new technologies. It is a significant obstacle to successful completion of online assessment.

Continuous professional development programs for teachers are essential to enhance their digital literacy skills. Additionally, integrating digital literacy education into the curriculum for students can prepare them better for online assessment. Providing access to training resources and support can help both teachers and students become more proficient with digital tools.

5. Conclusion

The challenges highlighted in this discussion underscore the multifaceted nature of implementing online assessments in the Algerian universities. While there are clear benefits to

online assessments, such as flexibility and the potential for innovative assessment methods, there are also significant challenges that need to be fixed. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that includes investments in technological infrastructure, comprehensive professional development, and reliable support systems. By tackling these challenges head-on, teachers can create a more effective, equitable, and engaging online assessment environment that align with the needs and wants of all learners. The investigation into online assessment has revealed important gaps that require more research. Future studies could further explore how technological advancements and pedagogical practices interact, specifically focusing on how emerging technologies and e-learning platforms may transform assessment strategies to reach quality learning.

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