

Teachers' Experience in E-assessment: Case Study of EFL Teachers in Algerian Universities

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Abstract

In the wake of the Corona Virus pandemic, many universities have rapidly shifted to remote education. In this regard, students are enrolled in online learning instead of, or sometimes along with, physical classroom presence. As a result, the online assessment also appeared as an alternative method to assess students. The current research paper aims to provide an in-depth look at the online reviews in EFL teaching and learning in the Algerian context during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main questions that set the study are: How do Algerian English language teachers perceive e-assessment via Moodle? What impact did the online reviews have on assessment practices?; How did an online assessment affect students' achievements? To answer these questions, the researcher conducted a study with Algerian EFL teachers and students from three Universities. The researcher collected data through a questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers and a comparative analysis of Project-Based Language essays done by the students in face-to-face assessment and online assessment. The findings revealed that although the challenges facing teachers in online review, positive attitudes appeared towards this method. The analysis also demonstrated that the assessment practice used mainly by participated teachers is a summative assessment. The results also showed a big difference in students' achievements between face-to-face assignments and online evaluation, in favor of e-assessment.

Keywords: Algerian universities, COVID-19, EFL teachers, e-learning, e-assessment, online education, teachers' perception

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Introduction

By the introduction of 'E,' the pace of change has picked up. From signal processing to control and communications, the internet revolutionized the world to the extent that it is now our preferred medium of everyday communication. Technology has impacted almost every aspect of life today, and absolutely, education is no exception. This new medium is now sweeping through schools and classrooms, profoundly changing the process. Thanks to the advancement of technology, online learning is currently a part of many institutions' course offerings worldwide, especially in higher education. In this regard, students receive online learning instead or sometimes with physical classroom presence. This situation became more expansive due to Corona Virus lockdowns worldwide. Following the outbreak of the virus (Covid 19), universities canceled face-to-face classes, closed the doors to campuses across the globe and switched to online learning. Thus, encouraging students to return home and complete their studies prevents contamination.

The rationale aims for undertaking such a study is to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions towards e-assessment; the different practices of online assessment used, in addition to its impact on students' achievements. The significance of this study is to provide an overview of the process of e-assessment in higher education. It has been reported that e-assessment is rarely used in Algerian universities. As such, this study will look at the reasons behind this hesitation. Following the outbreak of the Corona Virus, Algerian universities shifted to distance learning through Moodle website. Students receive lectures weekly, and teachers are required to evaluate their student's knowledge perception. Thus, assessment is taking place. However, the current review is no longer the same. Due to the tough times posed by the virus, physical-based classroom presence assessment is canceled. On the other hand, online evaluation appeared, causing more challenges to EFL teachers. Therefore, this study prompts for the following research questions:

- How do Algerian English language teachers perceive e-assessment via Moodle?
- What impact did online review have on assessment practices?
- How did online assessment affect students' achievements?

The objective of the above research questions is to bring forth the actual exploitation of MOODLE to assess EFL students virtually. As such, EFL teachers' attitudes will be revealed; the different types of online assessment will be investigated, and the impact of e-assessment on students' achievement will be scrutinized.

Literature Review

Academic Assessment: An Overview

After completing a lecture, students enroll in special tests to evaluate their knowledge perception. This kind of knowledge perception evaluation is called 'assessment.' Assessment plays a vital role in every pedagogical program. It is the process of using evidence to understand and improve student learning in academic programs. Its primary focus is to answer the following question: did students learn what they should have upon completing a program?

In this context, Webber (2012) claimed that assessment refers to "activities designed primarily to foster student learning" (p. 202). In general, these activities, by the end, will report some understanding of students' achievements and progress toward desired learning outcomes.

Furthermore, Brown (1990) referred to assessment as a related series of measures used to determine a complex attribute of an individual or group of individuals. In this sense, the teacher draws his conclusion to interpret the level of learning attainment. Next in importance, Goubeaud and Yan (2004) defined assessment as the process of collecting information about a student to aid in decision-making about the progress and language development of the student. In this respect, the assessment does not only evaluate students' achievements but diagnostic the gaps in student learning, (Lee,2015). Based on this assumption, the instructors adjust the curriculum to meet the learners' needs. As a result, teachers monitor the quality of education and the learning process.

In education, the teaching-learning process requires teachers to base instructional, grading and reporting decisions on knowledge of student attainment and progress toward desired learning outcomes (Wilson and Adams 1996). For this reason, both assessment and evaluation may be treated as synonyms or as distinctly different concepts. Assessment is concerned with converting expectations to results. On the other hand, evaluation is concerned with the interpretation of assessment results that describes the worth or merit of a student's performance about a set of learner expectations or standards of performance. As a result, it deals with validity, accuracy, and reliability (Yambi, 2018).

Types of Assessment:

Assessment is essential in the educational process to fulfill the mission of teaching and learning. According to Klint (2020), through assessment, teachers usually try to answer the following questions:

- What do students know? What do they not yet understand?
- Where are students struggling? Why?
- What should the instructor teach next? What should they adjust in future lessons?
- Which students need an intervention? Which intervention matches the need?
- Does retained learning meet district and state expectations?
- Does our curriculum have gaps between learning expectations and assessment?

For the sake to answer these questions, four types of assessment appeared in the classroom:

Diagnostic Assessment: this is a pre-lecture evaluation used to reveal students' strengths and weaknesses. Instructors recommend the use of this type at the beginning of each class, unit, or chapter since it allows the teacher to discover the academic student's level of the previous section to successfully move to the next one, Lee (2015).

Formative Assessment: is an in-process evaluation used to instantly test students' comprehension and perception of the lesson, unit, or course to identify their weaknesses during a particular lecture. Black and William (2010) defined formative assessment as: "activities undertaken by teachers—and by their students in assessing themselves—that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities" (p. 82). So, in this type of assessment, the teacher collects detailed information to improve and adjust the lesson to meet the students' needs.

Summative Assessment: unlike to formative assessment, a summative is an ending process used to evaluate students by the end of the semester or the year, such as graded final exams or tests.

According to Black and William (2010), this type attempts to capture the culmination of students' achievements within a specified time frame.

Interim Assessment: this is similar to the formative assessment. It is an in-lecture evaluation to check students' grasp of the lesson content to successfully to the next level. This type is used between lessons or units to test the student's knowledge change through time, (Tomlinson, 2000).

Online Assessment

In online education, an online assessment or e-assessment is sometimes used as an online method to evaluate students' attainment of information provided in online teaching. This method usually refers to online ability tests completed at home or in a controlled environment. Moreover, the principle of e-assessment lies beyond measuring what the students know, and it also focuses on how they learn. As a result, schools, colleges, and universities need to implement relevant technologies for assessments to make learning applicable to modern students, who are more digital and competence-based. Gursula and Keserb (2009) define this process as educational technology, which is, according to them, more accessible to today's students than face-to-face education.

When discussing the advantages of the e-assessment, this type of evaluation is more beneficial because it does not require much time as in the traditional method. At the same time, the assessed students can take the assessment during class or at home using their own devices. This new version of assessment gave the teacher instant accessibility to see their results and answers and provide instant feedback. However, technology is not always reliable. Especially in developing countries such as Algeria. Where, connection or internet problems are heavily reported. Moreover, most teachers said that one of the prominent disadvantages of e-assessment is that teachers are unsure who is behind the screen. Thus, virtual evaluation is a good place for students cheat, Elizondo-Montemayor (2004).

E-assessment in Algeria: a Covid-19 Obligation

Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 incident, higher education institutions have faced different challenges in their teaching-learning activities. Online education has been the most effective device for student retention and maintaining access to learning. Consequently, the ministry of higher education in Algeria hurried to apply the new tool during the era of Covid 19 to catch up with teaching and learning processes. Most of the Algerian universities did not engage in online teaching and learning before that period. As a result, online education is coined with the Covid-19 Virus. Bin Herzallah, (2021) argued: "The virtual setting of education has not really been applied until the spread of the virus" (p. 78). Therefore, and as a response to the Algerian ministry's call for carrying on studies, 'Moodle' has been used to meet the new variety of teaching and learning processes. This sudden shift to online teaching faced high education teachers with an array of challenges they had not experienced before. Notably, teachers experienced many challenges in assessing students virtually. In others, online assessment is not practiced, (Boubekeur, 2021).

Methods

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to determine high education teachers' views about e-assessment, areas of online assessment practices used, and whether e-assessment reveals the same results as classroom assessment. To achieve these objectives, quantitative and qualitative method is used.

Participants

The research sample consists of **13** randomly selected EFL teachers from Algerian universities, namely, Oran University, Saida University, and Tlemcen University. The participants reported that they had already assessed students through Moodle more than three times. They provided the researcher with the questions used in the assessment process. They also provided electronic copies of the marks obtained by the same students before and after the Corona Virus in these essays. All corpus has been received by email. The aim and procedure of the study was clarified to the participating teachers, and their consent were obtained. All data have been received by email.

Research Instruments

To answer the research questions, an electronic structured questionnaire was addressed to 13 EFL teachers from three Algerian Universities. The overarching purpose of employing the questionnaire is that, this instrument proved its utility in collecting sufficient data in a short period about teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards different types of teaching and learning assessment, (Webber, 2012).

A comparative analysis was used to compare the mean Project-Based Language marks during face-to-face and online assessments. The researcher believed that using this comparative method would reveal the reality of the evaluation in Algerian Universities. In other words, most teachers are against e-assessment because they think that most students in virtual evaluation base their answers on cheating.

Data Collection and Procedures

The questionnaire was divided into three structures: in the first one, several factual questions had been used to elicit demographic information (age, gender, academic subject, and the number of e-assessments completed). This information would enable analysis by a group. In the second structure, the respondents received a series of closed questions. The answers to the questions formed the central part of the research data. In the third structure, a comment box was included at the end to allow for open-ended responses and, or suggestions.

The questionnaire was delivered online for many reasons: the research is about online assessment, so it was an opportunity to use the same software to provide the questionnaire; in addition, there are numerous benefits to online delivery in terms of cost, time, ease of administration, data collation and analysis (Dillman, 2007), and of course due to the pandemic. Frequency and Percentage Distribution Analyses are used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire.

After that, the researcher analyzed the students 'marks of the same PBL essays done in two different means. The first mean was a face-to-face control, and the second mean was an online

control. In this regard, Arithmetical averages are used to see the differences between PBL essays marks in the face-to-face assessment and online assessment.

Results

Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

Phase 1: Demographic Information Analysis

The sample contained (eight M-61.53%) males and (five F-38.46%) females, aged from 32 to 67 years. Through these age differences, the investigator wanted to know the use of e-assessment in all age categories. Hence the results showed that online assessment is used chiefly by teachers under 45 years old. The other category is not convinced by this type of evaluation, and they still prefer classroom-based presence assessment.

All respondents are EFL teachers (four teaching Literature and Civilization/nine teaching Linguistics and Didactics). Based on this assumption, it was found that teachers of linguistics and didactics used online assessment more than teachers of Literature and Civilization.

All participants used e-assessment more than five times in the two previous years to evaluate their students' perceptions. Thus, the study is based on reliable data where e-assessment was used frequently.

Phase Two: Analysis of Questions

Question 1: Do you evaluate students after each lesson?

Table 1. *Teachers' evaluation strategy*

Options	Responses	Percentage
Yes	09	69.23
No	04	30.76

The table above indicates that the overwhelming number of teachers; that is, around nine (09-69.23%) out of thirteen (13-100%) claimed that they evaluate students just after each lecture, as opposed to four (04-30.76%) informants who reported that they do not. According to them, they select the most important courses, and evaluate them.

Question 2: When evaluating students, are you adopting:

Table 2. *Teachers' evaluation method*

Options	Responses	Percentage
E-assessment	11	84.61
Classroom evaluation	02	15.38

The table above shows that, around eleven (11-84.61%), reported that they use online assessment in evaluating students. Two participants (15.38%) out of thirteen (13-100%) stated that they still use classroom evaluation.

Question 3: What e-assessment practices do you use mostly?

Table 3. *Assessment types used by teachers*

Options	Responses	Percentage
Diagnostic Assessment	01	7.69
Formative Assessment	08	61.53
Interim Assessment	00	00
Summative Assessment	04	30.76

When asked about the e-assessment practices they use the most, eight (08-61.53%) of the respondents said they use formative assessment., four (04-30.76%) of subjects use summative e-assessment, while the remaining respondent (01-7.69%) uses diagnostic e-assessment. Surprisingly, no teacher uses interim e-assessment.

Question 4. What type of questions do you use in your e-assessment?

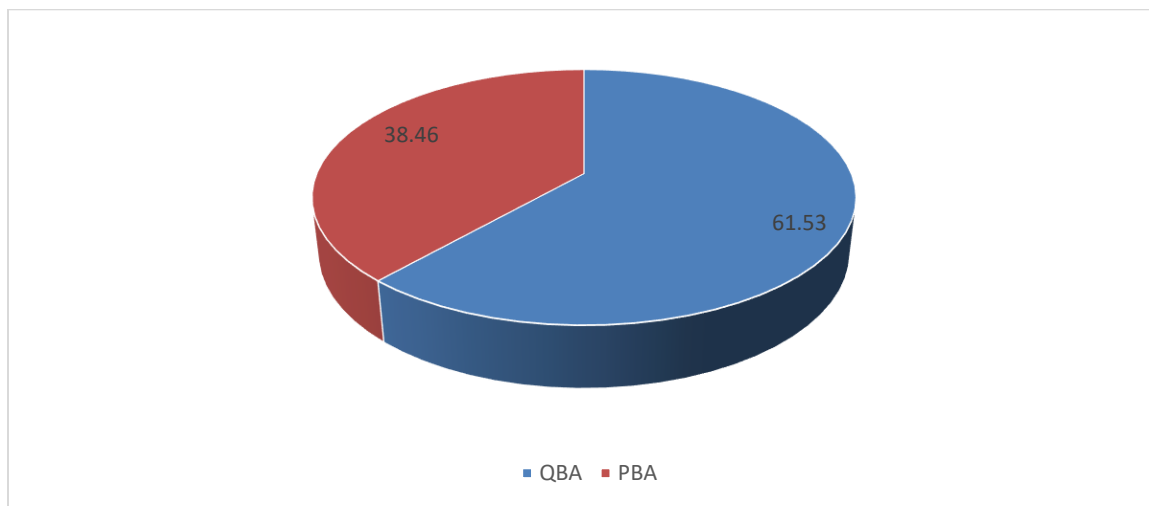


Figure 1. The type of questions used in the e-assessment by EFL teachers

The graph above demonstrates that 61.53% of teachers claimed that they use direct questions in e-assessment. Only five teachers (38.46%) out of thirteen, reported that they use project-based questions.

Question 5: What challenges do you face in creating and deploying assessments for your online courses?

Table 4. Challenges facing EFL teachers in EFL assessment

Options	Responses	Percentage
Internet access or connectivity	13	100
Low students' response	08	61.53
Cheating	10	76.92
Losing the reliability of the test	09	69.23

As depicted in Table 4, a follow-up analysis about the challenges of e-assessment revealed that all respondents (13-100%) see that internet access and connectivity is the major problem, both teachers and learners are suffering from. Ten (10- 76.92%) teachers claimed that cheating is also another problem in e-assessment. Nine teachers (69.23%) considered the e-test incredible. At the same time, eight (08-61.53%) teachers reported that low students' response to distance evaluation is another challenge.

Question 6: According to you, is e-assessment considered a valid, practical, secure, and reliable alternative to traditional paper-based assessment?

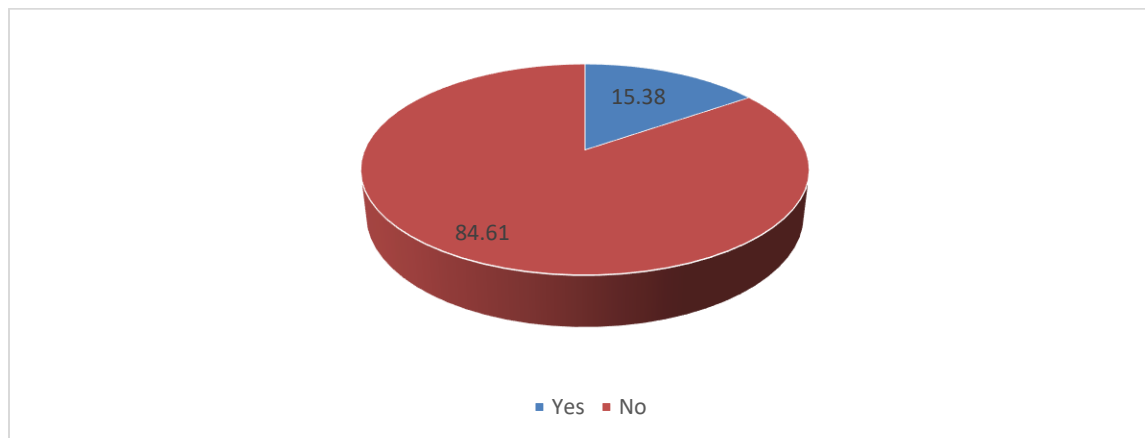


Figure 2. Teachers' attitudes towards the reliability of e-assessment

The figure above reveals that 84.61% of the questioned teachers claimed that they consider e-assessment as a valid, practical, secure and reliable alternative to traditional paper-based assessment. On the other hand, only 15.38% of the informants presume that online assessment is a poorer method, and can never be an alternative to traditional paper-based assessment.

Question 7: Did you Use E-assessment before Coronavirus?

Table 5. E-assessment usage before Corona virus

Options	Responses	Percentage
Yes	00	00
No	13	100

The table above shows that all of the questioned informants, (13-100%) reported that they never used online assessment in evaluating students before the outbreak of the Coronavirus. Thereby, none of them (0-0%) replied 'yes'.

Analysis of Students PBL Essays in Traditional and Online Assessment

Comparing the Mean PBL Essays Marks of the Students

Table 6. Comparison between students' achievement in the face to face assessment and online assessment

PBL Essays	Average		Paired t-test	
	-10	+10	Parameter	Value
Face to face Asse	152	112	P-value	0
			T	-infinity
			Average of differences	-40
			SD of differences (Sd)	0
Online Asse	67	197	P-value	0
			T	Infinity
			Average differences	130

			SD of differences (Sd)	0
The difference	Under average		P- value	0
			<i>T</i>	-infinity
			Average of differences	-85
			SD of differences (Sd)	0
	Above average		P-value	0
			<i>T</i>	Infinity
			Average of differences	85
			SD of differences (Sd)	0

The above table demonstrates the following:

- In the face to face assessment, the results of the paired t-test indicated that there is a significant medium difference between (-10, M=152, Sd=0) and (+10, M=112, Sd=0), $t(0) = \text{infinity}$, $p < .0.001$.
- In online assessment, the results of the paired t-test indicated that there is a significant medium difference (-10, M=67, SD=0) and (+10, M=197, SD=0), $t(0) = \text{infinity}$ $p < 0.001$.
- Thus, the difference between the scores obtained in the two periods under-average is marked. In this regard the paired t-test indicated that there is a significant medium difference between the under-average marks in face-to-face (M=152, SD=0) and online assessment (M=67, SD=0), $t(0) = -\text{infinity}$, $p < 0.001$.
- Also, the difference between the scores obtained in the two periods above-average is marked. In this regard, the paired t-test indicated that there is a significant medium difference between the above-average marks in the face-to-face assessment (M=112, SD=0) and online assessment (M=197, SD=0), $t(0) = \text{infinity}$, $p < 0.001$.
- As a result, what is reported by the above table shows a great difference in students' achievement between the face-to-face assessment and online assessment, in favor of online assessment.

Discussion

The study aims to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards e-assessment in evaluating their students. The findings above have answered the two questions set out to steer the direction of this study.

In question one, the majority of the informants asserted that they evaluate students after each lecture. On the other hand, only four teachers claimed that they choose only the most essential lessons in the syllabus, and assess students in it. In fact, due to Covid, it is worth mentioning that the teaching and learning processes and schedules are changed in Algerian Universities, (Boubekeur, 2021). The semester is scheduled in no more than seven weeks, with sometimes more than ten lectures should be delivered in that period. As a result, most of them focus only on explaining the courses. By this, teachers do not provide much time for assessment. When, the semester is completed, most of them do tests to evaluate their students. This fact that explains the absence of frequent review.

When asked about the type of the assessment- e-assessment or classroom assessment-, 84.61% of participants claimed that they use distance assessment. Due to Coronavirus, all

universities and high schools shifted to online teaching. As a result, online assessment is taking place. However, only 15.84% of EFL teachers still use classroom evaluation. Discussing the results regarding the demographic information of participants, those respondents who are not using e-assessment are aged more than 60 years old. Thus, aged teachers are not well-formed in using internet websites, and still prefer the use of traditional methods in teaching. These results agree with Gursula and Keserb (2009), who argue that in education, technology is mainly used by youngsters.

Talking about the e-assessment practices used by participants, most of them use formative assessment, and four teachers use summative e-assessment. This result supports the first question's findings where nine teachers reported that they evaluate students after each lecture, while the remaining claimed that they do not. On the other hand, only one respondent uses diagnostic e-assessment. The absence of this type of evaluation can be explained based on (Lee, 2015)'s claims, who recommend the use of diagnostic assessment in the classroom rather than online learning. Surprisingly, no teacher uses interim e-assessment. Interim assessments are presumed to provide teachers with valuable information about changes in students' knowledge and understanding of the material throughout the school year. In addition, interim evaluation leads to constructive feedback and differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2000). Unfortunately, according to the participants, this is not the case in the online assessment, where they claimed that they are not sure who is behind the screen. Thus, interim assessment is not a suitable method in the online evaluation.

The results also revealed that the teachers encountered challenges when assessing students online. Among are, internet accessibility, and poor connectivity. Moreover, most teachers consider cheating as one of the crucial challenges, they face. All teachers claimed that students cheat in the classroom, so they will not miss the opportunity when they are online. Furthermore, the participants agree on the quality of online tests. Because according to them, it is an excellent chance for students to cheat. The other challenge was about the inadequate response of students to the online evaluation. This supports the first challenge claimed by participants about the poor connectivity.

Next in importance, the results indicate more substantial positive feelings than negative ones of the e-assessment. Of course, this agrees with the previous findings about the use of e-assessment among teachers. It was found that aged teachers still preferred the traditional assessment because they do not trust online evaluation.

As hypothesized before, all teachers reported that they did not use e-assessment before the outbreak of the Corona Virus. This finding is supported by a survey done by Bin Herzallah (2021), who claimed that through the use of the internet, Algerians discovered the fragility of the systems, which hinders them from keeping pace with the developments of the digital age. In this regard, "the distance educational system" remains confined to its traditional scope (printed lessons sent to the participants by regular mail). As a result, the online assessment was excluded from teaching practices until the outbreak of Covid 19, which poses the shifting mode of e-learning.

Finally, comparing students' results between the face-to-face assessment, the online assessment. The high achievements can be explained by the availability of courses in Moodle. And the students' easiest access to this platform, Gursula and Keserb (2009). However, teachers had another answer, which is that the students through project-based learning online assignments find much more time to cheat. These findings are consistent with those of Elizondo-Montemayor (2004).

Conclusion

Because there is a need to assess the learning outcomes achieved through online education, e-assessment is often challenging for EFL teachers. This paper aimed to provide an in-depth look at assessment in EFL teaching and learning in the Algerian context during the Covid-19 pandemic. It tried to investigate different teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards online assessment. On this basis, the results revealed that, despite the various challenges have been tackled in this study; positive feelings are more vital than the negative feelings towards e-assessment in EFL teachers of Algerian universities. Moreover, summative assignments are the most used online by EFL teachers. Finally, higher achievement level was detected by students in online assessment when compared to face-to-face assessment.

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