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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS ONLINE
ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CASE STUDY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ENGLISH
DIVISION AT BISKRA UNIVERSITY**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47832/2717-8293.2-3.23>

Research Article

Received:

18/12/2020

Accepted:

11/01/2021

Published:

01/02/2021

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Abstract:

Incorporating technology into assessment in university framework can transform educational practices by developing self-regulated learning and facilitate interactivity and involvement among students. Recently, development in information and communication technologies (ICT) has played an important role in improving the Internet tools that can be applied for learning and research. The present paper investigates students' perceptions of online assessment. An exploratory study was carried out to investigate the students' perceptions of online assessment at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Division at Biskra University. A Sample of 40 Master 1 students from the Division of English who had experienced online assessment during the lockdown due to the Covid 19 was chosen for this study. Only 30 responded, which made a response rate =75%. Data were collected by an online survey which included 15 items to collect data about the students' opinions of online assessment. Results revealed that students hold a positive attitude and appreciated online assessment.

Key words: Higher Education, Online Assessment, Biskra University.

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Introduction

Assessment is a basic part of instruction, as it ascertains whether or not the goals of education are being achieved. The main purpose of assessment is to gather significant information about student progress, or to find out student interests to have an insight about their learning process. After obtaining this information, teachers can reflect on the student's level of achievement to adapt their teaching plans. Valid and reliable assessment enhances the quality of learning, teaching and academic programs (Dermo, 2009, Rastgoo, Namvar, & Iran, 2010). Regular assessment provides cyclic feedback about the learning and teaching process. Assessment can affirm the efficacy of teaching and learning. It also assures that teaching, as a formative process, advances over time with feedback and input from students. This builds a good classroom relationship. One of the challenges for teachers is to select and use appropriate assessment techniques. Mainly, carrying out an assessment is to direct teachers to students' needs to improve the learning process (Rocco, 2007).

There has been a shift from traditional assessment toward online assessment. It started being used due to the increasing awareness of technology on the teaching /learning process. Accordingly, students' opinions about online assessment should be taken into account. But neglecting their opinions will impede the faculty staff from offering online assessment which will be a major means of assessment at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Division at Biskra University.

The Purpose of the Research

The present paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions towards the use of online assessment used at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Division at Biskra University?
2. What features of online assessment do students find helpful?

Literature Review

With the rising number of students and the limitation of placement, a new innovative way in learning is required. Therefore, online assessment has been initiated to enable the students to live in virtual learning environment at their homes, and assists teachers to correct tests and release marks in a short period of time. Universities implemented online assessment in order to obtain faster process to assess students rather than traditional assessment.

The word "assessment" in online assessment is linked to the purpose and characteristics of the assessment. In general, the purpose of assessment can be classified as formative, diagnostic, or summative. In addition, online assessment should preserve the features of traditional assessment such as validity, reliability, fairness, and accessibility (Baker, O'Neil, & Linn, 1993; Shute, 2009). It is an electronic assessment, in which all the assessment procedures from the start to the end of assessment should be carried out electronically.

It is also called computer assisted/mediated assessment and computer-based assessment, is the use of information technology in various arrangements of assessment such as educational assessment to evaluate and gather data about the academic performance of an individual or a team.

The development of e-assessment is dependent on a range of factors:

- Technical and logistical
- Teacher and school readiness
- Policy context

- Teacher Training
- The aims and purposes of e-assessment.

Unlike face-to-face assessment, online assessment has different characteristics. Ronles and Braathen (2002) depicted that in the online environment, the student is responsible for his or her learning. He needs to read, understand, ask, answer, discuss, and discover the learning materials provided by the teacher. However, the main role of teachers is to facilitate all these tasks, and sustains communication and interaction among students through the use of technology. Additionally, they should determine the purpose of the online assessment, its desired outcome and the criteria to be measured (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007).

Online assessment offers a range of advantages for students, teachers, and institutions, including:

- Online assessment is highly interactive, customizable, trustworthy, secure, and can be linked to other computer-based or online materials.
- It provides easier evaluation for different types of tests via mobile applications.
- It offers assessment models with multiple choice questions and providing instant feedback.
- It helps monitoring the progress of each student regularly through guidance and supervision.
- It eliminates cheating and frauds during online tests.
- It's more environmentally friendly with less paper, printing and transport used overall.

Methodology

An exploratory study was carried out to investigate the students' perceptions of online assessment at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Division at Biskra University.

Sample

A Sample of 40 Master 1 students from the Division of English who had experienced online assessment during the lockdown due to the Covid 19 was chosen for this study.

Only 30 responded, which made a response rate =75%.

Data Collection

Data were collected by an online survey which included 15 items to collect data about the students' opinions of online assessment. Each item was rated on a four-point scale: strongly agree= 4, strongly disagree = 1.

Research Results

Q1- What are the students' perceptions toward the use of online assessment at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Division at Biskra University?

Most items ranged from favorable to very favorable for the respondents. Immediate feedback attained the highest mean, followed by the fair grading. However, "Online assessment can be used in all modules" is categorized as unfavorable.

Q2-What features of online assessment do students find helpful?

Results also revealed that most students are motivated in using online assessments because:

- It is accessible and flexible,
- It provides instant and detailed feedback in a variety of formats,
- It is beneficial to students with special needs,
- It enjoyable and interactive

Results revealed that students hold a positive attitude and showed a high level of satisfaction with the online assessment activities.

However, there are still some challenges they faced as:

- Time allotted,
- Internet signal,
- Difficulty to ask questions or contest answers,

Implications for Practice

Implementation of online assessment in higher education faces numerous challenges. Accordingly, many studies have been carried out and explored these challenges and suggested the following solutions:

1. Onboarding onto New Technology

- Both teachers and students need a training at the beginning of the transition from pen-and-pencil examination to the online examination in order to be familiar with E-assessment

2. Infrastructural Barriers

- The government should supply necessary equipment to set up E-assessment in Higher education.
- Give the student a longer time period to take the test in case of issues with technology or Wi-Fi.

3. Open Book

- Teachers should formulate questions in a way that students can express their readiness to understand the material as well as applying what they have learned. In fact, questions should aim to assess student's understanding of the subject matter.
- Teacher should be aware of the virtual learning environment that is not suitable for collaborative evaluations or group projects. This is because the nature of the platform is objective, rejecting subjective evaluations.

Conclusion

Assessment is an inevitable part of higher education system. With the rising number of students and the limitation of locations a new innovation in learning is vital. Hence, virtual environment has been initiated, to provide online accessible, inclusive and accurate courses and electronic assessment. Additionally, E-assessment helps the students to be assessed at home, and helps the teacher to give instant feedback. At the same time, it does not remove best practices in student evaluation and examination that have been built over the years. Instead, the online assessment system is a culmination of the traditional and familiar and the new and up to date.

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