



Research Paper

## Students' Perception Towards the Usage of Online Assessment in University Putra Malaysia Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The current study explored the students' perceptions of online assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic in University Putra Malaysia (UPM). The university employs online method assessment due to the restrictions from the government to cope with the pandemic. These abrupt changes from traditional to online form of assessment caught many by surprise and made it interesting for the researchers to investigate the students' perceptions of online assessment at the tertiary level. The study aimed to investigate 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. A questionnaire was distributed to 50 undergraduate and postgraduate students from the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programme in University Putra Malaysia (UPM) through Google Form. The findings of the study revealed that both undergraduate and postgraduate students prefer traditional assessment than online assessment. Meanwhile, communication, personal and technical issues are the challenges faced by both undergraduate and postgraduate students in completing online assessment. Overall, the study provides some insights for the educators in UPM which could help them in designing their online assessments effectively based on the students' perceptions and challenges.

**Keywords:** Perception, online assessment, challenges.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Technology-based education has always been encouraged by the Ministry of Education, mostly at the tertiary level. However, it is not widely conducted across the country and all institutions. This pandemic changes the pattern or way of learning from regular face to face class to entirely digital and virtual learning. All conventional forms of classes and assessment have been replaced by online learning through websites and online meeting platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. We generally believe that every student prefers the conventional way of learning that allows them to interact with their classmates and lecturers. Many of them prefer the traditional form of assessment conducted in class too. However, this wind of change that envelops us all brought us the new online form.

Assessment is a crucial element in the education system providing teachers, parents and institutions with the information concerning learning outcome and objectives proposed in the syllabus. It signifies at the end of the day, whether the students manage to achieve the outcome and based on the results help teachers or educators to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Moreover, the information gathered from assessment is essential for many other parties like policy makers and stakeholders to direct them towards the right direction in the future.

Currently, every higher institution in Malaysia employs online learning as a medium of teaching and learning to ensure the continuity of education despite the pandemic. While many supports this rapid change in the mode of learning, there are soft whispers and sighs heard from different sides. For some students, preparing to study online in terms of device availability and internet access are burdening. This is especially prevalent in rural and remote areas in Sabah and Sarawak. Their struggles even made the headlines of media outlets and newspapers. It came to light that many of them are undergraduate students who faced these difficulties. On the other hand, not much news about postgraduate students is heard. Therefore, current research is interested in

exploring these two groups of student's perceptions and challenges they faced from this change.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students on online assessment. It also aims to compare undergraduate and postgraduate perceptions towards online assessment while at the same time identify the challenges they faced to complete or attempt the assessment. On that account, this study will address the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students on online assessment?
2. What are the challenges they faced to complete the assessment?

There is no doubt that this change is needed to accommodate the students' learning needs best. Nevertheless, the higher-up's decision seems to be leaving out an essential part of that decision which are students. While they claim to be making this decision for the students' benefits, many students, especially in the tertiary level, face difficulties with the changing directions of the decision every time announced. Therefore, our research will give some meaningful insights for the decision-makers in the future while implementing this online form of assessment. Though there are already many researchers ahead of us in exploring this topic in this short time, our study will add to the repertoire of knowledge from different settings and context. The focus of this study will be on assessment carried out online during the course of studying in the current academic calendar according to their own registered subject.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Online Assessment**

Online assessment or also known as technology-based assessment refers to an efficient way of assessing the students' performance or learning in an online environment. In other words, online assessment can be viewed as a tool for assessing the students' academic performance as well as measuring the students' academic achievement and progress throughout the learning process. According to Marisa Yoestara, Zaiyana Putri, Meta Keumala and ZahratulIdami (2020), online assessment is an alternative way of evaluating students' learning using a website or an application. On the other hand, Weleschuk, Dyjur and Kelly (2019) defined online assessment as a method for assessing students' performance, giving feedback and pushing students further in their learning process in an online learning environment. This type of assessment can be fully online like online test, quiz, exam, presentation or simply require online submission like assignment, report, essay, reflection and so forth. For the purpose of this study, the concept for assessments is asynchronous limited to online test, quiz, exam, submission and presentation.

### **Previous Studies**

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

In 2018, Rosa Amalia investigated the perception of students toward online assessment and the challenges faced by the students in online assessment. The results of the study 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. Meanwhile, a study by Sarah Khan and Rashid Azim Khan (2018) on university students' perspectives of using online assessments underlined that the need for online assessment was not appreciated and accepted by the students.

In a recent study, Howe (2020) explored the students and lecturers' perceptions of e-assessment at the institute of Development Management in Eswatini. The results revealed that both students and lecturers have positive perceptions towards the use of e-assessment. Overall, all the studies above showed the students' perception towards the use of online assessments in the teaching and learning process in various contexts. The present study is about the postgraduates and undergraduates' perception towards the usage of online assessment in University Putra Malaysia (UPM) amidst Covid-19 Pandemic.

### **Benefits of Online Assessment**

First and foremost, online assessment is more flexible compared to the traditional assessment as it allows the students to review their work or learning anytime and anywhere with a stable internet connection. Sarah Khan and Rashid Azim Khan (2018) claimed that online assessment offers additional flexibility in terms of the place and time of the exam conducted. Take for example, it provides a greater flexibility for the students on how to do their assignments since they have the privilege to decide on where and when to do it. To put it simple, the students can complete their tasks like tests, exams, quizzes, assignments and more at a place and time that is convenient for them. Sarah Khan and Rashid Azim Khan (2018) also stated that the majority of the

students feel comfortable with the online assessment.

Next, online assessment allows the students to be more independent or autonomous learners. According to Kebritchi, Lipschuetz and Santiago (2017), students need to be a self-directed and self-motivated learner due to the flexibility of online assessment. This is because, students have a greater control over their learning in an online learning environment compared to the classes in a traditional learning environment. Hence, the students tend to schedule and manage their time effectively as well as plan their coursework accordingly so that they are able to submit their work on time.

Apart from that, online assessment has the tendency to provide immediate feedback to the students as compared to the paper assessment. Alruwais, Wills and Wald (2018) stated that online assessment offers direct and immediate feedback to the students. Similarly, Rolim and Isaisas (2018) also claimed that a detailed and frequent feedback can be given to the students through online assessment. Additionally, immediate feedback facilitates the students' learning and improves their performance in a particular subject matter as it motivates them to obtain good scores and showing good progress. The finding of a study conducted by Romeu Fontanillas, Romero Carbonell and GuitertCatusus (2016) revealed that the teachers' feedback is really useful for the students and helped them to improve their learning process. Thus, as stated by Marisa Yoestara, Zaiyana Putri, Meta Keumala and ZahratulIdami (2020), online assessment enhances students' performance.

### **Challenges of Online Assessment**

One of the significant issues of implementing online assessment in the teaching and learning process is online assessment facilitates cheating. Some of the students were really concerned about the equity and fairness in assessment (Weleschuk, Dyjur and Kelly, 2019). These students doubt if their classmates are cheating when doing an online assessment, for instance, online examination as they are not able to see them. Hylton, Levy and Dringus (2016) stated that in order to complete the online examinations, students tend to use the internet, notes as well as ask help from their classmates or friends. It might be more difficult for the teacher to control or prevent the students from cheating in a virtual learning environment than the traditional learning environment.

Next, some of the students have no sufficient technological knowledge and skills which hinder them from using the online assessment tools effectively and most importantly, some of them are not familiar with the online assessment process. Alruwais, Wills and Wald (2018) indicated that it is necessary to provide the students with adequate training so that they will be familiar with the technological tools and the online assessment process.

Despite that, one of the major challenges faced by the students in doing online assessment is the unstable internet connection. Majority of the students regardless of their location, urban or rural struggled to get access to stable internet connection in order to attempt the online exam or quiz, giving online presentations and submitting the assignments on time. As stated by Abdulghani Ali Al-Hattami (2020) and Alruwais, Wills and Wald (2018), students who have problems with accessing the technological resources and internet are likely to face problems in doing formative assessment. Moreover, BadiatulAzmina, MaratusSolihah and Agung Guritno (2017) found in their study that when the internet connection was poor or unstable, the students struggled to do the online exam.

### **Students' Perception of Online Assessment**

It is an undeniable fact that the students' perception plays a pivotal role in making an effective decision regarding the teaching and learning process. It helps the educators to assess the effectiveness of their teaching. As stated by Rosa Amalia(2018), the students' perception is essential as it helps the educators to modify their decision regarding the teaching and the way of delivering content or material to their students. Therefore, the students' perception of online assessment is very important as it provides some insights to the educators on what the students think about doing the assessments online, what are the obstacles they face, what types of online assessments they prefer and how to conduct the online assessments effectively that meet the students' needs.

Despite that, the students' negative and positive perceptions need to be considered when conducting an online assessment as it assists the educators to assess the students' academic performance without any undesirable consequences and to measure the learning outcomes at the same time. Hence, it is necessary to identify the University Putra Malaysia (UPM) students' positive and negative perceptions toward the usage of online assessment amidst Covid-19 pandemic.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

For this study, the participants consist of 25 undergraduates and 25 postgraduates from the Teaching English as a Second language (TESL) course in UPM. The mixed method design was used to collect the data for this study. A qualitative method places emphasis on collecting primarily textual data and examining it using interpretive analysis as cited by Heigman and Croker, (2009). The qualitative method helps to find out more of

the respondents' thoughts through open-ended questions. Besides that, a quantitative method deals with data that are numerical or that can be converted into numbers. According to Judithe, (2018), quantitative method is also related to statistical techniques that are concerned with the organization, interpretation, analysis, and presentation of numerical data.

### **Instruments**

Two instruments were used in order to collect data for this finding that is a set of questionnaires and open-ended questions. Both instruments were used to find out the perceptions among TESL undergraduate and postgraduate students towards online assessments and the challenges faced by them. The questionnaires utilized in this research was largely influenced by few of the previous studies on online assessment. However, the questions were modified in a way to serve the purposes and contexts of this study.

### **Data Collection & Analysis Procedure**

The data were collected through Google form consisting of two sections and few questions on background information. For the first section, a total of 16 questions were asked to find out the students' perception on online assessment while in the second section, a total of 15 questions were asked to gain insights on the challenges faced in completing the assessment. After that, the responses recorded in the Google form will be analyzed using a numeration formula and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was first developed by Gerald Holton in the 1970s and has recently been accepted as a "distinctive method with a clearly outlined set of procedures in social science" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.178). According to these authors, thematic analysis is a data analysis method that helps a researcher to identify themes and patterns of meanings across a dataset in relation to a particular research question.

## **IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

In this section, the findings gained as per the purpose of this research that emphasize the perceptions of undergraduate and postgraduate students on online assessments and the challenges they faced to complete and attempt the assessment in University Putra Malaysia (UPM), Serdang will be presented. Based on the data gathered, comparison between undergraduate and postgraduate perceptions toward online assessment will also be discussed. The demographic information of the participants involved in this study would be presented first before other research questions are answered.

**Table 1: Respondents' Gender and Level of Study**

<b>Demographic Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	11	22
Female	39	78
	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Level of Study</b>		
Undergraduate	25	50
Postgraduate	25	50
	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

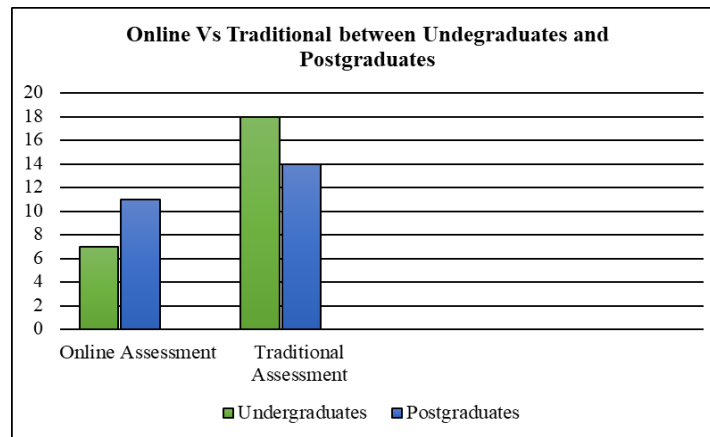
Table 1 shows the demographic information of the respondents. It also presents the number of respondents participated in this study. As illustrated in table 1, out of 50 respondents, 11 respondents are male whereas 39 respondents are female. Besides, 25 of the respondents are undergraduate students while 25 of the respondents are postgraduate students.

**Table 2: Students' Perception on Online Assessment**

Items	Statements	Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Online assessment enhances my learning quality	5	20	16	64
2	Online assessment improves my technical skills.	18	72	21	84
3	Online assessment enhances self-learning	19	76	22	88
4	Online assessment provides immediate feedback about my performance.	14	56	16	64
5	Online assessment provides unbiased grading. It is fair	15	60	7	28
6	Online assessment does not facilitate cheating.	9	36	3	12
7	Online assessment is suitable for all students	4	16	2	8
8	Online assessment is suitable (applicable) for all subjects.	4	16	5	20
9	Online assessment reduces the exam stress.	12	48	21	84
10	Online assessment is convenient and flexible	14	56	20	80
11	Online assessment motivates me to learn the subject matter.	9	36	15	60
12	Online assessment is easier than the traditional assessment.	13	52	13	52
13	Online assessment is faster than the traditional paper assessment.	16	64	20	80
14	I prefer online tests, quizzes, exams, presentations and other online assessment tools.	13	52	14	56
15	I prefer online assessment than the traditional assessment.	9	36	12	48

Table 2 shows the students' perception on online assessment between undergraduates and postgraduates in TESLat University Putra Malaysia (UPM). Based on the table above, there are similarities and differences in the perception between postgraduates and undergraduates in UPM towards online assessment. 64% of the postgraduates find that online assessment enhances their learning quality and provides immediate feedback about their performance in learning. 56% of the undergraduates also find that online assessment provides immediate feedback in the learning performance. Meanwhile, 20 out of 25 undergraduates disagree that online assessment enhances their learning quality. Furthermore, 60% of the undergraduates find that online assessment provides unbiased grading and it is fair. In contrast to the postgraduates which 72% of them thinks that the grading for online assessment is biased and unfair. 60% of the postgraduates discover that online assessment motivates them to learn the subject matter while 64% of the undergraduates oppose this idea.

Other than that, 80% of the postgraduates consider that online assessments improve their technical skills, enhances self-learning, reduces the exam stress, convenient and flexible, and faster than the traditional paper assessment. In relevant to the previous statement, 50% of undergraduates also have the same perception towards online assessment. In addition, more than 50% of both undergraduates and postgraduates find that online assessment is easier and prefer online tests, quizzes, exams, presentations and other online assessment tools than the traditional assessment. Both undergraduates and postgraduates agree that online assessment facilitates cheating and not suitable for all learners and subjects. Overall, the perception of the postgraduates toward online assessments is more positive compared to the undergraduates in TESL at UPM. The figure below will show the comparisons between the two groups on how they perceive the online assessment.



**Figure 1: Undergraduates and Postgraduates' Perception towards Online Assessment and Traditional Assessment**

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students preferred the traditional assessment than the online assessment. The students found that traditional assessment has more effective feedback and communication, less distractions, lower possibilities of cheating, technology limitations and more as compared to online assessment. Overall, 32 out of 50 (64%) of students from both groups preferred the traditional assessment as compared to the online assessment. Meanwhile, 18 students from both undergraduates and postgraduates chose online assessment than the traditional assessment. Most of them chose online assessment as it is flexible and convenient in terms of time, place and cost.

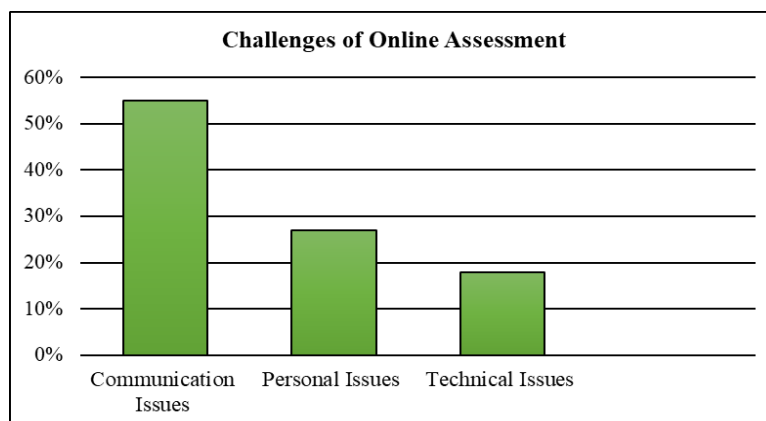
**Table 3: Challenges of Online Assessment**

Items	Statements	Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Lack of physical space or proper facilities.	22	88	23	92
2	Lack of access to resources at the library.	16	64	17	68
3	Lack of internet access.	22	88	21	84
4	Distractions at home.	21	84	23	92
5	Lack of motivation.	20	80	20	80
6	Economic challenges (Internet fee).	21	84	19	76
7	Lack of feedback from the lecturers.	18	72	16	64
8	Online assessments made me nervous.	11	44	8	32
9	Lack of awareness on internet skills and reluctance in taking responsibility for completing the assessment.	15	60	12	48
10	Technological challenges (lack of technological knowledge/unavailability of technological equipment)	16	64	17	68
11	I must think fast in doing the assessment like quiz, test, exam, etc.	18	72	20	80
12	I face difficulty in answering the open-ended questions quickly.	18	72	16	64
13	Time constraint management.	19	76	20	80

Table 3 shows the challenges faced by the undergraduate and postgraduate students in completing and attempting the online assessment. The findings revealed that lack of physical space or proper facilities is one of the biggest challenges faced by both undergraduate (88%) and postgraduate students (92%) in completing their assessments efficiently. Meanwhile, 88% of the undergraduate students and 84% of the postgraduate students also faced several difficulties in attempting the online assessments due to the lack of internet access like unstable network connection or slow internet speed. Despite that, distractions at home appeared to be one of the significant problems among the undergraduate (84%) and postgraduate (92%) students which impede them from attempting or completing the online assessment.

Additionally, 80% of the undergraduate and postgraduate students found it challenging to complete the online assessment as they have a lack of motivation. On the other hand, 84% of the undergraduate students encounter some economic challenges, especially the internet fee burdens them as compared to the postgraduates where only 76% of them were affected by these challenges. The findings also identified time constraint as one of the challenges faced by 76% and 80% of the undergraduate and postgraduate students respectively in

completing the online assessment. These students feel challenged when answering the questions that are limited by time. Overall, these are the major challenges faced by both undergraduate and postgraduate students in completing or attempting the online assessment and there are no significant differences between them.



**Figure 2: Challenges Faced by the Students in Completing the Online Assessment.**

Figure 2 shows other challenges faced by both the undergraduate and postgraduate students in completing the online assessment. Majority of the students, which is 55% of them faced communication issues in completing the online assessment where they don't have two-way communication and no immediate responses from their peers or lecturers. Meanwhile, 27% of the undergraduates and postgraduates were having personal issues such as distractions at home and peers' willingness in completing the assessments. These issues greatly affect the students' performances or ability in attempting and completing the online assignment effectively. Finally, the technical issues were one of the challenges encountered by the undergraduate and postgraduate students. The students tend to make mistakes and errors in completing the assessment as some of them were lacking of skills with the technology equipment.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the study revealed that both group of students in University Putra Malaysia favours traditional assessment than online assessment. They are of the opinion that traditional assessment provides more effective feedback and has lower possibilities of cheating compared to online assessment. The study also revealed that between undergraduates and postgraduates, it can be seen that postgraduates are more open and comfortable with online assessment compared to the others as they think that online assessment provides more flexibility in terms of time, place and costs which is easier and practical. Based on the results, the students find it challenging to do online assessment due to these reasons; communication, personal and technical issues. Attempts to do online assessment, often at home, is difficult because they could not focus on the assessment when there are many distractions around and technicality issues like internet connection. These challenges are often frustrating because these issues are beyond their control. They could not control the variables such as internet connection and that demotivates them while they try to do the assessment.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Online assessment has become an integral part of today's education due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It seems to replace the traditional assessment as every teaching and learning activities including the assessment are being conducted online. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct an effective online assessment to achieve the desired outcomes. It is recommended to the lecturers to provide immediate feedback and constantly communicate with their students. Moreover, lecturers should give tasks to the students on a weekly basis in order to make sure that the students understand a particular topic or content of the course. Meanwhile, it is also suggested to the lecturers to implement a dynamic interactional approach in an online learning environment. For example, encourage the students to communicate by conducting forums or debates online. As many students preferred traditional assessment than the online assessment, lecturers could adapt and adopt the traditional assessment techniques or tools like exams, discussions, speakers' corner and more in order to carry out an effective online assessment. In short, it is highly recommended to conduct a similar study with a bigger sample size and various instruments to obtain more in-depth data and insights.

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