

Some Teaching Tips for Overcoming Challenges and conducting an Effective Online Assessment in Algerian Universities

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Abstract

In response to the corona virus COVID-19 pandemic, Algerian university rapidly moved from traditional to online assessment. Assessing EFL students in an online environment without preparation leads to several challenges for teachers and students. The lack or limited technical skills, slow and unreliable internet connectivity, teachers' different levels in online language assessment literacy, differences in students' levels in digital literacy, problems in grading and feedback, academic dishonesty and misconduct, are the main challenges. The objective of this research is to explore challenges hindering the process of online assessment at university, and providing suggestions and some teaching tips for the sake of overcoming these barriers and establishing effective online assessment. There is an urgent need to develop teachers' online language assessment literacy. The attendance of specialized language assessment and testing conferences is beneficial for teachers. Developing students' digital literacy is fundamental in enhancing online assessment. One of the basic roles attributed to the language teacher is raising students' awareness of the unethical acts such as e cheating and plagiarism. Teachers need to receive in-service training focusing on online language assessment literacy. Online assessment in Algerian universities is still in its first steps, the above-mentioned challenges should be surmounted for the sake of putting remote assessment in its right path.

Keywords : Challenges- effective- online assessment- teaching tips- University

1. Introduction

Due to the unexpected health crisis that hit the world, and the sudden closure of universities, many higher institutions adopted online learning and online assessment. From their houses, students can be accessed through different devices. Online teaching paves the way to online assessment; it is more flexible than the traditional assessment methods. There is a variety of remote assessments to evaluate students online. Designing effective online assessment is rarely a matter of transposing existing assessment items to some online system or tool. Effective online assessment is always informed and primarily by pedagogical considerations, with technical considerations secondary to this. Online assessment is a type of assessment conducted off site; it basically makes use of technology. Online assessment frees the student from the necessity of traveling to a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be assessed. Traditional assessment is replaced by an online assessment in which traditional tools such as papers and pens are no more used; assessment is conducted by new and advanced technological devices. New assessment methods and strategies have been created. Teachers were led to use online assessment as an alternative or support for traditional assessment methods without any prior preparation or practice. Although this kind of assessment provides several advantages, various pedagogical, technical, social and psychological challenges were encountered by teachers while integrating online assessment. This type of assessment is attracting attention in educational research nowadays especially in the post-pandemic era. However, it is not given such attention in EFL context at Algerian university. Online assessment at Algerian university is a new research area; therefore, it is necessary to investigate EFL teachers' practices and challenges of online assessment. This research seeks to investigate EFL teachers' online assessment practices. The main objective of this study is to discuss the challenges encountered by EFL teachers in assessing their students online. This research attempts also to offer some suggestions and recommendations for hopefully overcoming EFL teachers' online assessment challenges, and enhancing their practices to achieve effective and successful online assessment.

2 . Definition of Online Assessment

Online assessment may be defined as an evaluation of a person's abilities, behaviours or characteristics. This test is conducted over the Internet by using available web technologies. Online assessments can be any means of evaluating student achievements, giving feedback or channelizing students

forward in their learning process in a fully online mode (Fulcher, 2012). Compared to pen and paper methods of assessments, online or e-assessment methods are less labor-intensive and more secure. (Howarth, 2015).

The terms "online assessment" and "e-assessment" are often used interchangeably by researchers. E-learning that stands for electronic assessment and online assessment are used as synonyms, in fact both terms are closely related, however there is a slight difference between them. It is important to explain what is meant by "online" and "electronic" to understand the distinction between online assessment and e-assessment. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, the term "online" is used to refer to an activity or process "done using internet". In contrast, electronic refers to something "done or produced by computer or other electronic device" without necessarily being connected to the internet. Based on the distinction between "electronic" and "online", online assessment can be defined as a type of assessment done via the internet. In contrast, electronic assessment involves using any electronic device for assessment purposes with or without being connected to the internet. Accordingly, it could be stated that online assessment is a type of e-assessment. Miranda et al. (2022) state that e-assessment refers to the use of computers, laptops, smartphones, or any other electronic digital devices for the construction, delivery, storage, recording, grading students' responses, and deliver feedback to learners about their performance. Crisp (2011) adds that e-assessment can be used to achieve both formative and summative purposes. Similarly, Arif (2020) argues that online assessment is the process of measuring students' performance and learning progress via the internet. Furthermore, Husain (2021) points out that online assessment is different from pen-paper assessment since it ensures "easier access by moving on to the electronic version" (p.67).

2.1 Advantages of using online assessment

Online assessment has been used in many universities over the world years before the pandemic, however, it was not used at Algerian university before, it was until the lockdown imposed by the pandemic that this type of assessment was introduced in higher education in Algeria, online assessment has several advantages. Following are the advantages of using online assessment tools according to testreach website:

a-Reduces the burden on administration:

Printing and circulation of exam papers can be a very tedious task. If a student uses online assessment tools for giving exams, the burden of the

administration is also reduced, and the students need not relocate themselves to give exams. So, it is a win-win situation.

b-Marks results quickly:

The online assessment tools have software, which helps in tallying and displaying the results quickly. In some cases, results are available almost instantly if needed.

c-Extremely environment-friendly :

One is no stranger to the fact that a huge amount of paper is saved when one makes the use of a software tool. The printing and transportation charges are also waived off.

d-Greater security:

When you write an offline exam, there is only one invigilator. It becomes difficult for him to manage everything all by himself. When someone gives an exam online, the onus is also less, and there is greater security as all the exam papers, marks and results are stored digitally, so there is no scope for any mistake to happen.

e-Easily accessible to everyone:

When one runs assessments online, it is easier for everyone to give tests online. People having disabilities can also give a test at the comfort of their home.

3. Tools for online assessment

There are more than 20 different types of online assessment tests. A few of the most popular tests cover skill assessment, communication assessment, cognitive assessment, behavioral assessment, etc. (Howarth, 2015). In Algerian university, the official e-learning platform is MOODLE through which teachers deliver their lectures and assess their students. Some teachers prefer using Google Forms as an assessment tool due to its high accessibility and flexibility.

3.1 MOODLE

MOODLE is an acronym that stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. It is a learning management system (LMS) in which instructors and learners need to have an account with a user name and password to access it. MOODLE is free, open source software. It can be downloaded via an internet connection at any time with any fees. Martin Dougiamas primarily developed this software in 2002. Later, the software was updated and continues to develop through the years. MOODLE as LMS can be used for online assessment purposes. (Benaicha, 2022). Teachers can integrate rubrics, deliver and create quizzes. It also enables course instructors to assess students' learning

online through discussions. According to Benaicha, (2022), MOODLE has plenty of features that can facilitate the online assessment process:

➤ Design: The feature "Add an activity or resource" enables teachers to create an online test by clicking on the " test " icon. A window will appear where the teacher can design the test, name the test, add test description, set a date, and limit test time. In addition, MOODLE provides a variety of activities that can be used to assess students such as multiple-choice questions and true/false questions.

➤ Delivery and Administration: Students have to sign in to MOODLE with a username and password to take the online test. They have to be enrolled in the course as well. After the online test is created, students log in and access the course to take the online test.

➤ Recording Responses: Students' attempts, responses, and scores will be saved in Notes". Teachers can view details about the performance and attempts of each student. All students' test attempts will be recorded automatically as long as the teacher allows students to make several attempts.

➤ Grading and Feedback: Course instructors and testers assign points for each question, set the correct answer, the partially correct and wrong answers. MOODLE also enables teachers to give global, general, or specific automatic feedback on students' performance depending on their scores.

3.2 Google Form

Google Forms is a free web-based software used to conduct, administer surveys and run online quizzes. It is part of Google Docs Editors. Google Forms software operates on a web server connected to the internet. This application enables teachers and instructors to design, edit and deliver online assessments to students. It offers a multitude of options for conducting the online assessment. It facilitates all the steps of the online assessment process including design, delivery, administration, scoring, and feedback. (Milliner & Bar, 2020).

Benaicha (2022) explains some features of Google Form as follows:

➤ Design: Google Forms allow teachers and instructors to design various tasks and tests. It enables them to use both open-ended and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions include short answer, paragraphs, and file upload in case of assignments and essays. Options for close-ended questions include multiple-choice, checkboxes, dropdown, multiple choice grid, checkbox grid, date, and

time.

- **Delivery and Administration:** The quiz created can be delivered in various ways as demonstrated. It could be sent as a link via email. It could be embedded into Facebook and Twitter, and it can also be shared through other social media platforms by copying and pasting the link.
- **Recording Responses:** "Responses" feature allows managing, collecting, and recording responses. Students' responses can be collected via email; these responses will be stored in a spreadsheet. Quiz respondents can also receive a copy of their answers.
- **Scoring and Feedback:** Assessors assign point values for each question, set the correct answers, and provide automatic feedback. The quiz can be automatically graded where students can see their marks immediately after submitting their responses. The grading can also be semi-automatic or manually done by the teacher. In this case, grades will be released later to respondents after the manual review or correction by the teacher.

4 .Challenges of online assessment

There are several challenges that are actually hindering the process of online assessment at university in Algeria. These challenges can be grouped into technical challenges, pedagogical challenges, lack of technical and digital literacy, lack of online assessment literacy for teachers, students' academic integrity and misconduct, challenges in grading and feedback.

4. 1 Technical Challenges

Hosseini et al. (2021) argue that technical challenges are among the greatest issues in online learning in general and in online assessment in particular. Teachers and students alike may face technical challenges from technical issues such as PC freezing, platform glitches, and internet accessibility, besides lack of technical skills and infrastructure. These technical issues may raise teachers' anxiety in dealing with online assessment and may affect online assessment accessibility, distribution and management. These technical issues and internet disruptions negatively influenced online assessment reliability and validity.

4. 2 Pedagogical Challenges

The broad concept of pedagogy covers instruction method, teaching styles, syllabus design, feedback, and assessment. Looi et al. (2021) argue: "the most crucial role of an online instructor is a pedagogical role followed by the assessor role" (p.139). Consequently, it is critical to address the pedagogical

challenges that may hinder teachers' online assessment practices. These challenges include but are not limited to teachers' lack of online assessment literacy, students' academic integrity and misconduct, and grading and feedback issues.

4.3 Students' lack of digital literacy and teachers' lack of online assessment literacy

Students' lack of digital literacy is a challenge in online learning and online assessment alike. Following the same line of thought, Language Assessment Literacy LAL is comparatively a recent term that emerged under the umbrella of Applied Linguistics. LAL is a new area of language assessment that encompasses language teachers' knowledge and practice of educational assessment. LAL is teachers' knowledge, principles, skills, and abilities to design, to develop, monitor, evaluate, grade, score test, and analyze assessment data based on theoretical knowledge. Students also need training for using ICT effectively for learning and for being evaluated successfully. Accordingly, the lack of teachers' OLAL, which can be understood as «online language assessment illiteracy," can have serious drawbacks on teachers' online assessment practices and the effectiveness of the online assessment.

4.4 Students' Academic Integrity and Misconduct

One of the pedagogical challenges that online assessment poses for teachers is ensuring academic integrity. The concept of academic integrity was first introduced in the 1990s by the American professor Don McCabe, known as the father of academic integrity. Scholars and researchers define academic integrity or educational integrity as the commitment of all higher education staff members, including teachers, students, and researchers, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. The commitment to these values is crucial in academic and pedagogical practice to prevent academic dishonesty and misconduct.(McCabe et al, 1993). Most studies and research on academic integrity have extensively addressed academic dishonesty and misconduct. McCabe et al (1993) state that academic dishonesty and misconduct refer to the violation of academic integrity principles. One of the issues teachers struggle with while conducting an online assessment is students' academic dishonesty and misconduct among which cheating and plagiarism. Traditional cheating includes using notes, opening the lesson or copybook to copy responses, or receiving what students call "help" from others. E cheating involves using electronic devices, the internet, Google, and other search engines to solve online assessment

questions. (Hosseini et al., 2021). Second, some teachers may not be aware of strategies and approaches to minimizing students' academic misconduct (Hosseini et al., 2021). For example, some students give access to their MOODLE accounts by sharing their username and password with others. It is difficult for teachers to verify students' identities in such cases, especially during the online assessment. Consequently, such dishonest activities can be serious threats to online assessment reliability and validity. (Benaicha, 2022)

4.5 Challenges in grading and feedback

One of the teacher's roles of assessment, besides being assessor, is being scorer and feedback generator. In other words, the teacher grades students' performance and offers feedback for learners. However, among the main pedagogical issues that teachers face in adopting online assessment are grading students' performance and providing feedback. Starting with grading students, teachers may have difficulty grading the students and handling students' complaints about their grades due to multiple considerations. For instance, some students complain about the automatic "objective" grading of MOODLE and Google Form. In such a case, teachers find himself/ herself in a situation whether to maintain the automatic grading or review manually grading; this makes the grading "more subjective and humanistic". (Benaicha, 2022). Another issue associated with grading is students' academic misconduct; some students may plagiarize or use cheating. In these situations, the teacher may not detect cheaters; in the case of students' plagiarism in essays and assignments. Students' academic misconduct can make the feedback faulty since students' response does not reflect students' real level and learning progress.

5. Solutions and Recommendations

This research work demonstrated the major challenges that EFL teachers faced in conducting online assessment during COVID-19 pandemic. To come up with fruitful and effective recommendations and suggestions.

5.1 Teachers' In-service ICT Training

One of the best ways to enhance teachers' online assessment practices is in-service ICT training due to its advantages. Firstly, in-service ICT training develops teachers' OLAL. Secondly, it helps reduce the challenges they face in online assessment. Thirdly, it offers pedagogical support to teachers who will learn pedagogical alignment. In-service ICT training is very helpful for teachers to learn how to design appropriate online assessments that meet the course contents and objectives and serve students simultaneously. It is

beneficial for teachers to receive continuous ICT training on a yearly basis to cope with the rapid changes in educational technology. Finally, in-service ICT training helps EFL teachers develop a positive attitude towards online assessment. Thus, all EFL teachers need to be trained on how to assess their students online and how to conduct an effective online assessment.

5.2 Students' ICT Training

One of the challenges that EFL teachers faced in conducting online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic was students' lack of technical skills. Therefore, students need to receive training to develop their technical skills and learn how to use technology to enhance their learning. Students need to be trained on accessing and using different online assessment tools such as Moodle, Google Forms, Google Meet, Zoom, and Gmail. The training will enable students to become online language assessment literate.

5.3 Practice Online Assessment

ICT training alone is not enough. Both EFL teachers and students need to practice what they learn about online assessment. Teachers need to practice online assessment by conducting more formative online assessments. The regular practice of online assessment will allow teachers to use their knowledge of online assessment and get familiar and acquainted with its challenges. Thus, they will be able to see the difficulties and learn how to manage and deal with online assessment challenges. Through the practice of online assessment, students will learn how to adapt to this type of assessment, and they will learn how to manage it easily, which will reduce some of the teachers' challenges with online assessment.

5.4 Study Days, Conferences, Workshops

The negative attitude of some teachers towards online assessment can be attributed to their lack of OLAL, lack of practice and online assessment experience, and students' academic misconduct. The researcher suggests organizing study days, conferences, and workshops about what assessment is, what online assessment is, how to conduct a sound online assessment and how to deal with the challenges of assessment. The major aim of these scientific gatherings would be to raise both teachers and students' awareness about online assessment, and its necessity to keep up with the "New Normal" pedagogy. It would also be a chance to change their negative attitude toward online assessment. Similarly, Davidson & Coombe (2022) maintain that attending these scientific gatherings would allow teachers to exchange expertise and ideas

about online assessment. Davidson and Coombe (2022) listed numerous annual specialized language assessment testing conferences that English language teachers can attend, some of these conferences are:

- Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC)
- The Annual Conference of International Language Testing Association (ILTA)
- Language Assessment Research Conference (LARC)
- Language Testing Forum, organized by UK Association for language Testing and Assessment (UKLATA)
- The International Conference on Language Testing and Assessment (ICLTA)
- New Directions in English Language Assessment in East Asia, hosted by the British Council.

5.5 Raising Awareness towards Students' Academic Misconduct

The major challenge that EFL teachers faced in conducting an online assessment is students' academic misconduct. Students' academic dishonesty is more than just a pedagogical challenge; it is a serious ethical issue. Students' academic misconduct in online assessment can take different forms: e-cheating, plagiarism, inappropriate and fraudulent use of identification keys. Eventually, there is an urgent need to develop students' awareness of these unethical acts through study days, webinars, and discussion sessions. Students need to be aware of the drawbacks of academic dishonesty and its negative consequences on them as individuals first before being students. Teachers should raise students' awareness about what is cheating and plagiarism. Thus, concrete practical sessions and workshops should be organized to train students and offer them tips and techniques on avoiding plagiarism and not committing academic misconduct. (Benaicha, 2022). Furthermore, teachers should also inform students that they would be punished if they intentionally commit any academic misconduct.

5.6 Overcoming Students' Academic Misconduct

Increasing students' awareness of cheating and plagiarism is not enough to eradicate or reduce academic misconduct. There are various strategies and tips that teachers can use to reduce students' academic misconduct. Firstly, teachers may ask students to join an online meeting and put their cameras on while taking the online assessment to observe any suspicious acts and verify students' IDs. Secondly, the type of online assessment questions should differ from

classroom assessment questions. Questions in online assessment should encourage students to rely on themselves and encourage them to think and find the answer. Teachers should avoid direct questions that their answers could be googled and found easily. It would also be beneficial to rely on different methods to assess students online to understand their level and progress better.

5.7 Collaboration between Teachers and Departments

One way to improve EFL teachers' practices and reduce online assessment challenges is through collaborations between teachers within the same department or from different departments. In effect, teaching is one of the careers whose outcomes and practices can be enhanced through collaboration. Effective collaboration can take different forms. Teachers can communicate and discuss on a regular basis the issues and the challenges they encounter in assessing their students online. These discussions and collaborations allow teachers to share their experiences and learn from each other experiences. Teachers can attend, observe, and assist each other in conducting online assessments; then, they provide feedback to their mates about their practice and the online assessment process.

5.8 Needs Analysis and Providing Materials and Tools

The researcher suggests conducting a needs analysis (NA) before assessing students online and contextualizing online assessment. The major aim of NA would be to identify students' needs (psychological, sociological, material, and methodological needs) to conduct online assessment in terms of skills and materials. Needs analysis would allow teachers to know the level of their students and their technological skills. It would also allow them to know the materials their students possess, whether a laptop, Smartphone, or Tablet, so they would be assessed online. The contextualization of online assessment would allow teachers to adapt their online assessment practices to the current situation needs, students' needs, skills, levels, and educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, thus, NA is needed in online assessment.

This study suggested providing materials to improve practices of online assessment and reduce the challenges mainly cheating and plagiarism. Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research should equip universities and teachers with different materials, programs, and plagiarism checkers that would allow teachers to detect plagiarism easily. These programs should be dedicated to universities. Decision-makers and universities should also guarantee free access for EFL teachers to premium versions of plagiarism checkers programs

and software such as Turnitin, Grammarly, PlagScan, Plagiarism Checker, and iThenticate.

5.9 Patience, Endurance, and Flexibility

According to Benaicha (2022), teaching is one of the careers that require enormous patience and endurance from the teachers. Teachers need to be armed with patience and endurance with regard to learners' reluctance to such teaching and assessment modes. The use of online assessment is not an easy process that will occur day and night since it is challenged by both students and teachers' pre-judgmental ideas, apprehensions, and negative beliefs. The shift toward online assessment requires a change in these beliefs and negative attitudes, which can be achieved only through readiness and willingness to accept and deal seriously with online assessment, raising awareness, training, and practice. The use of online assessment also requires teachers' patience and flexibility; teachers should be flexible and patient with online assessment. Teachers should use online assessment and carry using online assessment tools despite the challenges and the difficulties they might be encountered on the way. Finally, it is worth mentioning that online assessment can be used as support and, in some cases, as an alternative to traditional classroom assessment. However, during these years, online assessment in Algerian universities cannot fully replace and eliminate traditional classroom assessment. Both modes of assessment have their own merits and demerits; each is adequate and suitable for a certain situation and certain types of students and teachers.

6. Conclusion

Online assessment is one of the most challenging aspects of e-teaching-learning, especially in the Algerian context since it is still in its infancy. Many Algerian teachers faced challenges while assessing their students online, especially during the COVID19 pandemic, since many teachers and students were neither accustomed to nor prepared for this assessment mode. Since the research investigated EFL teachers' practices and challenges of online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic, it provided some suggestions and recommendations that would enhance teachers' practices and reduce online assessment challenges. The current research work opens the door for future research about online assessment challenges and practices. Further research can investigate students' academic misconduct, cheating, and plagiarism in online assessments. A future study may investigate this issue, its factors, and its consequences. It would be beneficial to propose solutions and suggestions to reduce and deal with students' academic misconduct in online assessments.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

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