

The Tussle of Using Online Language Assessment

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Abstract

To reach a considerable education efficiency, we need as an initial step to exploring stakeholders' perceptions about online language assessment experience. Accordingly, understanding teachers' perceptions about their experience of assessing language learners online and the obstacles that hindered their practices will help to bring insights towards future sound practices. For this aim, this paper reports the perceptions of English language teachers at the University of Biskra about online teaching and assessment experience and challenges during covid-19 period. An online semi-structured questionnaire was designed to depict the participants' perceptions about the online language assessment experience, the major challenges affected the process, and the effect of the online assessment on the teaching and learning processes. The collected data were treated statistically using the SPSS. Ultimately, the analysis showed that internet connectivity and lack of training to teach and assess online were the major issues the teachers confronted and prevented the online assessment to achieve its promising effects.

Keywords: Challenges, english language, language assessment, online assessment, teachers' perceptions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Obtaining the digital citizenship along ago, language teachers confronted the necessity to utilise the information and communication technologies' profits to valorise English language teaching. In this respect and alongside the covid-19 crisis, educational online technologies used for teaching the English as a foreign language (henceforth, EFL) reached a higher level of its use by a large population in different educational systems. Among the technologies used we can mention Moodle, MooC, among others, through which teachers transferred their lectures online and find an engaging environment where the teacher-student interaction was facilitated over time and through a variety of instruments.

Digital fluency helped language educators and testers to transform their work online, either blended or hybrid, during the covid-19 crisis that has urged the world to virtually unite. Using online sphere, considered the ultimate mode to keep the educational progress on the track when in person meeting was impossible, lead to raise interest -if not oblige- language teachers to use various information and communicative technologies tools (ICTs) and online platforms to deliver lessons, administer assessment and tests, and display results. Assumably, language classrooms are becoming resilient to the incorporation of technology at different stages of language learning, aiming to boost the interaction between language teachers and learners.

Using technology- or online-based assessment appeared as a cutting-edge issue not to only the teaching development but also the learning progress. Besides the use of classroom assessment as a facilitating tool for instruction and acquiring knowledge, online assessment is no exception. It helps to create a friendly-user environment that suits students with a strong technological background. Among the facilities online assessment could provide for language teachers are the ready-made templates, easy-made activities, organised, and timely feedback. Assessing students' performances virtually provides teachers with an appropriate checklists, rubrics, and scales.

Despite the integration of technology and the accessibility of different technological methods and knowledge in language classroom, decades ago, teachers still arrive to misuse the educational online technologies (EOTs) due to a variety of obstacles that sometimes lead to block the educational wheel. EOT could be challenging for teachers who lack knowledge, resources, training and motivation. In the light of approaching online language assessment as a teaching companion,

more interest needs to be devoted to develop online language assessment literacy and practices of teachers.

Understanding the major challenges and exploring teachers' perceptions seem to be a workable starting point to investigate ways of implementing online assessment, its effect, challenges, and the appropriate manners of its application. It is highly appreciated the link between teachers' beliefs and choices. Henceforth, investigating their perceptions will help researchers to put appropriate recommendations forward. Teachers' perceptions about their teaching experiences have remarkably been helpful to answer inquiries and try to reach sufficient understanding. It is believed that teachers' practices are highly affected by their perceptions and beliefs, which fall under the cognition effect on teachers' attitudes. Besides, teachers' knowledge could interfere with the choice, design, and administration of tests and assessment. That being the case, this paper aims to expose teachers' perceptions about online teaching and assessment, focusing on the challenges hindered the tasks' development. The coming sections reveal the results of an exploratory study on university English language teachers' perceptions about online language assessment challenges during covid-19 time after reviewing some literature about the study-related notions like online education, online language assessment, and teachers' perceptions

2. Literature Review

A discussion on teachers' perceptions about their online language assessment experience requires an elaboration on different areas. This section introduces an account on the concepts related to the present study. It mainly reveals three areas of interest, language assessment, technology in education, and the role of investigating teachers' perceptions.

2.1 Language Assessment

2.1.1 Language Testing and Assessment

Language testing and assessment refer to different processes with different objectives in different educational phases to collect information on the progress of not only learning but also teaching. On one hand, language testing has specific and guided objectives, setting, and construct. It is a periodic process in the language classroom seeking to track the development of learners in a specific topic and/or language items over specific time in a form of tests and quizzes. Language assessment, on the other hand, encompasses larger elements for judgment over a fair period of time through different methods, like tests, observation, projects, and

homework. The aim of the assessment could be either for learning or of learning. The former implemented by language educators to encourage the learners' language development and use. The latter aims to form judgments about the learning process of the students. All considered, the two types have decisive role in language classroom to be headed for. On the whole, language assessment is an ongoing process that collects learners' performances via formal or informal methods, encompassing testing which is administrative procedure of assigning scores to learners' ability (Brown, 2004, Weir, 2005).

2.1.2 Language Assessment and Instruction

Traditionally, assessment main focus was to spot the weaknesses at the end of the learning trajectory, yet, with the furtherance brought by language theories and teaching methods, language assessment treated as a process not a product (Al-Mahrooqi, 2017). It is approached as a companion to the teaching and learning processes, this is what is called by Black and Williams (1998) assessment for learning. It has its theoretical foundation in the social interactionist theory of Vygotsky (1970) which claims for providing the opportunity for learners to construct their own understanding through interaction with their community.

The role of language assessment in classroom over-performs the mere traditional way of presenting information and grading students on their knowledge and performances. It can provide a succinct guidance to instruction. Brown (2004) affirms on the integral role of assessment in the teaching process. He describes the different types of assessment over different periods of the instructional process. Prior to courses' delivery, Brown (2004) suggests that educators may use diagnostic assessment for two major reasons, to decipher learners strengths and weaknesses, and to design the learning goals and instructional paths which could be altered via discussing the results of the students in the formative assessment. At the end of the instructional process, educators use summative assessment for a larger judgement and making decisions about learners' future educational trajectory.

Among the aims of higher education is to develop knowledgeable and skilled individuals, who will be ready to join job market. This makes the assessment in higher education a sensitive stage that needs to be meticulously thought of and conducted for a developed academic career. On that account, assessment in higher education must pay close attention to learners' advancement and courses' specifinness. Capism (2018) details five levels of assessment in higher education. The two first levels describe assessment of students in a particular course, and over

a set of courses. The third level concerns evaluating courses followed by programme's assessment, which help in designing future courses, and make the appropriate changes for further advancement in the teaching as related to the courses needed for developing skills and knowledge. The last level is about assessing the institutions in terms of the success of the institution to prepare the learners in post-education life. More specifically, Archer (2017) affirms that successful education system is highlighted while the assessment purposes, accountability, certification, progress, and transfer, are respected in a balanced manner while designing and implementing assessment.

2.2 Technology in Education

The change in nowadays social needs has created an unavoidable use of technology which has provided easy access to information and knowledge. This has minimised the need for memorisation skills in education and assessment due to that learners are digital literates. Parsons, et al. (2019) believe that those learners build their own learning and knowledge through virtual observation, and interaction with which physical classrooms activities appear to be needless.

2.2.1 Online Education

Since nowadays learners are digital natives; they will probably be motivated to be assessed online (Al-Mahrooqi & Troudi, 2014). Online education is becoming the most prevalent educational mode due to the accessibility of courses for students while they cannot be present physically at campus. It accommodates the increasing overcrowded class size so the educators can find that the workload and materials costs are reduced. However, to conduct an effective online education system sounds tedious for many. For achieving good results from the online education, educators need to be equipped with electronic pedagogical and technical support and training for professional development (Welschuck, et al. 2019).

Educational online technologies (EOTs) prior to covid-19 crisis were used to stimulate engaging activities as a major aim of EOTs integration. Revre and Kovachi (2011) point that this aim could be failed due to educators' use of EOTs replicating the traditional classroom methods. However, to prevent the technologies from failing, they suggest that educators need to be responsible for building educational online communities, which they facilitate learning and interaction and promote collaboration sense of work inside the classroom. EOTs can promote the education only when they are used properly. This emphasises the importance of the role of teachers' knowledge and skills in using these technologies.

Online education is well established in academia, yet the efficiency of the designed online courses and the involvement of students which is regarded for high quality online education remains uncertain (Revre & Kovachi, 2011). Accordingly, educators' knowledge of the appropriate methods of integrating technology in education can be assuring to developed involvement, learner-centred environment and alive course content.

The optimum outcome of online education is to develop learners with interpersonal skills through the use of various communicative methods. Regarding the flexible schedule and different course choices that help learners to acquire knowledge at their own pace, and help teachers to use different methods and tools to design efficient communicative activities, Rai and Rajeshwari (2021) suggest that based on learning goals educators can use different online methods. For example, educators can rely on content sharing either interactive like online activities and surveys or non-interactive, which include virtual display of lectures on downloadable forms. Another method could be virtual classroom that make use of synchronous resources meeting learners via audio or video conferencing. Another form of online learning is to ask learners to work on team, sharing information and performing task in groups.

2.2.2 Online Assessment

It exemplifies a set of assessment activities that are submitted online. It was regarded as the only strategy to evaluate learners' skills, knowledge, and performances during and post covid-19 crisis. Although online assessment previously was used as an additional out classroom activity to boost the language learning and develop learners' self-reliance and autonomy (Morrison & Sepulveda-Escobar, 2022). Brown (2004) puts forward that online assessment helps to make the process of reporting assessment results easier and promotes the testing an individualised pursue, although it creates doubts about security, interaction, and the use of one type assessment.

Post covid-19 crisis reforms produced a new thinking about the role of assessment including the matter of contention about assessing the recalling of knowledge or the ability of its use. Aiming to implement communicative development assessment create a number of difficulties like the knowledge, workload, the design, methods that discourage plagiarism, and strategies that promote and motivate learning. Hughes and Tait (2021) claim that EOT affected the use of assessment strategies in the classroom. The effect included educators' knowledge and use of assessment practices as a tool of learning and a tool of

instruction guidance over different periods of the teaching. Assessment under the EOTs is treated as teaching and learning companion towards an efficient development.

2.2.3 Online Assessment Challenges

Different researches were conducted starting from the embark of the online education, aimed to understand the effect, efficiency and challenges of this newly experienced mode of learning. Studies sought to understand teachers' perceptions towards the move to this mode, teachers' practices, and learners' acceptability and preparedness to learn online. This section cites recently conducted studies on the challenges of using online education and assessment.

Mahyoob (2020) conducted a study with undergraduate learners in Saudi Arabia university for the aim to understand their attitudes towards E-learning. Although the majority of students showed a positive attitude towards their overall ability to use online services, few participants were able to submit and/or attend assignments. The participants similar to most of works on this topic have declared to suffer from internet connectivity, courses access, and difficulty to handle online assessment.

In order to investigate Algerian higher education teachers' practices and major challenges faced them when used online assessment, Rahmani (2021) used a survey-based questionnaire sent to teachers via their professional emails. The findings of this study included the discussion of three major points the types of assessment used, online assessment tools implemented, and the challenges hindered online assessment. During the pandemic period there was a divergence on the use of different types of assessment formative, summative, or both. Using the same face-to-face instructions, teachers used different online assessment methods, to mention few, the use of google meet and zoom for oral presentations, online written assignments, emailed projects or essays, and online tests via google forms.

Concerning the challenges, the participants in the study (Rahmani, 2021) listed a set of drawbacks of online assessment. They found that the lack of social contact in interaction with their students shaped the major issue in online testing because they were unable to observe the students' attitudes during the examination, which caused the most challenging phase of testing. Another salient problem was related to students' integrity that is due to the high level of cheating and plagiarism because there is no invigilation and the time given to learners allow the use of external unacademic practices. These were the major problems next to technical issues and the lack of training and knowledge of educational online technologies.

In the same vein and for the same objectives, attitudes towards online assessment, techniques use and challenges faced by teachers, Abduh (2021) surveyed and interviewed teachers of a Saudi Arabian University. Focusing on the challenges, the participants highlighted similar to previously mentioned challenges. Lack and low internet accessibility and technical issues were at the top of the issues. Moreover, the teachers also faced some obstacles when speaking skill was meant to be assessed. The participants assured the increase of the workload due to two factors. On one hand, the number of students creates a problem to handle and organise an administered online assessment. This can be scheduled and managed using specific technique related to each EOT. On the other hand, the second factor is related to questioning the integrity and validity of the online assessment due to the high risk of cheating and plagiarism, which will affect the real achievements of students. Training teachers can help them reduce the workload, get acquaintance with different technologies and tools.

2.3 Teachers' Perceptions

Rai and Rajeshwari (2021) advise with a training for teachers to develop professional skills meeting the needs of the new circumstances and helps to alter the previously acquired outdated practices and perceptions. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes according to Abdi and Asadi (2011 as cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2017) are generally generated from teachers' experiences with the process of teaching and learning as learners, experience from teaching, teachers' personality, and principles that are education-based and/or research-based. Another factor that affects the genesis of teaching and learners' perceptions is the influence of culture and religion (Kuskari, 2004, as cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2017)

Targeting beliefs' exploration in research studies helps in understanding the effect of beliefs in conceptualising of ideas, which reflect their cognitive processing and eventually result in teaching methods choice (Zhang, 2009, Li, 2012, as cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2017). They form the background for teaching planning, instructions, practices, and even their choice of assessment approaches.

English language educators to be in Chile after being informed in online assessment, they have changed their assessment perceptions. Regarding assessment reliability and authenticity, the participants started to focus on the role of assessment on improving learning and teaching in addition to checking on language proficiency (Morrison, Sepulveda-Escobar, 2022).

3. Statement of the Problem

During covid-19 time, the implementation of online education and online assessment at the Department of English language and Literature in the University of Biskra was at its fresh start although in previous times the university section of pedagogical quality organise annual teaching training including implementing the Moodle. The mere interaction happened was via Moodle, emails, and Facebook groups. For around a couple of months before the return to the university for two weeks of instruction and one week of examination teachers used different tools for tracking their learners' progress.

Regardless the online language assessment promising utilities, its sudden implementation created a challenging setting for teachers. The latter faced difficulties to carry out the instruction process. Based on the effect of assessment on teaching and seeking to develop the use of online assessment in the English Department setting, we believed that understanding teachers' perceptions about online assessment at the very beginning is the first step to take.

Henceforth, before the starting of the new academic year after the lockdown, we contacted teachers to report an investigation about their perceptions concerning the experienced challenges in assessment. We focused primarily on teachers' attitudes since they were the responsible about the major assessment tasks organisation and development. Through comprehending those perceptions, we may be able to make educated insinuation about the effects of online assessment on the learning process. The major aim of the study is to conceptualise a sound online assessment practice through understanding the major effects of online assessment on language instructions and learning. Hence, we seek to answer the following questions.

4. Research Questions

- 1- What are the main challenges that faced EFL teachers during assessing their learners online?
- 2- How do teachers react to the effects of post-covid technology integration in EFL assessment?

5. Aims of the Study

We sought to explore teachers' perceptions and practices in online assessment and try to understand the challenges they faced in order to make appropriate suggestions concerning the development of positive use of online assessment. This study is considered as a part of a larger exploratory PhD project

research which aims to understand the readiness of EFL higher education stakeholders to accept, implement, and rely on online and technology-based assessment. This work is regarded as an initiative towards calling EFL teachers to depend on technology to make their profession updated and innovative when necessary.

6. The Methodology for this Study

A process of detecting the truth about a significant phenomenon is “a voyage of discovery” (Kouthari, 2004). The latter refers to the process of conducting research studies, exploring different world issues for either better understanding of the issue at hand or ameliorate it and find solutions to it. Research can be carried out either through observation or experimentation for the sake of gaining knowledge and answering raised questions. To reach methodical results and answers, researchers find themselves before the choice of a strategic solid scientific research design to conduct their investigations. Creswell (2009) believes on the integrity of research nature on the choice of the suitable and appropriate research design.

Since we seek to explore teachers’ beliefs and perceptions, we opted for an exploratory research design which falls under a qualitative research (Creswell, 2009) because it supports small scale unresearched studies that deal with individuals’ point of views and routines’ (Danscombe, 2010). Moreover, seeking to understand participants’ interpretations of a given situation, their attitudes towards it, their behaviours and interactions (Cohen, et al. 2018) is considered to be investigated using exploratory design.

6.1 Population and Sample

The target population was teachers of EFL in higher education and particularly teachers at the University of Biskra. Referring to the University website, we selected 35 teachers’ emails and sent them the online questionnaire to which only 11 teachers responded. Hence, the used sampling technique is the opportunistic and purposive sampling because we have already targeted the participants to be best providers of information (Kumar, 2011). It is though that this is the technique that suits describing a social phenomenon meticulously.

6.2 The Sample Profiles

For the gender of participant, eight male and three female teachers have responded to the questionnaire, as for their age, seven teachers are between 20-40

years while the other four teachers are at the range between 41-60 years. The majority of teachers had 6-11 years of teaching experience while all teachers have online teaching experience span from 0-5 years. This relatively could help us to make a primary guess of teachers' attitudes and behaviours and knowledge of using technology in the education sector. The information about teachers' background could suggest that they will have a positive attitude and a relatively remarkable preparedness towards the integration. However, they would not have enough knowledge and skills to use different technologies.

6.3 Data Collection Method

We designed an online open-ended questionnaire via google forms. This tool is selected for different reasons. On one hand, the period of conducting the research was still lockdown and it was impossible to meet various teachers face to face and hand them the printed copy of the questionnaire or conduct an exploratory in-depth interview. On the other hand, online questionnaires as a tool to collect data pave the way to meet the appropriate conditions to meet an exploratory design of the study with the minimum efforts in terms of time, cost, and design and administration (Dorney, 2003).

The designed online questionnaire included two main parts: The first section collected demographic information, and the second section collected online assessment challenges the teachers faced, in addition to their perceptions about the online assessment knowledge and the effect of online assessment on their teaching practices and on the students' learning.

7. Data Analysis Results

The data from the questionnaire were collected over one month. they were analysed using SPSS software and for the questions that required long answers were analysed thematically. Throughout this section, the results from the online questionnaire are displayed and interpreted regarding the original order of the elements as they appear in the survey.

7.1 Demographic Information

This section will help us to understand the background of the sample and help us to model the characteristics of the meantime EFL teachers at the higher education. This kind of data are collected due to the importance of background knowledge and experience effect on the practices and beliefs, in general.

Table 1. Teachers' Profiles

Variables	Gender		Age			Teaching experience span (years)				Online teaching experience span (years)			
	Male	Female	20-40	41-60	More than 60	0-5	6-11	12-17	18-23	More than 24	0-5	6-11	More than 11
Frequency	8	3	7	4	0	3	4	3	1	0	11	0	0
Percentage	27.3%	72.7%	63.6%	36.4%	00%	27.3%	36.4%	27.3%	9.1%	00%	100%	0%	00%

The table above summarises the profile of the teachers which was mentioned in the section above (refer to section 6.2). We can assume from the years of experience and the years of technology integration of teachers that this sample is able to manage online courses and tests. The sample appears to be fairly knowledgeable with the technological advances. This will be verified via the answers of the participants throughout the coming sections. We will try to understand whether or not the educational transfer to online mode created few challenges to the sample regarding the majority of teachers are among the millennium of computer.

7.2 Online Language Assessment Challenges

This section forms the heart of the survey and the study. It depicts the major related issues to the challenges faced during online assessment by university teachers. We first tried to understand their perceptions about the overall online assessment experience, the challenges they faced, and the participants' perceptions about the possible effects of online assessment on teaching and learning. This will help us for future online learning planning.

7.2.1 Perceptions of Teachers about their Experience of Assessing Language Learners' Online

The majority of teachers showed that online assessment cannot be trusted because of the lack of validity of tests. One of the participants showed that they have no experience with the online assessment. Some of the teachers expressed their satisfaction with this mode of assessment yet they have pointed to the fact the nature of assessment is challenging to deal with.

7.2.2 Teachers' Knowledge about the Online Assessment Methods

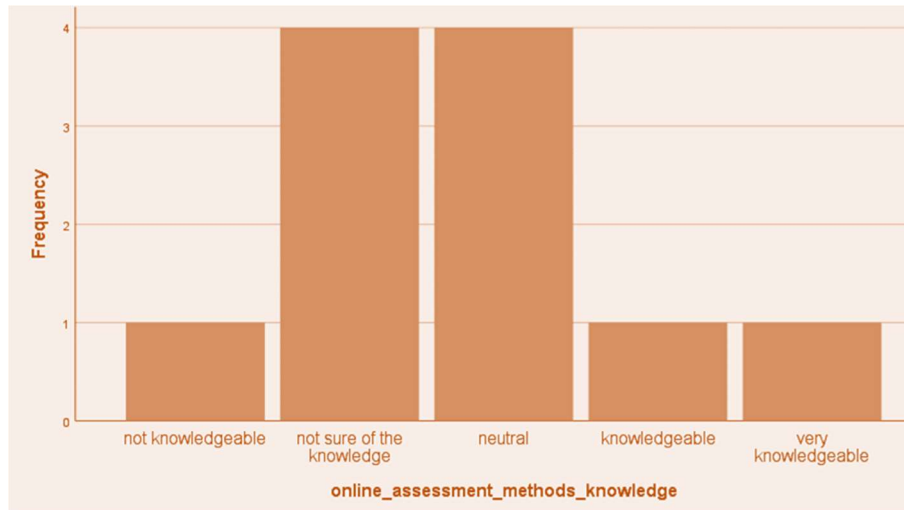


Figure 1. Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy

Teachers are not knowledgeable enough about their assessment knowledge. They are unable to identify their knowledgeable level about language assessment. This is mainly due to the lack or insufficient language assessment background teachers possess.

7.2.3 Online Assessment Challenges

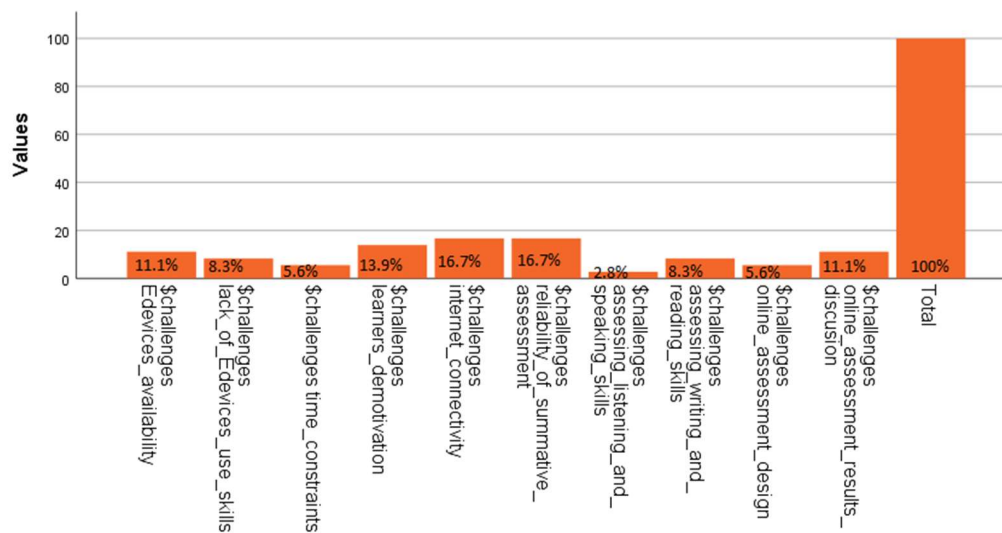


Figure 2. Online Assessment Challenges

The three top challenges that teachers suffered from are the reliability of summative assessment, internet connectivity, and learners' demotivation to participate. The second range of the challenges include the results discussion, E-devices availability and the skills of its use, and assessing writing and reading ability. The time constraints and assessment design were the least challenging. Other difficulties teachers faced during the online teaching with assessment are the lack of training to use online assessment, credibility of students' answers, and the lack of immediate feedback. We can assume that training, time management, in addition to stressful circumstances can be the noticeable sources of challenges.

7.3 The Effect of Online Assessment on Teaching

While the majority found that the online assessment had no major effects on their instruction, one of the teachers suggested that online assessment is a promising form, yet it still stuck with the traditional assessment. However, there are some of the participants who believe that online assessment made their teaching instructions more facilitated and effective. Moreover, it helped to provide opportunities for students for interaction. Besides, online assessment aided to diagnose students' autonomy.

7.4 The Effects of Online Assessment on Learning

On one hand, similarly to their perceptions of the effects of online assessment on teaching, some of the teachers agreed on the uncertainty about the existence of effects on learning, while a teacher stated that online assessment could negatively affect the learning process due to plagiarism and cheating, benefiting

only language learners. On the other hand, teachers found that online assessment is useful to track their learners' progress and comprehension. Others found it motivating and entertaining as one of the teachers mentioned their students' feedback,

8. Discussion of the Results

As noticed from the results, unexpectedly, the majority of teachers expressed their dissatisfaction on the use of online assessment since there were no remarkable effects on their teaching instructions and their students' learning. This goes in hand with the results found by different studies (Rahmani, 2021; Mahyoob, 2020) that claimed that online assessment relatively failed to reach the predisposed objectives,

The major online assessment challenges for teachers were internet connectivity, reliability issues, and technical problems with the platforms and infrastructure, similarly, Mahyoob (2020) and Alharbi, Alhabshi and Meccawy (2021) found that in addition to internet connectivity, time constraints, and reliability and validity issues (Abduh, 2021),

Another impeding challenge that different research studies agree upon is the lack of training, assessment, and electronic knowledge (Ja'ashan, 2020; Abduh, 2021; Rahmani, 2021). However, there was a moderate satisfaction with the effects of online assessment, for example, it helps in indicating the autonomy and motivation of learners despite the low interaction between teachers and learners.

9. CONCLUSION

Digital proficiency aided language teachers and testers in transforming their hybrid online work. Teachers were able to move their lectures online and discover an interesting atmosphere with the aid of a variety educational online technologies. At various stages of language acquisition, it is likely that language schools are becoming more adaptable to the incorporation of technology. Teachers are given the chance and the tools use while evaluating the performance of their students online. The present study revealed how teachers view online evaluation, instructors' perceptions impact on their practices, and the major challenges that affected those practices.

Although the sample was not fairly representative, discussing the challenges can provide an insightful conclusion about the needs of teachers to achieve the expected teaching and learning progress. To conclude, further and deeper research about the level of teachers' assessment literacy, the use of online assessment for

learning, and the relationship between online assessment and learners' autonomy are highly recommended.

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