EFL Teachers' Challenges on the Usage of Online Assessment Methods

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges that EFL teachers face while assessing their students online and to find out some solutions EFL teachers can adopt to overcome the challenges of online assessments. The study has followed the descriptive approach by investigating some previous studies that shed the light on the online assessment that done by EFL teachers. According to most of previous studies, the results of this study show that most of EFL teachers face challenges when using online assessment methods. the severity of these challenges is the iinternet cost and connection all the studies which were investigated by the researchers have these findings. Then, comes lack of digital literacy, less motivated and discouraged students and academic dishonesty respectively. The study recommends that EFL teachers should improve their computer literacy to be able to manage computers well or to operate a basic online platform. In addition, teachers should adopt effective and interesting teaching materials and techniques to increase students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning.*

KEYWORDS: Assessment, Challenges, EFL teachers, Online, Methods.

INTRODUCTION

Assessments play a major role in students' experiences within a course. The main objective of assessments for students is to demonstrate their achievement of the course learning outcomes, for formative feedback, a grade, or for a pass. However, they are much more than that, often, assessments are the biggest source of motivation for students and drive their decisions of when and how to study (Boud, 2010).The appearance of COVID-19 pandemic led to the global lockdown which has affected all the aspect of life including the educational sector. The sudden shutdown of most educational organizations affected about 186 countries in the world (WHO, 2020). This lockdown forced the educational sector to look for some solution to complete the academic year, as well as to find alternative methods to evaluate the students' performance. So, most of educational institutions activated distance learning and, suddenly, teachers and learners were separated and had to start online classes. One of the most important parts of this online teaching and learning is the assessment methods that have to adopt to evaluate the students' performance as these methods have not been known by both teachers and learners. Hence, the present situation demanded an online form of assessment of

the students which was earlier being done on pen paper mode. However, the transition to online assessments without adequate preparation has caused problems in different aspects in the process of education. Absence of basic needs has negative impact on the quality of assessments and the extent of this impact is worth researching.

From the above discussion, the researchers have aimed at investigating the main challenges that EFL teachers face when applying online assessment methods to evaluate the students' performance. Another objective of this study is to find out how these teachers overcome the challenges of online assessment especially for those who are often adopting the traditional methods of paper-based assessments.

The significance of this study comes from the fact that, the study was conducted to investigate important topics concerning the applications of online assessment methods by EFL teachers. The study has discussed the teachers challenges in applying online assessments from various aspects such as technological, pedagogical, affective, and administrative grounds. In addition, some solutions are provide in order to help EFL teachers to adapt their online assessment practices in the new context. Since the educational system is at the beginning of exploring different aspects of the online assessment, the results of the present study will guide EFL teachers to do the online assessments practice in an informed way and hence improve their practice in similar contexts in the future.The results of this study will, also, help administrators, EFL teachers and professional development experts with the modern aspects of online learning and teaching and how to implement EFL online classrooms and overcome any challenges. So, they will have the ability to make better-informed decisions.

Problem of the Study
There are some certain considerations need to take place before starting online teaching, especially for teachers who are used to face-to-face classes as most of university EFL teachers did not receive much training to prepare for online remote teaching (Jones, 2020). The main problem of this study is that most of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia have encountered many barriers with the online assessment of the students. These teachers follow the same traditional assessment methods which is used in face-to-face classes and some of these traditional assessment methods do not fit within an online teaching and may negatively affect the quality of assessments process.

This study has aimed at investigating the ELT teachers' challenges when using online assessment for undergraduates' students. Building on the above ground, the present study was conducted to answer the following two research questions in the particular context of the present study:

1. What are the challenges that face EFL teachers' when using online assessment?
2. How can EFL teachers overcome the challenges of online assessment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessments are crucial aspect of the teaching and learning process in higher education, because, assessments indicate the progress of the students to both the teacher and university. In addition,

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assessments give the students a clear vision about their final assessment, so they will be able to put a plan and an indication of future exams. Assessment is commonly considered as a scheduled process in which diverse activities of assessment are organized to gain students' learning report, which leads to the future adjustment of the teaching and learning process (Looney, 2011 as cited iChen et al., 2021). As one type of assessment for learning, assessment is simply defined as the various techniques (cards, diagnostic tests, group discussions, peer-to-peer sharing, set inductions) used by the teacher to examine the comprehension and knowledge of students. This kind of assessment enables teachers to recognize the students' needs, wants, and lacks (Ibragimova, 2021). Thus, the teacher could specify which skills that students are struggling with or are difficult to face in order to create better and appropriate learning.

Due to the modern technology and online learning tools and systems, an online assessment format has become an efficient means of assessing students in such systems (Appiah & Tonder, 2018). In the words of Webber (2012, p. 202), assessment refers to "activities designed primarily to foster student learning" (Timmis, et al, 2016). However, this leads to a critical question that whether online assessments are valid when comparing to the traditional methodologies due to the fact that students can use to their advantage a wide range of forbidden tools and therefore there are many critiques of current e-assessment policies (Graff, 2004). Moreover, researchers indicated the utilizing online assessment for their classroom and giving immediate feedback to the students.

As Osuji (2012) stated that online assessment possesses quick feedback as compared to paper tests. It is improving students' autonomous learning, creating a collaborative learning atmosphere, and developing their critical thinking. This is relevant to Gilbert et al. (2011) which stated that E-assessment can enhance the students' performance such as autonomous learning and critical thinking. On the other hand, other researchers also denoted in utilizing online assessment such as easy and fast in scoring as well as flexible in time and place of to do assignments. This is in line with Remmi and Hashim (2021), which revealed that online assessment is manageable and easy to use. It is also relevant to Alruwais et al. (2018) which claimed that E-assessment can alleviate the burden on teachers to assess a large number of students. However, the   put more emphasis on which can avoid the boredom felt by students and teachers. As Remmi and Hashim (2021) stated that attracting students' interest is one of the online assessments.

Definition of Online Assessment
In online education, the term 'online assessment' is defined as an assessment approach where the students can utilize online tools to test themselves (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Through online assessments, students gain feedback to make self-assessment that led to their decision to enhance their learning. Studies on online assessment indicate that it has a great number of affordances. Several studies reveal that the usage of online assessment provides students with more comprehension towards materials (McCallum and Milner, 2020; Remmi and Hashim, 2021), promotes students' learning (Chen et al., 2021; Ibragimova, 2021), and enhances the ability to assess their progress and evaluate their learning (McCallum and Milner, 2020). Besides, more importantly, by implementing online assessment students can develop their language and digital literacy skills (Ibragimova, 2021).

Parshall and others (2002) define electronic assessments as the usage of information technology methods to assess the learners' activities. Recently, and according to this modern technology, traditional assessment of using paper-and-pencil testing is now seen as outdated methods compared to information technology techniques in teaching, learning and assessments (Pangali, 2003). Therefore, knowledge of computer techniques and its applications has become a necessity not by choice, but due to the requirements and standards set by industry where there is a need for trained and digitally literate personnel. This has evolved into an increased demand for electronic assessments for training and education (Alruwais, Wills, Wald, (2018). Thus, applying software assessments in higher education now is crucial for obtaining a more accurate and faster method to assess students, rather than traditional paper-based assessments (Benson, (2003).

According to Benson (2003), the process of assessment has the same principles if it is done online or traditionally. Because, online assessment is governed by the same principles of validity, flexibility and fairness and has its own strategies as traditional assessment methods (Booth et al. 2002). According to Hricko and Howell (2006), one of the important considerations for effective software assessment is to choose appropriate tools which incorporates all the importance elements of assessment, fits the mode of delivery and legitimately measures the desired outcome (Aller, et al, 2002) Therefore, teachers, schools and students can have good chance to be benefit from the electronic assessment process, especially, when there is a good relationship between learning outcome and assessments.

Teachers' challenges of Online Assessments
Assessment is a very sensitive activity where the teacher must take extra care when formatting it. Although online assessment of the learners has been in place for many years most of teachers who are used to teaching face to face believe that traditional assessment is always reliable and valid, because through regular testing teachers can monitor the students' progress and further offer required material. Osman (2020) claimed that "The assessment of students' performance in online environments remains to be a challenge to both instructors and students, particularly the assessment of practical skills, technical competencies, and teaching practicum" (Ali & Alhassan, 2021: 9) On the other hand, assessing students at a distance, proved to be more complex and challenging and has many drawbacks and the worst of which is to increase the chances of students' cheating. Contract cheating, according to both teachers and learners, is a growing problem that many academic institutions suffer from it. To make matters worse, it is difficult to spot ghostwritten work because it is a new piece of writing tailored to course requirements and specific assignments.

In addition, assessment in online learning contexts has been discussed at the international level as online learning can be under the threat of cheating, plagiarism, dishonesty, and impersonation (Peytcheva-Forsyth et al., 2018). At the local level, Bensaid and Brahimi (2021: 12) mentioned that "it is difficult to analyze students' outcomes, measure the applied evaluation process, or evaluate the extent to which student learning outcomes are being effectively attained as per the requirements of respective accreditation bodies".

In fact, the transition from the physical classroom-based traditional assessment to a virtual one caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 has had a far-reaching impact on different aspects of the classroom-

based assessment. In this regard, many studies have investigated different variables such as lack of contact with the instructors, poor digital literacy, and lack of effective interaction and feedback mechanism (Holmes & Gardner, 2006; Kanaan et al., 2013; Masa'deh et al., 2013; Tarhini et al., 2013) [19].

Previous studies

Among different aspects involved in online assessment, understanding the way teachers implemented online assessment including their perceptions, the challenges they faced, and their coping strategies are important. There are some of the studies conducted to investigate the challenges that most of EFL teachers face on online assessment methods.

Salameh & Hawarna (2023) have done qualitative study to investigate the challenges in implementing online assessment strategies to improve EFL students' proficiency. The study revealed that the difficulties encountered EFL teachers included a slow internet connection, high internet quota costs, limited access to computers and smartphones, insufficient digital technology proficiency, and difficulty. On the same way, Dewi and others (2023), conducted a descriptive qualitative study that aimed at exploring online assessment strategies used to assess writing and the challenges encountered by EFL teachers during the assessment. The results showed that EFL teachers faced some prominent challenges included academic integrity, time allocation, punctuality, Internet access, and guidance and feedback.

Alsahli and Meccawy (2022) investigate challenges faced by EFL Teachers and Learners in online writing assignments. The study aimed at determining the challenges faced by EFL teachers and learners when using Blackboard (LMS) to provide and receive online corrective feedback on writing assignments. The findings revealed that the main obstacles were related to language proficiency, technical and communication challenges, and the amount of time and effort required. Another study that was conducted by Mariadi Mariadi (2022), which aims to find out the challenges of online assessment in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic disruption among EFL teachers, and the solutions to meet these challenges. The findings showed that the five primary challenges of online assessment are; uneasiness, technical problems, time-consuming process, late submission, and academic dishonesty.

In a study conducted by Yulianto and Mujtahin (2021) examined the ELT teachers' perspectives and practices on the use of online assessment during COVID-19. This study revealed the teachers got some obstacles while conducting the assessment test such as; the internet connection, the validity of the assessment, and the low of students' enthusiasm. Dicky Meiantoni ,et al (2021), has done a study describes online assessment practices as well as the challenges faced by the EFL teachers. The findings show that EFL teachers found some challenges such as internet connection, the different level of students' intelligence, students' low motivation, and EFL teachers' lack of computer skills. In her study concerning EFL teachers' perceptions about online assessment during COVID -19 Lockdown, Abdu, M (2021), finds that most items related to teachers' perceptions of challenges encountered in online assessments, scored high/very high means which indicated that teachers faced serious challenges in assessing students online. Zboun & Farrah (2021), that aimed to elicit EFL students' perspectives towards benefits and challenges of online classes. The finding of this study

showed that the most challenges of online learning from students perspectives are; the weak internet connectivity, poor interaction, less motivation, less participation and less understanding.

Arif (2020) who also studied the challenges and the possible solutions by investigating the implemented of online assessment done by the English language teachers and how to overcome the challenges they faced. The results showed that the teachers faced several challenges such as misunderstanding of the given instruction, internet connectivity, and difficulty in scoring. On the same way, Guangul et al. (2020) examine the challenges of remote assessment in higher education institutions following the COVID-19 incident, using Middle East College as a case study. The study concentrated on the difficulties associated with remote assessment in general and academic dishonesty specifically. So, academic dishonesty, infrastructure, coverage of learning outcomes, and students' commitment to submit assessments were identified as the primary challenges in remote assessment.

The Current Study
Long before the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning or online one through the integration of the technology has been used in many tertiary institutions in Saudi Arabia. However, during the period of this pandemic the transition to online teaching was an additional provision and not as the whole replacement of the course. Therefore, since online mode of educational delivery has become the "new normal" in many tertiary education contexts around the world and also considering the power-coercive and unplanned nature of the change, a coherent research program is needed to investigate the change in different tertiary education contexts. In addition, considering that the professional development of teachers happens in the situated contexts of face-to-face practice, therefore, investigation of the particular challenges the teachers faced in the online assessment would help improve the quality of online assessment programs in the local contexts of practice. on the other hand, quality research on the lived experiences of the EFL teachers dealing with online assessment is lacking. so, the present study was conducted to answer the following two research questions in the particular context of the present study:

-What are the challenges that face EFL teachers' when using online assessment?
-How can EFL teachers overcome the challenges of online assessment?

DISCUSSION

Overall, most of the previous studies and the relevant materials available as well as the current study have revealed the following challenges that most of EFL teachers face in online assessment:
- Internet cost and connection,
- Lack of digital literacy,
- Less motivated and discouraged students,
- Academic dishonesty

The most challenge that has impact on implementing of online assessment is the internet cost and connection which create great difficulties and become a hot issue because not all students and teachers have WiFi in their houses, particularly in remote or rural areas. Additionally, the speed of internet

connection is not always at their home. As a result, some students are less enthusiastic about doing online tasks due to the lack of internet connection as well as some teachers are not able to login to do the assessments. Moreover, both students and teachers consume lots of internet data (Wibowo & Novitasari, 2021) and most of them often complain that online classes as general need a lot of internet data and costs. There are many studies that their findings reveal that challenge encountered by EFL teachers have related to internet cost and connection. For instance, the study of Salameh & Hawarna (2023), Dewi and others (2023), Alsahli and Meccawy (2022), Mariadi Mariadi (2022), Yulianto and Mujtahin (2021), Dicky Meiantoni ,et al (2021), Zboun & Farrah (2021) and Arif (2020) are all have the same results.

Lack of digital literacy is also considered challenging that face EFL teachers when conducting online assessment. This finding is relevant to Salameh & Hawarna (2023) who found that insufficient digital technology proficiency and difficulty is one of the challenges that face EFL teachers. This finding is also as the same as in the study of Alsahli and Meccawy (2022), Mariadi Mariadi (2022) and Dicky Meiantoni and others (2021).

It is clearly shown that many students feel less motivated in an online class (Zboun & Farrah, 2021) because they prefer to interact physically in the classroom in order to participate more [32]. Subsequently, these less motivated students were often late in submitting the assignments or did not collect the tasks until the due date expired. Dewi and others (2023), Yulianto & Mujtahid, (2021), Dicky Meiantoni ,et al (2021) have the same findings in their studies.

Academic dishonesty was the other major challenge with online assessment although this finding is not revealed in many studies. It was only relevant to the study of Mariadi Mariadi (2022) and Guangul et al. (2020). In fact, the security of online exams or cheating issue was a major concern raised by many teachers including the researchers themselves. Most of teachers who are used to teaching face to face believe that conducting assessments online have many drawbacks and the worst of which is to increase the chances of students' cheating. Internet usage itself may encourage the students for cheating and is considered a catalyst for this behavior (Roldán, et al, 2019).

Many teachers try to overcome the challenges of online assessment by changing their teaching strategies and assessment methods. For example, teachers often look for a suitable platform for all students such as WhatsApp group and Google Classroom. Beside asking the students to come to schools use the school facilities provided namely Wi-Fi, computer, and handbooks so that problem concerning internet cost and connection may be reduced. some teachers replacing close-book exams with open-book ones and open camera is activated during the exams in order to reduce the academic dishonesty. Teachers also look for train programs to improve their technological knowledge and increase the digital literacy. To overcome the problem of less motivated and discouraged students teachers can prepare an interesting learning media such as video and YouTube to increase students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

FINDINGS

Based on the study discussion above, it has showed that many EFL teachers experienced the same main challenges, namely the unstable internet network connection. In addition, EFL teachers also need more time to prepare online assessments as well as to adapt and learn the media that will be used. Besides the technological struggles, there are many teachers could not trust in the technology as a reliable assessment tool. On the other hand, lack of motivation and support for students, and low levels of student understanding of the technology used as online assessment media create new problems that arise for teachers when implementing online assessments in English classes. In addition to these challenges, cheating on online tests is easy and simple which cannot be controlled. Accordingly, teachers try to make the tests in a way that the answer of its questions cannot be acquired easily from textbooks and teachers, still, look for solutions to lower the chance of cheating in the online exams. This make the process of creating exams more difficult and upload the teachers with some additional efforts. Therefore, most of EFL teachers experience several challenges that hinder them in the online assessment process.

Recommendations

- EFL teachers should improve their computer literacy to be able to manage computers well or to operate a basic online platform.
- Schools must be equipped with necessary technical learning material and support facilities so students can do their exam inside the schools.
- Teacher should adopt effective and interesting teaching materials and techniques to increase students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning.
- Teacher needs to decrease the score to cheat by preparing different exams or question banks, using open camera and putting restrictions such as making the exam available on LAN and disconnect the internet.

Limitations

As in all studies, certain limitations constrained this study and the scope of the collected data. The study was conducted only in a limited descriptive approach which investigated a number of related studies. So, the outcomes would be more generalizable if a qualitative and empirical approaches were used in the study. In addition, most of the related studies investigate the target topic during the period of 19- COVID pandemic. Thus, the discoveries may not be summed up to other period during normal situation.

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