

THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS ON ONLINE ASSESSMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Most higher education institutions have been conducting all classes online during the COVID-19 pandemic and thus assessments have to be conducted online too. It is a very new thing for some students as all these while they have been taking test or exam in a conventional way. Various feedbacks regarding online assessment have been received from students, some are positive and some are negative. Although online assessment increase in use, not many research has been conducted on students' perceptions of online assessment. It is important to investigate the students' perceptions of this mode to get their feedback and thus, enable the administrators to improve what is lacking in the future. This paper will share some of the perceptions of students in a Malaysian public university regarding online assessment during the pandemic. Online assessment has become a common thing for most students as they have gone through this for two semesters ever since the pandemic started. However, many respondents hope that the online assessment system improve as time goes by in order to lessen problems especially among new students in the future.

Keywords: Online Assessment, COVID-19, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Online assessments have been the in-thing for most students when the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. All classes in most higher education institutions were instructed to be conducted online, hence, assessments have to be done online too. Assessments include all sorts of assessments such as written test, oral test, listening test, mid-semester test as well as final exam. No face-to-face test was allowed. Due to this, academicians have to make needful preparation. All types of assessment have to be tailored to online platform. This however has affected a number of things such as marking scheme, rubrics, time allocation, just to name a few. Many factors have to be taken into consideration too, for example, internet connection problem, students sharing device with siblings, bad weather (heavy rain) and inconducive environment.

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of online assessment. The research questions are :

1. What is the students' competence with computers?
2. What are the prior experiences of students for online assessment?
3. What are the perceptions of the students of online assessment?

BACKGROUND

Many concerns emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in a language learning environment. Among the often mentioned concerns are the quality of online learning experiences, lack of digital literacy, as well as access to technology. According to Bhagat and Kim (2020), educational institutions have to be digital resilience and enhance their role in order to provide students with support for online learning. The world over, the COVID-19 pandemic has been changing the face-to-face education landscape. Therefore, online teaching and learning infrastructures should be established by addressing one of the integral parts of education- online assessment. This support will reduce the apprehension faced by students who are grappling with the inadequacy of learning online. The adoption of a distance learning model based on an innovative technological platform with diversified learning elements will allow the implementation of the education 4.0 paradigm, in which student learning is personalised and supported by a diverse set of collaborative tools (Almeida & Simoes, 2019; Hussin, 2018).

Previous Studies on Online assessment during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rosa Amalia (2018) stated that students' perception is essential as it provides some insights to the educators on their thoughts about doing the assessments online, the obstacles they face, the types of online assessments they prefer and how to carry out an effective online assessments that meet the students' needs.

A study by Almeida and Monteiro (2021) explored the challenges posed to evaluation models in a Portuguese higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study looked into the relevance of formative and summative assessment models and the perception of teachers and students about the practices adopted in remote assessment. The findings suggest there is a high concern among teachers about adopting fraud-free models and an excessive focus on the summative assessment component. Students on the other hand stated problems regarding equipment to follow class sessions and concerns about their privacy, particularly when intrusive IT solutions request the access to their cameras, audio, and desktop. Guangul et al. (2020) conducted a study in a college focusing on the challenges of remote assessment in general and academic dishonesty in particular. The study found that in remote assessment the main challenges identified were academic dishonesty, infrastructure, coverage of learning outcomes, and commitment of students to submit assessments. The solutions offered to minimize academic dishonesty was assigning different questions for each student and online presentation. Furthermore, combining various assessment methods such as report submission with online presentation also helped to minimize academic integrity violations as the examiners would have the chance to verify that the work submitted was indeed the work of the student.

A study conducted by Noradila Iskandar et al. (2021) investigated the students' perceptions of online assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic in University Putra Malaysia (UPM). Online method assessment was introduced to cope with the restrictions imposed by the government to

contain the pandemic. The study explored the perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students on online assessment, compare the students' perception towards online assessment as well as to identify the challenges they faced to complete the assessment. The findings of the study revealed that both undergraduate and postgraduate students prefer traditional assessment to online assessment as traditional assessment provides more effective feedback and has lower possibilities of cheating compared to online assessment. The study also found that postgraduates are more open and comfortable with online assessment compared to the undergraduate students as they think that online assessment is easier, more practical and offers more flexibility in terms of time, place and costs.

Previous Studies on Online Assessment

Kearns (2012) investigated the types of assessment methods being used in online courses and the ways in which the online environment facilitates or constrains particular methods. She found that challenges stemmed from the impact of physical distance between the instructor and the students, adaptations resulting from the necessity of using technology for communicating with students, workload and time management issues, and the ongoing need to collect a variety of assessment data and provide feedback.

In 2016, Petrisor et al. conducted a study to identify the perception of medical students in using an online web-based assessment method. Petrisor et al. found that most of the students preferred online assessment methods than the other types of assessments such as the traditional pen and paper examination. It is also found that the potential reason for selecting the online assessment method is that the students are exposed to it over a long period of time.

Alsadoon (2017) explored students' perceptions of E-assessment at Saudi Electronic University. The e-assessment formed an important part of the learning management system of the university. It was found that students had positive perceptions of e-assessment and valued its features such as immediate feedback and unbiased grading.

Rosa Amalia (2018) explored students' perception and challenges toward online assessment. The findings revealed that the students have both positive and negative perceptions toward online assessment. The students also encountered few challenges like time constraint and poor network connection.

Sarah Khan and Rashid Azim Khan (2018) conducted a study on university students' perspectives of using online assessments and found that the need for online assessment was not appreciated and accepted by the students.

More recently, Howe (2020) investigated the students and lecturers' perceptions of e-assessment at the institute of Development Management in Eswatini. It was found that both students and lecturers have positive perceptions towards the use of e-assessment.

The studies reviewed traced the development of online assessment from the year 2004 to the present. The studies highlighted the students' perception towards the use of online assessments in the teaching and learning process in various contexts. The present study is about the undergraduates' perception towards the implementation of online assessment in University Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

This present study aims to investigate students' perceptions of online assessment. The participants were 21 male and 49 female students of first year degree in a public university in Malaysia. A questionnaire was distributed online to the students in order to get their feedback. The questionnaire was adapted from Ozden, Erturk & Sanli (2004). The data was then analysed and presented in tables.

DISCUSSION AND FINDING

Students' Competency

The first question asked was their level of competency in using the Internet. Many students are well-versed with the Internet, especially the new generation. They have been exposed to the Internet since they were in their primary school. However, for education purpose, the data is presented in the table below. In terms of using web browser, majority (75.7%) said that they are good at it while 14.3% said that they are of the advanced level. However, only 10% of the respondents said they are at the beginner level.

As for using the chat application, 70% of them are good at it and 21.4% are at the advanced level, while 7.1% are at the introductory level. On the other hand, 1.4% of the respondents are not good in using the chat application.

Using e-mail is common among students as this is one of the ways for them to contact their lecturers or supervisor for submitting their assignments or tasks given. Majority of them (77.1%) are good in using emails while 14.3% are of the advanced level. On the other hand, 8.6% of them are beginners.

Using Whatsapp web and Telegram web is also common among students especially during online learning, as it is the main channel of communication between them and their lecturers. 60% of the respondents are good at using Whatsapp/Telegram web while 31.4% are advanced users. A small number (8.6%) of the respondents are at the introductory level.

As for the use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom, these two applications are new to these students. These applications are being used in this university for online learning and teaching and applicable to registered users (students and lecturers) only. Therefore, these students may only experience using this applications once they enter this university. Majority of them (62.9%) of them are good at using this applications and 18.6% of them are of the advanced level of competency while 17.1% are at the introductory level. On the other hand, only 1.4% of the respondents are at a poor level. It is hoped that as time goes by, these students will be familiar and able to use the applications better.

Table 1. Student's Level of Competency

	Advanced %	Good %	Introductory %	Poor %	None %
Web browser	14.3	75.7	10	0	0
Chat	21.4	70	7.1	1.4	0
e-mail	14.3	77.1	8.6	0	0
Whatsapp web/ Telegram web	31.4	60	8.6	0	0
Microsoft Teams/ Zoom	18.6	62.9	17.1	1.4	0

Students' Prior Online Assessment Experience

Most of the students have some experience in online learning as when the Lockdown 1.0 was enforced, all schools, colleges and universities had to switch from face-to-face to online learning. However, there might be some students who have little experience on this.

From the data analysis as presented in Table 2, all of them (100%) are taking their courses online, definitely. 88.6% of them have attended an online course before while 11.4% have never attended any. 85.7% of the respondents have taken online assessments before while 14.3% have never taken any. 98.6% of the respondents have taken online quiz on the web before while a small number of the respondents (1.4%) have never before. Lastly, 98.6% of the respondents have used the Web for learning purposes while 1.4% of them have never used before.

Table 2. Students' Prior Online Assessment Experience

	Yes %	No %
I am taking course(s) online	100	0
I have attended an online course before	88.6	11.4
I have taken some kind of online assessments before	85.7	14.3
I have taken an online quiz on the web	98.6	1.4
I have used Web for learning purposes	98.6	1.4

The Quality of Assessment

Table 3 presents the data gathered on the quality of assessment. 51.4% agree and strongly agree that online assessment helps in improving the assessment in higher education while only 10% disagree with this statement. 38.6% of the respondents are on the neutral side.

48.6% of the respondents agree with the statement that online assessment enhances quality aspect of their learning and 15.7% of them strongly agree with this statement. Only a small number of the respondents (1.4%) disagree with the statement. The rest (34.3%) are on the neutral side.

Majority of the respondents (45.7%) agree that online assessment enhances self-learning and 21.4% feel strongly agree about it. On the other hand, 32.9% of them are uncertain or unsure of this statement.

Table 3. The Quality of Assessment

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Online assessment helps in improving the quality of assessment in higher education	20	31.4	38.6	10	0
Online assessment enhances quality aspect of my learning	15.7	48.6	34.3	1.4	0
Online assessment enhances self-learning	21.4	45.7	32.9	0	0

Table 4 presents the data analysis of the appropriateness of online assessment. As we know, during the Lockdown 1.0, all higher learning institutions have been instructed to conduct all

learning and teaching sessions using online platform, and this is applied to all courses. All assessments also should be conducted online. Based on the data analysis, 38.6% of the respondents agree and strongly agree with this statement that online assessment is appropriate for all subjects, while 20% of them disagree and strongly on this statement. 41.4% of the respondents remain neutral.

38.6% of the respondents agree and strongly agree with the statement that online assessment is appropriate for all students, while 15.7% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. On the other hand 45.7% of them are on the neutral side.

For the statement that online assessment promotes applying a variety of questions, majority of the respondents (64.3%) agree and strongly agree with the statement while only 1.4% disagree with it. 45.7% of the respondents are neutral with the statement.

Table 4. Appropriateness of Online Assessment

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Online assessment is appropriate for all subjects	8.6	30	41.4	15.7	4.3
Online assessment is appropriate for all students.	12.9	5.7	45.7	12.9	2.8
Online assessment promotes applying a variety of questions	14.3	50	34.3	1.4	0

Online Assessment in General

48.6% of the respondents agree with the statement online assessment provides unbiased (fair grading) and 11.4% feel strongly agree with the statement. On the other hand, 1.4% of the respondents feel strongly disagree with the statement. 38.6% of the respondents are on the neutral side.

38.6% of the respondents feel agree and strongly with the statement that online assessment does not facilitate cheating while 17.1% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. Quite a big number of respondents (44.3%) are neutral about the statement.

When asked whether online assessment reduces exam stress, majority of the respondents (42.8%) agree and strongly agree with the agreement while a small number of respondents (21.4%) disagree and strongly disagree with it. 35.7% of the respondents are on the neutral side.

Table 5. Online Assessment

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Online assessment provides unbiased (fair) grading	11.4	48.6	38.6	0	1.4
Online assessment does not facilitate cheating	10	28.6	44.3	15.7	1.4
Online assessment reduces exam stress	17.1	25.7	35.7	20	1.4

Benefits of Online Assessment

Table 6 presents the data analysis of the benefits of online assessment. Based on some literature, there are many advantages of online learning, as well as online assessment. In this study, the respondents were given a statement whether online assessment improves their technical skills. 54.3% of the respondents agree the statement and 22.9% feel strongly agree with. On the other hand, only 4.3% of the respondents disagree with the statement, while 18.6% are on the neutral side.

For the statement that online assessment does not require advance technical skills from students, 32.9% agree and strongly agree with this statement, while 22.8% disagree and strongly disagree with it. However, 44.3% of the respondents remain neutral.

Online assessment requires the students to be in front of the screen for quite a long time depending on the allocation time of the assessments. Some may find this difficult and some may not. Based on the data gathered, 35.7% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that reading from a screen does not make using online assessment difficult while 20% disagree and strongly disagree with this statement. 44.3% of the respondents are of the neutral side.

To conclude the questionnaire, a statement of preference whether the respondents prefer online assessment or the traditional one, 64.3% of them agree and strongly agree with it while 25.7% disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. Another 10% remain neutral.

Table 6. Benefits of Online Assessment

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Online assessment improves my technical skills	22.9	54.3	18.6	4.3	0
Online assessment does not require advance technical skills from students	10	22.9	44.3	20	2.8
Reading from a screen does not make using online assessment difficult	10	25.7	44.3	15.7	4.3
I prefer online assessment rather than the traditional one	40	24.3	10	21.4	4.3

Discussion

Switching traditional assessment to online assessment is never easy. It requires a lot of efforts such as learning or exploring the application that one uses. Both lecturers as well as students need to take some time to explore this as it is very new for us in Malaysia. There are many applications that have existed ever since online assessment has become everyone's choice of conducting assessments.

Based on the data analysis it can be seen that online assessment has been well-received by the students. Many positive feedback received from the questionnaire. However, there are still many rooms of improvement to be made.

As mentioned earlier, factors such as poor internet connection, students sharing device with siblings, inconducive environment and bad weather are inevitable. These factors are way beyond everyone's control. These can be solved by giving more time to the students to complete the tests and do not be too rigid with the time allocation for the test.

Besides that, it is hoped that many more friendly-user applications will be stored in the market. Some people are not IT-savvy, hence to make things easier, perhaps there should be more less technical applications.

Based on the data analysis, majority respondents agree that online assessments are unbiased in terms of grading. This is due to the reason that all tests or quizzes questions and rubrics as well as marking scheme are uploaded in the system used, hence grading will be done without bias and favoritism.

Furthermore, online assessment also does not facilitate cheating. Since the students are taking the test on their own, there is no way discussion with friends will happen because simultaneously they have to be alert with the time allocation. This is another benefit of online assessment as it can happen without any supervision. In contrast with conventional assessment which usually conducted in an exam venue, requires invigilators throughout the assessment period to ensure the smoothness of the assessment process and to start/end the assessment process.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it is undeniably, online assessment has many advantages to the students especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Assessment can still be carried out despite the situation that prohibits all face-to-face meetings. All classes in schools, colleges and universities are able to proceed like normal, it is just it is conducted using online platform.

If more emphasis and improvement given to online assessment, it is unsurprisingly that it will be implemented throughout many parts of the world. Furthermore, we are all moving towards IR 4.0 and it is high time for all learning and teaching process to be done virtually in which it is accessible by anyone, anywhere and anytime.

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