

Online Assessment during a Time of Crisis: EFL Students' Perspectives and Challenges at Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University

*SEMAKDJI Fatima Zohra**

Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University, (Algeria)

Fatimazohra.semakdji@umc.edu.dz

Received: 16/03/2025

Accepted: 06/12/2025

published: 26/12/2025

Abstract:

The current research sets out to gain insights into the undergraduate EFL students' perspectives on the viability and challenges of online, as opposed to offline, assessment which they had been accustomed to during their learning before the COVID-19 pandemic. A descriptive quantitative method has been adopted using a student questionnaire as an instrument for collecting data. Results have revealed that the students held positive perspectives on online assessment, and acknowledged its significance as an inevitable means during the pandemic crisis. However, they equally indicated that online at-home assessment had its own share of difficulties, which made of it an inevitable and useful means under such special circumstances, but not a thorough substitute for offline classroom assessment which they were more accustomed to. In the end, some recommendations are suggested to address the current problematic situation.

Keywords: innovative pedagogical methods, online assessment, pedagogical practices, remote learning, time of crisis

* Corresponding author: SEMAKDJI Fatima Zohra

1. Introduction

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on teaching and learning at all levels, inside and outside Algeria. The challenges created by this global pandemic have called for serious reconsiderations of the pedagogical EFL practices which had prevailed before the pandemic crisis, in an attempt to put forward more innovative procedures, new decisions and suggestions to enhance such disruptive situation. On top of the aforementioned practices comes assessment with all its intricacies. The present situation has motivated the need to explore this area of pedagogy in such a critical period as the pandemic.

The major research questions raised in the current research work are:

- How do the undergraduate students at the Department of English, Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University perceive online assessment during the COVID-19 crisis?
- Are students inclined towards online or offline assessment?
- To what extent do they believe that online at-home assessment is viable in their learning process?
- What challenges has online at-home assessment created to students?

As background to the present investigation, a few basic concepts pertinent to online assessment are discussed. Online assessment is defined with a special focus on its characteristics and forms. A number of advantages of undertaking this mode of assessment are also presented, in addition to some challenges that could be encountered in carrying out such online task.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Online Assessment: Characteristics and Forms

Online assessment is the systematic process of collecting information about learners and their learning process in order to draw conclusions about their status. This process is often carried out using technological tools (Baker et al., 2016; Conrad & Openo, 2018). Online assessment is not exclusively confined to online courses, but could also be conducted in a blended form. Online assessment tasks should provide chances for ample feedback and pedagogical support for students (Gikandi et al., 2011). It is equally vital that online assessment tasks be closely related to the learning outcomes and distributed across the instructional period (Carless, 2007).

Online assessment could be categorized as summative or formative (Black, 1998; Pellegrino et al., 2001; Sclater, 2004). The former is administered for grading purposes, while the latter is meant to provide feedback in order to assist the learning process (Sclater, 2004). Two forms of formative assessment include diagnostic and self-assessment. Diagnostic assessment, as described by O'Reilly & Morgan (1999), is undertaken in order to pinpoint students' prior knowledge and skills, whereas self-assessment occurs when learners themselves reflect on their understanding, skills or learning process in general. Sclater &

Howie (2003) make a distinction between the following variants of assessment: high-stakes summative assessment, continuous assessment, anonymous self-assessment, and diagnostic assessment.

Further categorizations of assessment comprise formal (invigilated) versus informal (not invigilated), and final, occurring at the end of a course, versus continuous, conducted throughout a course (Conole & Warburton, 2005). It is worth noting that online assessment involves various formats ranging from project-based works, e-portfolios and oral presentations to single / multiple-choice quizzes, games and written essays. Such formats could be conducted individually or as pair / groupwork (Admiraal et al., 2014; Baleni, 2015; Conrad & Openo, 2018; Kim & Ifenthaler, 2019).

2.2. Advantages of Undertaking Online Assessment

Various research works have emphasized the viability of online assessment and its significant contribution to the pedagogical process. Empirical research highlights the major influence of this mode of assessment on students' engagement and learning outcome (Nguyen, et al., 2017). In addition, it allows for more opportunities for automated assessment providing automated feedback (Gamage et al., 2019).

Bull & McKenna (2004, as cited in Özden, Ertürk & Sanli, 2004) claim that online assessment motivates learners to study and encourages more practice of skills. Moreover, it widens the range of assessed knowledge and abilities, increases feedback to teachers and learners, extends the range of assessment methods, increases objectivity and consistency, and ultimately reduces marking burdens.

Chalmers & McAusland (2002) emphasize that such unconventional mode of assessment can be successful if the entire pedagogical system is well designed and implemented. They consider the advantages of this assessment mode from two perspectives: pedagogical and administrative. The pedagogical advantages of this assessment mode involves enabling the assessment of a wide set of topics very quickly, with a reduction in the time teachers spend on marking; the elimination of the need for double marking; and giving teachers more opportunities to tailor tests to match students' abilities and vary the test format (in formative assessment) to match students' weaknesses as they appear during the test. As regards administrative advantages, Chalmers & McAusland (2002) argue that online assessment saves time in supervision or invigilation, reduces subjectivity and human error in the marking process, and ultimately ensures a more successful integration into students' records and university information and management systems.

2.3. Challenges of Conducting Online Assessment

In deciding whether to carry out online assessment, it is vital for teachers to be aware of the challenges that can be encountered with this particular mode of assessment. Teachers need to be accustomed to giving students timely and constructive feedback, which is a difficult task to deal with, especially for inexperienced teachers (Martin, 2020). The need to check the

identity of the student taking an online test is another challenging task for teachers. This is usually achieved through remote proctoring technologies. The latter permit to lock the student's device used for testing, and also videotape them when taking the test. Remote proctoring, however, seems to be time-consuming and raises concerns about certain ethical issues which are basically about intruding into the student's own life (Kitahara & Westfall, 2007).

Academic integrity and other issues pertinent to identity security, plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration are often seriously considered in all settings of assessment. However, they are to be considered more seriously in the online mode due to the fact that teachers cannot physically see learners, on the one hand, and online technologies have increased opportunities for cheating, on the other hand (Akimov & Malin, 2020).

A further challenge that can be faced in conducting online assessment is related to how students have felt overwhelmed when the shift to remote pedagogy has unexpectedly occurred. Cumming, et al. (2020) argue that switching from letter grades to a pass/ fail system has solved many problems, but has equally created problems of another nature. The pass/ fail system complicates admission and makes discrimination between students' different academic achievement levels harder. Furthermore, this system may discourage many students from doing their best to stand out since students with different performance levels will ultimately get the same result instead of varying letter grades or scores.

3. Methodology of the Study

3.1. Participants

The current study is based on a sample of 107 students belonging to different groups at the Department of English, Faculty of Literatures and Languages, Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University, during the academic year 2021-2022. The students had been assigned to groups by the administration in a random manner at the beginning of the year. These learners were selected from various undergraduate levels: first year (33 students), second year (38 students) and third year (36 students). The researcher of the present study made sure to select only the students who had already experienced online assessment in order to get feedback from their first-hand experience with this 'new' assessment mode.

3.2. Research Method and Data Collection Instrument

To check the students' perceptions of online assessment during the COVID-19 crisis, a descriptive quantitative method was used. As regards the instrument employed for collecting data, a student questionnaire was an appropriate choice to elicit the learners' perspectives. This type of instrument suits the nature and purpose of the present research.

The student questionnaire is made up of ten questions, divided into three main sections:
Section One: Students' Experience of Online Assessment;
Section Two: Students' Perspectives on Online Assessment Viability; and
Section Three: Students' Perceptions of Online Assessment Implementation.

In addition, the questionnaire consists of eight statements to rate on a Likert scale of five points:

- 1: *Strongly Disagree*
- 2: *Disagree*
- 3: *Neutral*
- 4: *Agree*
- 5: *Strongly Agree*

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Section One: Students' Experience of Online Assessment

Q1. Have you ever been assessed online during the COVID-19 crisis?

Table 1: Learners' Experience of Online Assessment during the Pandemic

	N	%
Yes	107	100
No	00	00
Total	107	100

Table 1 exhibits that all the students involved in the study said they had already experienced online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that we made sure to include in the study only the students who had already experienced online assessment, so that they could provide us with feedback from first-hand experience.

Q2. Was the assessment:

Table 2: Forms of Students' Online Assessment

	N	%
Formative? (continuous, to check understanding and whether <i>specific</i> objectives of a lecture/ unit have been met)	63	58.88
Summative? (to check the extent to which the <i>overall</i> course objectives have been attained at the end)	21	19.63
Both	23	21.49
Total	107	100

As regards the forms of online assessments, more than half the participants (58.88%) said their assessment was 'formative', i.e. continuous in order to check their understanding and whether specific objectives of a lecture or unit have been met.

Q3. How often had you experienced online assessment *before* the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 3: Students' Experience of Online Assessment Prior to the Pandemic

	N	%
Often	00	00
Sometimes	00	00
Rarely	00	00
Never	107	100
Total	107	100

Table 3 shows that all the students without exception said they had never been assessed online before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Therefore, online assessment was a new experience for them.

Q4. Have you received any form of training or guidance by teachers on how to be assessed online before or during the COVID-19 crisis?

Table 4: Students' Training in Online Assessment

	N	%
Yes	11	10.28
No	96	89.72
Total	107	100

The majority of the students (making up 89.72%) revealed that they had not been trained by teachers in online assessment, neither before nor during the pandemic. The students' responses to the previous two questions (Q4 and Q5) make us wonder about whether the abrupt adoption of this 'new' mode of assessment is as effective as it should be.

4.2. Students' Perspectives on Online Assessment Viability

Q5. Rate the following two statements on a Likert scale of five points:

- 1: *Strongly Disagree (SD)*
- 2: *Disagree (D)*
- 3: *Neutral (N)*
- 4: *Agree (A)*
- 5: *Strongly Agree (SA)*

A. I prefer online, rather than offline, assessment.

B. Online assessment is useful in my learning.

Table 5: Learners' Preferences and Perceptions of the Usefulness of Online Assessment

Statements	% of Agreement					Total
	SD	D	N	A	SA	
A. I prefer online, rather than offline, assessment.	17.76	48.60	03.74	21.49	08.41	D: 66.36% A: 29.90%
B. Online assessment is useful in my learning.	07.48	30.84	16.82	32.71	12.15	D: 38.32% A: 44.86%

This part of the questionnaire is devoted to the students' perspectives on online assessment in terms of preferences and viability. Table 5 represents the percentages of the students' agreement on a scale of five points. The students were asked to rate the two statements using this scale. It has been found that more than half the students under investigation (forming 66.36%) do not prefer online assessment over offline assessment. Only a small percentage of 29.90% seem to have agreed with the first statement (A), preferring online assessment. As far as the second statement (B) is concerned, we can see that those who agreed are a little more than those who disagreed with this statement, in that 44.86% of the students viewed online assessment as useful in their learning process, as opposed to 38.32% who did not.

Q6. If you 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the previous last statement (B), it is because online assessment:

Table 6: Students' Reasons of Online Assessment Viability

	N	%
Is more interesting being new to me.	09	18.75
Is faster to do than offline assessment.	25	52.08
Is safer since there is no direct physical contact with other people (teachers and classmates).	46	95.83
Is better than using the conventional paper-and-pencil form of assessment.	16	33.33
Is a good way to familiarize me with such type of process which I may need in the future for my academic or professional training.	19	39.58
Is more efficient in reflecting the real level of students.	02	04.16
Other	05	10.41

This question is intended to shed light on the reasons as to why the students see online assessment useful in their learning process. Out of the 48 students who 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' to the previous second statement (B), the overwhelming majority (comprising 95.83%) said that online assessment is useful because it is safer since there is no direct physical contact with other people: teachers and classmates. The top second reason that got most of the ticks was that online assessment is faster to do than offline assessment, with a

percentage of slightly more than the half (52.08%), followed by the reason that online assessment is a good way to familiarize students with such type of process which they may need in the future for their academic or professional training, with a proportion of 39.58%.

Other secondary reasons as to why online assessment was believed to be useful include: "It is better than using the conventional paper-and-pencil form of assessment," "It is more interesting being new to me," and "It is more efficient in reflecting the real level of students," which got the least of the students' ticks. 05 students suggested other reasons why they think online assessment is useful: being a modern procedure, being time-saving, being used abroad, and making use of external help.

Q7. Which of the following platform(s) would you prefer to use the most for your online assessment?

Table 7: Students' Most Preferable Online Assessment Platforms

	N	%
Moodle	14	13.08
Webex	00	00
Zoom	08	07.47
Software	16	14.95
Other	21	19.62
No Answer	58	54.21

Q7 is concerned with the most preferable types of online assessment platforms for the students. The most striking matter, as Table 7 demonstrates, is that more than half the subjects (54.21%) did not provide any answer: they left all the boxes blank! A tentative explanation can be that they are not well familiar with such platforms in the first place. As for those students who did opt for platforms, *Software* seems to get more ticks than the other platforms, although 14.95% is not really a significant figure. *Moodle*, surprisingly, was preferred by only 13.08% of the students, in spite of the fact that it is the official platform used for teaching and assessing these students at the Department of English, Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University. Furthermore, 21 students suggested other platforms. The most recurrent ones were *Email* which, in fact, is not an online platform, and *Facebook* which is for obvious reason not suitable or academic for assessing students.

4.3. Section Three: Students' Perceptions of Online Assessment Implementation

Q8. Using the same aforementioned five-point scale, rate the following statements:

- 1: Strongly Disagree (SD)
- 2: Disagree (D)
- 3: Neutral (N)
- 4: Agree (A)
- 5: Strongly Agree (SA)

Table 8: Learners' Perceptions of Implementing Online Assessment

Statements	% of Agreement					Total
	SD	D	N	A	SA	
A. Online assessment has been inevitable since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.	03.73	25.23	06.57	44.85	19.62	D: 28.96% A: 64.47%
B. Online assessment should continue to be carried out, along with offline assessment, even after the pandemic circumstances.	20.56	45.79	01.88	25.23	06.54	D: 66.35% A: 31.77%
C. Online assessment is a better substitute for offline testing.	55.14	31.77	02.81	10.28	00	D: 86.91% A: 10.28%
D. Students should be assessed on campus, even if the course is delivered online.	10.28	28.97	00	45.79	14.96	D: 39.25% A: 60.75%
E. Online assessment is convenient to use in Algeria.	34.57	51.40	07.50	04.67	01.86	D: 85.97% A: 06.53%
F. Online assessment is rather challenging.	02.80	31.77	05.63	42.05	17.75	D: 34.57% A: 59.80%

The current part of the questionnaire is meant to unveil the students' perceptions of online assessment. To start with, Table 8 shows that the bigger proportion of the informants (making up 64.47%) agreed with Statement **A**, acknowledging the inevitability of online assessment during such special circumstances. As regards Statement **B**, 66.35% showed disagreement, believing that online testing should cease to be used along with offline testing after the pandemic is over. The students' perceptions elicited by the previous two statements (A and B) suggest that although online testing is inevitable during this crisis, it should not be undertaken anymore once this crisis comes to an end.

With reference to Statement **C**, the majority of the informants, making up 86.91%, expressed disagreement. They did not view online testing as a better substitute for offline testing. Concerning Statement **D**, the bigger percentage of the students (60.75%) believe that assessment should be done in class, even if the course was taught online. With respect to Statement **E**, the majority of the informants (85.97%) see that online testing is not convenient to use in Algeria. As far as Statement **F** is concerned, more than half the students (59.80%) see that online testing is rather challenging.

Q9. If you 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the previous last statement (F), it is because:

Table 9: Challenges Encountered by Students with Online Assessment

	N	%
You are not well accustomed to this new procedure of assessment.	47	73.43
You encounter Internet affordability or connectivity problems.	63	98.43
You feel uncomfortable being tested while the camera is turned on.	51	79.68
There is a risk of cheating, which affects the credibility of assessment.	62	96.87
The questions and instructions are not as clear as the ones provided by the teacher during face-to-face offline assessment.	38	59.37
You do not have a computer to use for your online assessment.	29	45.31
Other	04	06.25

The students who 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' to the previous last Statement (F): *Online assessment is rather challenging* (a total of 64) were asked to specify the challenges they encountered while being assessed online. According to Table 9, almost all these subjects (forming 98.43%) opted for Internet affordability or connectivity problems. An approximately equal percentage of 96.87% said that there is a risk of cheating, which affects the credibility of testing. The rest of the students said that online testing is challenging because the questions and instructions are not as clear as the ones provided by the teacher during face-to-face offline testing, and that they do not have a computer to use for their online testing. Other challenges mentioned by 04 students could be summed up as time limits, technical difficulties and distractive atmosphere at home.

Q10. Would you like to add any further comments with regard to online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A proportion of 28 students (out of 107) have responded to this last question. 17 have highlighted the fact that they have had difficulty adapting to the recently integrated mode of assessment (online), while 11 learners have stressed their need for providing them with training or at least "adequate" and "enough guidance" by teachers in order to help them cope better with the new situation.

5. Recommendations of the Study

A few recommendations are put forward in an attempt to address some of the major shortcomings created by the disruptive COVID-19 crisis with regard to online assessment. The recommendations are pertinent to teachers, students and the resources to be employed in online assessment.

- Collaborative work between academic and technical units:

It is very important that teachers, policy makers and IT experts collaborate together to improve the quality of online assessment, and equally address the challenges it has created to students and teachers.

- Enhancing Internet accessibility and quality of services:

No matter how hard teachers work on the online assessment tasks, not having easy access to the Internet for teachers to carry out the assessment, and for students to take it would impeded the entire process, and all the efforts would be in vain.

- Teacher training in online assessment:

The conventional assessment process is already demanding, and conducting it online makes it even more challenging. Therefore, teacher training can be very useful in assisting teachers to carry out online assessment in a more effective and professional way.

- Addressing students' concerns about online assessment:

The researcher of the current study believes that the students' concerns about such 'new' mode of assessment are rather justified. Accordingly, their concerns should be taken into a serious consideration to be addressed through constant communication and being open to their suggestions, so that EFL teachers can create a more comfortable atmosphere for student assessment.

6. Conclusion

The present study has tackled a major issue of online assessment from the students' perspectives during a time of crisis experienced by all educational institutions worldwide, including the Department of English, Constantine 1 Frères Mentouri University. Through the analysis of the student questionnaire feedback, it has been found that the students, in general, held positive attitudes towards online assessment, and acknowledged its significance as an inevitable means during the pandemic crisis. However, they equally revealed that online assessment created a number of challenges. The latter can be summed up as follows: Internet affordability or connectivity problems; possible risks of cheating, which affects the credibility of the entire assessment procedure; the confusion created by the lack of clarity of teachers' questions or instructions given online, compared to face-to-face settings; distractive atmosphere at home; and ultimately, not possessing personal computers or other resources which can help the students undertake the online assessment easily. Moreover, the findings have shown that the students perceived online assessment as an inevitable and, to some extent, useful means under such special circumstances, but not a thorough substitute for offline classroom assessment which they are more accustomed to and comfortable with.

The growing earnest demands of online assessment have inevitably led to greater demands on teachers to develop adequate skills in this sensitive pedagogical area and add them to the other areas which they are more familiar with (conventional face-to-face assessment). The challenging issues of maintaining academic integrity and providing teacher professional training in online assessment must be seriously attended to. Furthermore,

administrative and technical units should take serious actions by providing ample support for the pedagogical staff and preparing the required structure for the online assessment system.

References

- Admiraal, W., Huisman, B., & Van de Ven, M. (2014). Self- and peer assessment in massive open online courses. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(3), 119–128. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v3n3p119>
- Akimov, A. & Malin, M. (2020). When old becomes new: A case study of oral examination as an online assessment tool. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 45(8), 1-17. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02602938.2020.1730301>
- Baker, E., Chung, G., & Cai, L. (2016). Assessment, gaze, refraction, and blur: The course of achievement testing in the past 100 years. *Review of Research in Education*, 40, 94–142. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16679806>
- Baleni, Z. (2015). Online formative assessment in higher education: Its pros and cons. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 13(4), 228–236.
- Black, P. J. (1998). *Testing: friend or foe? The theory and practice of assessment and testing*. Falmer Press.
- Carless, D. (2007). Learning-oriented assessment: conceptual bases and practical implications. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290601081332>
- Chalmers, D. & McAusland, W. D. M. (2002). *Computer-assisted assessment: The handbook for economics lecturers*. Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University.
- Conole, G. & Warburton, B. (2005). A review of computer-assisted assessment. *Research in Learning Technology*, 13(1), 17-31.
- Conrad, D., & Openo, J. (2018). *Assessment strategies for online learning: Engagement and authenticity*. Athabasca University Press. <https://doi.org/10.15215/aupress/9781771992329.01>
- Cumming, T., Miller, M. D., Bergeron, J. & deBoer, F. (2020). Ensuring fairness in unprecedented times: Grading our nation's students. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).
- Gamage, S. H. P. W., Ayres, J. R., Behrend, M. B., & Smith, E. J. (2019). Optimising Moodle quizzes for online assessments. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 6(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-019-0181-4>
- Gikandi, J. W., Morrow, D., & Davis, N. E. (2011). Online formative assessment in higher education: A review of the literature. *Computers & Education*, 57(4), 2333–2351. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.06.004>
- Kim, Y. J., & Ifenthaler, D. (2019). Game-based assessment: The past ten years and moving forward. In D. Ifenthaler & Y. J. Kim (Eds.), *Game-based assessment revisited* (pp. 3–12). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15569-8_1

- Kitahara, R. T. & Westfall, F. (2007). Promoting academic integrity in online distance learning courses. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 3(3). <http://jolt.merlot.org/vol3no3/kitahara.htm>
- Martin, J. (2020). *Grading and assessing online student work: Core concepts and key strategies you can use today*. Blackbaud Inc.
- Nguyen, Q., Rienties, B., Toetenel, L., Ferguson, R., & Whitelock, D. (2017). Examining the designs of computer-based assessment and its impact on student engagement, satisfaction, and pass rates. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 76, 703–714. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.028>
- O'Reilly, M. & Morgan, C. (1999). Online assessment: creating communities and opportunities. In S. Brown, P. Race & J. Bull (Eds), *Computer-assisted assessment in higher education* (pp. 149–161). London: Kogan.
- Özden, M. Y., Ertürk, I. & Sanli, R. (2004). Students' perceptions of online assessment: A case study. *Journal of Distance Education*, 19(2), 77-92.
- Pellegrino, J. W., Chudowsky, N., & Glaser, R. (Eds.). (2001). *Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment*. National Academy Press.
- Sclater, N. (Ed.). (2004). *Final report for the item banks infrastructure study* (IBIS). Bristol: JISC.
- Sclater, N. & Howie, K. (2003). User requirements of the ultimate online assessment engine. *Computers & Education*, 40(3), 285–306.