

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Online Assessment Methods. A Case Study: Oran 2 University

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Received: 07/07/2024,

Accepted: 11/12/2024,

Published: 25/12/2024

Abstract: *The adoption of online assessment practices has become increasingly prevalent in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures. Educational institutions swiftly transitioned towards virtual learning and assessment methods to ensure the continuity of education, and to monitor student progress effectively. However, addressing the challenges of online assessment practices becomes imperative in ensuring quality education and fostering a fair and valid evaluation process. The purpose of this research is to probe the perceptions and practices of online assessment, with a focus on their impact on the quality of learning experiences. To gather inclusive data, the researcher conducted an empirical investigation using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover the intricate interplay between online assessments and the overall effectiveness of education in the digital age. A group of 30 teachers from Oran-2 University, Algeria formed the target population for this study. The findings from this study offered valuable insights into the misalignment between teachers' perceptions and actual practices when applying online assessment strategies. This innovative and resilient approach towards education is likely to continue shaping the future of the teaching-learning landscape in an increasingly digital world.*

Keywords: *E-assessment, E-learning, Higher Education, Assessment Methods, Online assessment, Teachers' perceptions*

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, teachers have been compelled to adapt their instructional methodologies to meet the demands of online teaching. The shift to virtual classrooms has presented obstacles, with online assessments emerging as a crucial facet of remote learning. However,

measuring student progress and evaluating their understanding in a virtual setting poses unique and complex challenges for teachers. The primary objective of this research endeavour is to investigate and analyse the perceptions and practices of teachers regarding online assessment. It aims to uncover the challenges and issues that arise as a result of the physical distance between teachers and learners when using online assessment methods. We seek to provide insights into the strategies and interventions teachers should use to ensure fair and accurate evaluations in virtual learning environments to foster meaningful learning experiences for their learners.

2. Literature Review

Online assessment, also known as e-assessment, is a method of evaluating learners' understanding, skills, and performance using digital platforms. In the context of higher education, online assessments have become increasingly prevalent due to the rise of online learning and the ongoing digital transformation of education.

Online assessment is an innovative approach to evaluating learners' growth and achievement in the online learning environment. (Heil and Ifenthaler, 2023). It is a systematic method of gathering information about participants in the learning process (Ambrose et al., 2010).

Online assessment heavily relies on new ICTs, particularly web-based testing, which has gained widespread adoption in schools and universities, surpassing traditional assessment methods (Cigdem et al., 2016). Web-based testing offers accessibility, flexibility, and efficiency, allowing assessments to be administered remotely and at a student's own pace.

As technology continues to evolve, online assessment is becoming increasingly prevalent in educational settings, revolutionizing the way students' achievements are evaluated and reinforcing the importance of digital literacy in modern learning environments.

Online assessment can be defined as the digital adaptation of traditional classroom activities aimed at evaluating students' achievement and providing feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This includes a range of familiar assessment methods such as quizzes, exams, and essays, which have long been employed in face-to-face educational settings. However, in the online context, these activities are transformed into electronic

formats that can be accessed and completed through digital platforms or e-learning platforms. The purpose of online assessment remains consistent with its offline counterpart: to gauge students' understanding, measure their progress, and offer valuable feedback to support their learning journey.

2.1 Forms of Online Assessment

Online assessments can take various forms, including quizzes, essays, discussions, peer reviews, and interactive assignments. They can be either diagnostic, gauging prior knowledge, formative, providing ongoing feedback to support learning, or summative, evaluating learners' achievement at the end of an instructional period. The literature suggests that diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are currently the most crucial types of evaluations used in higher education institutions (Chufama and Sithole, 2021). Thus, the main types of assessment (diagnostic, formative and summative) should be maintained at higher education institutions. Similarly, (Slade et al., 2022) claim that Online assessment or e-assessment includes 'summative, formative and diagnostic assessments delivered online'.

Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of the practical procedures involved in establishing an assessment environment that fosters learning success and empowers learners to acquire the foundational skills necessary to meet learning standards.

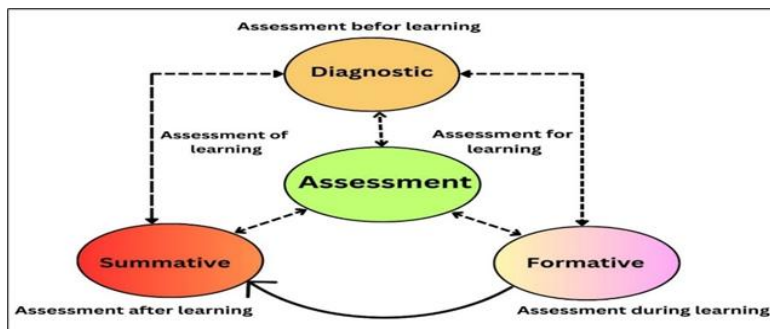


Figure 2.1: Types of Assessments

This framework draws inspiration from the assessment and grading practices proposed by (McTighe and O'Connor, 2005) and has been adapted to align with the specific objectives of this study.

2.2 Teachers' Beliefs and Assessment Practices

Teachers' conceptions and beliefs towards assessment have been studied from various perspectives and by many researchers (Davis & Neitzel, 2011; Sikka, Nath, & Cohen, 2007). Extensive literature has revealed that teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in determining their choice and design of assessment tools. This also affects how much they involve students in the assessment process and how they use the results of the assessment (Barnes, Fives, & Dacey, 2017; Tóth & Csapó, 2022).

The global trend toward online-based education places a significant emphasis on exploring teachers' perceptions of online assessment practices. Empirical studies conducted worldwide have sought to shed light on teachers' implementation of online assessment techniques (Padayachee, 2018; Mirza, 2021; Conrad & Openo, 2018; Emmanuel, 2020; Heil, 2023) and its consequential impact on the quality of student learning experiences.

In Algeria, online learning has emerged, amid and after the COVID-19 lockdown, as a powerful and transformative tool, offering the potential to revolutionize the teaching, learning, and assessment processes. All educational institutions have embraced an online education model to ensure continued access to learning. Universities have implemented

Moodle as an e-learning platform to accommodate the evolving methods of teaching, learning, and assessment. The transition from traditional to online learning has prompted teachers to reevaluate the appropriateness of assessment types within the virtual teaching and learning setting.

However, this shift poses a significant challenge as many teachers have had limited prior experience, that may not always align with their beliefs about online assessment (Ferretti et al., 2021).

The use of online assessments in higher education offers several benefits. It provides flexibility for both learners and teachers. It enables immediate feedback, which can motivate learners and enhance learning and retention. However, research has shown that there is a disconnect between teachers' beliefs and perceptions about online assessment and their actual practices.

3. Purpose of the Study

The main goal of this study is to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices regarding online assessment methods. In today's digital age, it is crucial to comprehend how teachers manage the virtual landscape when evaluating students' learning skills. By exploring teachers' perspectives and methods, the researcher intends to reveal insights that can guide the creation of successful online assessment strategies to improve the quality and efficacy of remote education.

3.1 Research Questions

To accomplish the objectives of the research, a set of questions was formulated. The study focused on examining three specific research questions, which were targeted as follows:

- 1) How do university teachers perceive Online Assessment practices?
- 2) Are there any discrepancies between teachers' perceptions of online assessment and their actual practices?

Following these questions, it is hypothesized that:

1. The integration of online assessment methods into the teaching-learning process will result in noticeable improvements in students' learning quality and overall skill development.

2. Teachers' beliefs and misconceptions may lead to the misuse of online assessment practices.

4. Methodology

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, starting with surveys to gather broad data on teachers' perceptions, followed by interviews for deeper insights. By combining the quantitative and qualitative data during interpretation, the researchers gained a comprehensive understanding of teachers' thoughts and practices. Quantitative data analysis techniques, encompassing statistical procedures and mathematical methods, are employed to extract meaningful insights. However, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the subject matter, a qualitative approach is integrated to enhance the completeness of the study and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data aims to strengthen the validity of the study's findings, and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

4.1 Population and Sample

The research study was carried out at the University of Oran², located in Oran, Western Algeria during the second semester of 2023. The target population consisted of university teachers who were currently working and teaching first and second year students. This study aims to capture a comprehensive and representative sample that can offer valuable insights into the research topic. A sample of 30 teachers was selected randomly to participate in the study. The sample size was determined based on the need for a manageable yet representative group of teachers with diverse subject specializations. Sampling is an important constituent in field research because it is often neither possible nor desirable to collect data from the entire population (Best & Kahn, 1993). The researcher designated individuals and sites capable of furnishing pertinent insights essential for addressing the research inquiries at hand. The target teachers have a diverse range of teaching backgrounds, incorporating varying levels of pedagogical training and professional expertise. They hold university degrees in specialized fields such as linguistics, literature, and civilization, thereby bringing a rich experience

to the research landscape. Table 4.1 exhibits the sampling population used in this study.

Characteristics	Variables	No	Percentage%
Gender	Male	09	30
	Female	21	70
Level	Professor	09	30
	Associate professor	15	50
	nt professor	06	20
Teaching experience	5-10years	06	20
	10-19 years	15	50
	+ 20years	09	30
Characteristics	Variables	No	Percentage%
Gender	Male	09	30
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Teaching experience	5-10years	06	20
	10-19 years	15	50
	+ 20years	09	30

Table 4.1. Demographic information

The study found a relatively unbalanced group in terms of gender, with 70.0 % female and 30.0 % male. In regards to educational background, 80.0 % held a doctorate degree, while 20.0 % possessed a master's degree (magister's degree). Notably, 80.0 % of the lecturers have over 10 years of teaching experience, indicating a wealth of knowledge in conducting assessment practices. While, only 20% or 6 respondents had between 5 to 10 years of teaching experience. These findings suggest that the teachers in this study possess a strong foundation for assessment practices, due to both their educational attainment and extensive experience.

4.2 Instrumentation and Data Collection

A comprehensive data collection approach was used to gain a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The research collected quantitative data through a 15-item Likert scale survey designed to assess teachers' perceptions of online assessment methods, with items ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The survey covered key areas such as technological proficiency, fairness of assessments, and student engagement. This instrument provided valuable insights into the participants' attitudes, opinions, and preferences related to the research topic. Quantitative data was presented using descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean, while inferential statistics like correlation explored potential relationships between variables.

Besides, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 selected participants, allowing for a deeper exploration of their experiences with online assessments. Questions such as "How do you perceive the effectiveness of online exams compared to in-person exams?" provided valuable insights into the challenges and benefits teachers encountered. This combination of quantitative and

qualitative data aimed to create a well-rounded understanding of teachers' views on online assessments.

Additionally, a comprehensive classroom observation protocol was implemented to document the dynamic interactions and behaviours within the teaching-learning setting. This qualitative data collection method allowed for the detailed examination of teaching practices related to online

assessment environment. Pre- and post-observation interviews with teachers (T1-T30) offered valuable insights into instructional practices and thought processes. This triangulation of data sources— surveys, observations, and interviews – allowed for a vigorous examination of the research questions.

4.3 Reliability and Validity

Addressing the internal consistency of the research instrument is crucial for establishing trust in the study's findings. To this end, a Cronbach's Alpha (α) test was conducted using SPSS version 24. This analysis yielded a highly satisfactory score of 0.753, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.60 for reliability. This result suggests a strong internal consistency within the questionnaire, implying that the various items effectively measured the intended construct.

The initial draft questionnaire was critically reviewed by three college professors in Algeria who were recognized as content experts in the field of classroom assessment. Their expertise and insights were invaluable in scrutinizing the questionnaire for clarity, completeness, and coverage of various assessment and grading practices employed by teachers in teaching -learning settings. Based on the professors' analyses, necessary revisions were made to improve the questionnaire's quality and ensure its alignment with the research objectives.

Quantitative data were rigorously analyzed using descriptive statistics to effectively summarize responses and draw comparisons in perceptions across various groups. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were subjected to a detailed thematic analysis, with interview transcripts systematically coded into key themes like "teacher preparedness" and "assessment fairness." To enhance efficiency and accuracy, we utilized SPSS version

24 software to organize the qualitative data, ensuring a streamlined coding process. This rigorous approach to data analysis provided a robust foundation for understanding the diverse perspectives of teachers regarding online assessments.

5. Results of the Study

Teachers have increasingly adopted e-learning strategies to enhance their teaching methods and engage students in innovative ways. However, despite their confidence in utilizing various digital tools, it is striking to note that many teachers lack a comprehensive understanding of online assessment procedures and techniques. While they perceive online assessment as serving diagnostic, formative, and summative purposes, there seems to be a gap in their knowledge when it comes to effectively implementing these assessments in virtual learning environments.

Teachers' initial concept of e-learning acts as a guiding indicator in comprehending the intricacies of online assessment. Figure 5.1 shows that a noteworthy majority of teachers, encompassing 80% of the participants, acknowledged the importance of e-learning and e-assessment.

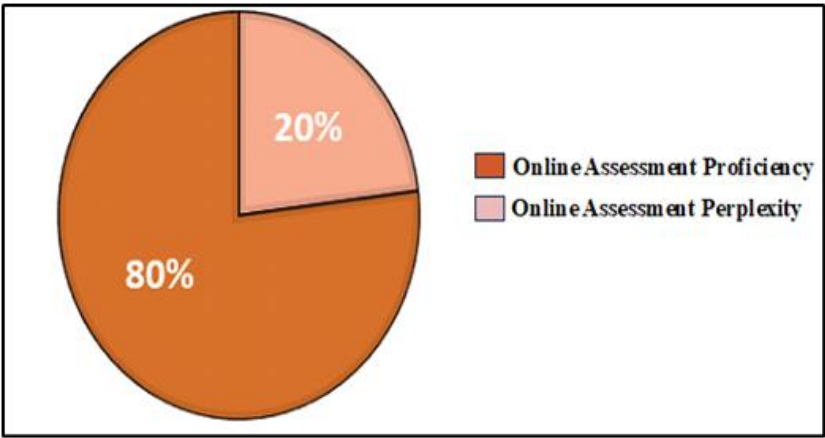


Figure 5.1: Teachers ‘view about online assessments

This suggests that most teachers possess a foundational understanding of the broader concept of e-learning, which can serve as a valuable starting point for exploring the techniques and significance of online assessment and its potential in revolutionizing higher education. However, it is worth noting that 20% of the surveyed teachers admitted to having little knowledge and clear understanding about e-learning and assessment. This disparity suggests a need for further research to explore the factors influencing teachers' online assessment understand of the diverse benefits and purposes associated with various forms of e-assessment.

6. Discussion of the Study

The findings provide interesting insights into the relationship between teachers' perceptions and their actual online assessment practices. Most teachers demonstrate deficiency to cope with the new era of digital assessment. This perception gap highlights a lack of knowledge and awareness among teachers regarding the broader scope and possibilities of online assessment.

6.1 Diagnostic Assessment

The study reveals that most teachers stated that their purpose of diagnostic assessment is to gauge students' previous knowledge and provide guidance to the students learning but in practice they were different from their views.

Diagnostic Assessment	N	Perception Mean	Practice Mean	Correlation Coefficient
Assessing students' previous knowledge	30	3.23	2.23	0.082ns
Bridging prior knowledge with new learning insights	30	3.37	1.90	0.131ns
Gauging students' misconceptions to foster understanding.	30	3.13	1.67	-0.139ns

N=Sample Size, ns=non-significant

Table 6.1 Diagnostic assessment

Table 6.1 reveals that teachers strongly agreed with the fact that diagnostic assessment in virtual classes is crucial to identify students' previous knowledge ($M=3.23$). They consider that bridging learners' prior knowledge with new learning insights ($M=3.37$) is the corner stone in the teaching learning process. Teachers clearly agreed ($M=3.13$) that assessing students' misconceptions, during the brain storming stage, contributes positively to promoting engagement and understanding.

In practice, a significant disparity arises at the onset of instruction and assessment activities. A majority of teachers fail to assess students' prior understanding and utilize it as a foundation for introducing new topics ($M=2.23$). However, a few teachers demonstrate efforts to actively engage learners using critical thinking strategies. Some teachers overlook the importance of assessing and bridging students' prior knowledge with new learning insights ($M=1.90$). They fail to actively engage learners in sharing their understanding of learning objectives related to the new topic. Some teachers hardly explore learners' misconceptions ($M=1.67$), neglecting the opportunity to address and correct misconceptions. Furthermore, they failed to adopt individualized instruction that aligns with the unique learning styles of each student at this learning stage.

The findings displayed in Table 6.1 show that there is no significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of diagnostic assessment strategies and their implementation in practice as the p-value exceeding 0.05. While, a weak positive correlation was observed between teachers' perceptions and practice regarding bridging prior knowledge with new learning insights, it is important to note that all results are statistically non-significant. This suggests a disconnect between how teachers perceive diagnostic assessment strategies and how they are actually implementing them into their teaching practices.

Various assessment methods can be employed to gauge prior knowledge, such as pre-tests, diagnostic quizzes, concept maps, and classroom discussions (Bransford et al., 2000; Vishnyakova et al., 2023). These assessments serve to identify knowledge gaps, misconceptions, and areas of strength and weaknesses, which in turn informs instructional strategies and content delivery.

6.2 Formative Assessment

Teachers showed their awareness of the importance of employing varied formative assessment strategies to evaluate students' learning practices. However, the practical implementation reveals limited online formative methods to assess students learning practices. Table 6.2 shows that teachers express a high level of agreement towards the implementation of diverse formative assessment techniques, with particular emphasis on assessing problem-solving activities ($M = 3.73$) and utilizing group work ($M = 3.03$) as effective tools for assessing students in online learning environments. Most significant, teachers placed paramount importance on delivering timely feedback ($M = 3.40$) to support student learning competencies. This focus on interactive and student-centred assessment practices suggests a commitment to promoting deeper understanding and fostering a dynamic learning environment.

Formative Assessment	N	Perception Mean	Practice Mean	Correlation Coefficient
problem solving assessment	30	3.73	2.87	0.191ns
group work assessment	30	3.03	2.83	0.094ns
Project-based assessment	30	3.67	1.40	0ns
Providing timely feedback.	30	3.40	3.07	0.259ns

Table 6.2 Formative Assessment

In practice, the average score relating to problem-solving statements (2.87) indicates that teachers demonstrated proficiency in this area. However, there's room for growth in designing instruction to align with diverse student needs. It is noted that teachers occasionally assigned equivalent activities and assessments to all student groups ($M=2.83$). Similarly, most of the teachers didn't use any project-based activities in their online classes ($M=1.40$). This finding underscores the need for improvement in terms of differentiating instructional practices to accommodate the diverse needs and abilities of learners. Furthermore, while teachers do provide feedback to encourage learners

whenever appropriate (mean = 3.07), there is still room for growth in this aspect. It is imperative for teachers to focus on refining their feedback strategies to ensure valuable support and encouragement for learners.

The findings presented in Table 6.2 show that teachers' perception about different formative assessment strategies and their actual practices in online classroom settings has no significant relation. Despite a weak positive correlation between teachers' perception and practice of statement no.1, the statistical analysis indicates that this relationship is not statistically significant, as the p- value is greater than 0.05. This suggests that even when teachers express strong agreement towards using a set of assessment methods, such as group work assessments, the actual implementation in practice does not align. This disconnect highlights a significant gap between pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices within the online classroom environment.

6.3 Summative Assessment

Teachers have acknowledged the importance of employing varied summative assessment strategies to evaluate students' learning practices. Table 6. 3 reveals a promising trend in teachers' commitment towards online assessment practices. Teachers express strong agreement with assessing both online written activities (M = 3.33), and providing written evaluative feedback (M = 3.40). This finding suggests that teachers recognize the importance of incorporating written assessments as a means to gauge students' understanding and skills in virtual learning environments. They also expressed their agreement with the idea of assessing learners' lower and higher order learning (M=3.03) on an equal footing. This finding reflects an equitable approach to assessment practices, where both foundational knowledge and higher-order thinking skills are given equal importance and aligns well with the online learning environment.

Summative assessment	N	Perception Mean	Practice Mean	Correlation Coefficient
Assessing learners 'written activities	30	3.33	3.13	0.21ns
Assessing learners'	30	3.03	1.47	0.255ns

higher order learning				
Providing written evaluative feedback.	30	3.40	2.47	0.193ns

Table 6.3 Summative assessment

In practice, teachers demonstrate proficiency in assessing learners' written activities (M=3.13). This suggests that teachers have developed effective strategies for evaluating students' written work. However, there was a noticeable lack of focus on assessing learners' higher order thinking skills (M=1.47). This indicates that only a limited number of teachers have embraced highly critical thinking assessment methods. Furthermore, the moderate use of written feedback (2.47) could be enhanced by a shift from generic negative comments to targeted, constructive criticism. Providing actionable feedback that highlights strengths and areas for improvement can foster a growth mindset among learners. This shift would empower learners to modify their learning strategies more effectively.

The results in Table 6.3 indicate that there is no significant relationship between teachers' perception of online assessment practices and their practical implementation, as the p value is greater than 0.05. This suggests that teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards online assessment do not necessarily align with their day-to-day instructional practices through online educational platforms. Although a weak positive correlation was observed between teachers' perception and practice of statement no. 1, this correlation was not statistically significant. This indicates that even when teachers strongly agreed on the importance of assessing students through written work, their actual implementation of this practice was limited. This discrepancy between perception and practice raises questions about the factors that may be influencing teachers' assessment decisions and the barriers they may face in translating their beliefs into action.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study show that university teachers generally hold positive views and demonstrate a solid understanding of effective assessment practices in the online environment. However, significant differences emerge when it comes to their actual implementation. In many cases, the target teachers struggle to effectively apply online assessment strategies or align their practices with their beliefs. This highlights a notable lack of correlation between teachers' perceptions and their current practices.

Teachers frequently prioritize summative assessment, resulting in a misalignment between their perceptions and actual practices about assessment. Their primary objective typically centers around testing students' knowledge and the extent of their memorization capabilities. To effectively support continuous student learning, teachers should adopt a facilitative approach that encourages the exploration of diverse and innovative assessment techniques. These may include self-assessment methodologies, problem-solving activities, evaluations of group work, and project-based assessments, among others. By applying these alternative approaches, teachers can foster a more comprehensive and dynamic learning environment.

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