

Online Language Assessment on Secondary Schools: An Investigation on Students' Perception and Preference

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Abstract

Since the beginning of development, language assessments have been provided on paper. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, it has shifted from paper-based to online. This phenomenon is still happening even though the pandemic has subsided, considering the advantages revealed. However, did students perceive them well? And did they prefer them as well? This present study aimed to answer those questions using a survey study design. The data were taken from 300 high school students who have carried out online language assessments using e-questionnaire. The questionnaire covered four aspects: ease of access, instruction, benefit, and motivation. Further, the questionnaire clarified students' preference for the assessment type. Students' positive perceptions toward language online assessments were found by the descriptive statistics results. They also tended to choose the online assessment over the paper-based one.

Keywords: *language assessment, online assessment, paper-based assessment, perception*

INTRODUCTION

The term assessment in education refers to teachers' broad range of techniques or instruments to assess, gauge, and record students' academic preparedness, learning progress, skill development, or educational requirements. It is an ongoing process encompassing various methodological techniques (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018) to promote learning among learners (Webber, 2012). Language assessment, specifically, is the process of using those methodological techniques to accomplish particular jobs in language classrooms and programs. The language assessment provides information on the prospective implementation of curriculum and syllabus components, planning obstacles, and potential instructional delivery issues to help teachers improve their future teaching practices (Sulistyo, 2015).

Assessments have always been provided on paper using pencils since the start of development, known as paper and pencil or paper-based assessments. Paper-based assessments are a group of assessments where candidates read questions and write their answers on paper. Some advantages of this assessment type include student familiarity with the system, development of social relationships among students, lack of technical issues, and ease of access (Le Corff et al., 2017). Since paper-based assessments are adaptable and evaluate advanced

learning abilities, they are considered an effective tool for evaluation. In addition, the fact that paper-based exams have several test questions on each page makes it simple for teachers to grade because they can swiftly go through each question on a page and immediately turn to the next page (Quansah, 2018).

However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, learning as well as assessment have been shifting from offline to online. The situation has significantly altered the scope of education; as a result, all components, including assessments, have shifted to being conducted online (Bardhan et al., 2020). The transition has revived discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of this digital approach over paper-based testing among educators, educational administrators, and researchers (Yeboah, 2023).

Recent studies investigated some advantages of online assessments (Choirunnisa & Mandasari, 2021; Jarrah et al., 2022) both for teachers and students. The results evidenced that online assessments helped teachers complete assignments and did not require much time to score them. With online assessments, students were flexible in that assessments could be done anywhere. Students who could not attend classes on-site through fixed hours or at all might take advantage of online assessment (Jarrah et al., 2022). Apart from the benefits, certain drawbacks of online assessments were also discovered. One of the problems was that the abundance of technology options encouraged unethical activity like cheating (Amzalag et al., 2022; Jarrah et al., 2022). Students in an online environment might assume that because they were not in a traditional classroom, they did not need to put as much effort into learning course material or completing tests (Konrad & Restivo, 2021).

In addition, investigations on the perceptions of online assessment were conducted. Perception is a method of organizing and interpreting sensory inputs to comprehend an idea. As Robbins & Judge (2013) stated, perception is a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment. Responses are obtained through a perceptual process that includes selection, interpretation, and reaction (Erin & Maharani, 2018). The outcomes of the process are the attitude, opinion, beliefs, and feelings of the perceiver. Through this psychological process of perception, people can filter their reactions into favorable or unfavorable. Positive perception will lead to favorable action, while negative perception will result in adverse action. Stated differently, a favorable deed signifies a positive perception, while an unfavorable action denotes a negative one.

Investigating students' perception of school is considered necessary, referring to the

attribution theory proposed by (Weiner, 2010). The fundamental principle of this theory is that human perceptions and understandings determine their behavior. Perception influences emotions and behaviors. Further, those emotional and behavioral responses contribute to forming environments and distorting beliefs about them. Students who tend to hold negative perceptions tend to interpret events pessimistically, which can negatively impact their achievement. Thus, students' perceptions play a significant role in determining learning results. Knowing students' perspectives allows teachers to modify what students find objectionable and enhance what they find agreeable in their instruction and material delivery.

In response, some studies started to examine perceptions on the use of online assessment (Adanır et al., 2020; Fitriyah & Jannah, 2021; Howe, 2020; Khan & Khan, 2019; Shraim, 2019; Yeboah, 2023) with various results. Investigating the general perception of students and lecturers in higher education on online assessment, Fitriyah & Jannah (2021) and Howe (2020) found that both participants had favorable outcomes. Focusing more on students' perception (not lecturers), Shraim (2019) and Yeboah (2023) reported similar findings in which online exams were perceived to offer major advantages over paper-based examinations. However, studies by Adanır et al. (2020) and Khan & Khan (2019) came with different results. Comparing male and female students' perceptions, Adanır et al. (2020) revealed that female students taking online exams in their study felt more disadvantaged than male students. The finding was similar to an earlier study by Khan & Khan (2019), where students did not comprehend the need for online assessment. They felt that online assessments were restrictive and had resulted in falling grades.

Within the context of higher education or tertiary education, certain studies have examined the use of specific online assessment tools such as Kahoot! (Mahbub, 2020; Nurhadianti & Pratolo, 2020; Nuri et al., 2022) and Quizizz (Ota et al., 2023; Zuhriyah & Pratolo, 2020)). The results of these studies indicated that participants generally found the integration of these tools to be well-received. Kahoot! helped teachers and students improve the learning atmosphere (Nurhadianti & Pratolo, 2020; Nuri et al., 2022), added enjoyment, variety, and fun to the class (Mahbub, 2020; Nuri et al., 2022), fostered collaboration among students, enhance competency in English, maintain focus, and strengthen the interaction between students and teachers (Nuri et al., 2022).

Given the benefits that have been discovered, online assessments have also been implemented in secondary education in addition to higher education. However, it's also

important to take into account any potential drawbacks, particularly for the students, of utilizing this kind of assessment. Do they think well of this kind of evaluation? Do they think it's better than the other type? Instead, many find the paper-based ones more pleasant. Unfortunately, only a small number of studies (Alharbi et al., 2021; Amalia, 2018; Bindiya & Fediyanto, 2023; Choirunnisa & Mandasari, 2021; Iman et al., 2021; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018) looked into these phenomena at the secondary education level. Emphasizing this circumstance, the present study aimed to investigate how secondary school students perceive online language assessment. Additionally, it clarified their preference for the assessment type.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This descriptive quantitative study employed a survey approach to understand secondary school students' perceptions of online language assessments in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, as well as their preferences. A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of a population's trends, attitudes, or opinions (Cresswell, 2014).

Participants

Three hundred secondary school students from three distinct East Javan cities — Kediri, Jombang, and Mojokerto — participated in this study. A non-random sampling technique was used to select the participants to ensure each student had experienced online assessments.

Instrument

The data were collected using an e-questionnaire as the instrument of the study. The questionnaire comprised 16 items from 4 aspects adapted from Amalia (2018) and Iman et al. (2021). The four aspects were: 1) ease of access (3 items), 2) the instruction of assessment tools (4 items), 3) the benefit of assessment tools (5 items), and 4) students' motivation (4 items). Additionally, three items clarified participants' preference between online and paper-based assessment were included. The questionnaire was measured in a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The summary of the questionnaire blueprint is presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire were then analyzed statistically. To be more specific, a descriptive analysis was used to pattern the tendency of students' perceptions to achieve the first objective of the present study. The mean and standard deviation of each item on the aspects were calculated for the study's analysis to indicate the tendency of the perceptions following the interpretation proposed by Ismail et al. (2015).

Table 1. Perception Interpretation

No.	Mean	Perception Interpretation
1	1.00 - 1.75	Very negative perception
2	1.76 - 2.50	Negative perception
3	2.51 - 3.25	Positive perception
4	3.26 - 4.00	Very positive perception

Fulfilling the second objective, a paired samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores on the preference responses. Separated responses on the two types of assessment, online and paper-based assessments, that were collected from the same individuals were compared to determine whether the mean values of the two dependent groups differ significantly from each other. The difference indicated the tendency of the preference.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The general information on the assessment types obtained from the questionnaire revealed that the participants had experienced particular online and paper-based assessments. Four popular applications of online language assessment were found. They included Google Classroom, Google Forms, Quizizz, and Kahoot! (see Figure 1).

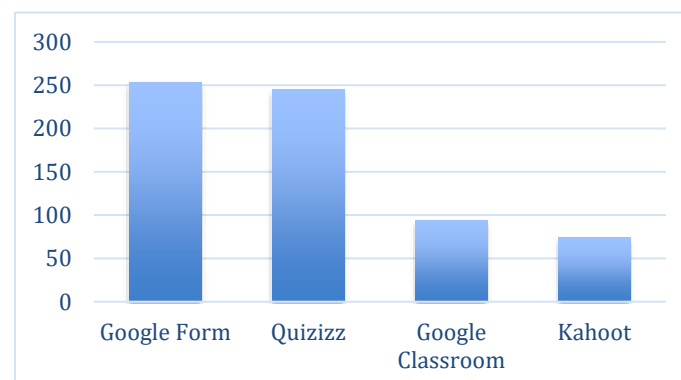


Figure 1. Online Assessment Applications Experienced by the Participants

Google Forms and Quizizz are shown as the most often used online evaluation tools in Figure 1. 253 and 245 participants had experienced the applications on their language assessment. It indicated that both applications were quite popular at the high school level. A few participants reported utilizing Google Classroom (94 students) and Kahoot! (74 students) for their online assessment.

Secondary School Students' Perception of Online Language Assessment

The primary goal of the first data analysis was to find out how secondary school students felt about taking online language assessments, which was the first research objective. Thus, a descriptive statistics analysis was employed on questionnaire responses on each aspect of perception regarding online assessment.

The results of the data analysis on the first aspect, ease of access, show a tendency of positive perception (Mean = 3.04). The detailed findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Perception of Ease of Access Aspect

Item Number	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The registration access is very easy to enter the online assessment	300	3,08	,599
2	It is very easy to use the features used in the online assessment	300	3,03	,633
4	It is very easy to save assessment results and feedback as evaluating material	300	3,01	,689
Total		300	3,04	

The mean scores in each item indicated that most of the students agreed that online assessment was easy to use because the registration access was very easy to enter, the feature was easy to use, and also it was very easy to save assessment results and feedback as evaluating material in online assessment (see Table 3). The highest mean score is 3.08 since the students agreed that the registration access is easy to enter the online assessment. It indicated that the students had no difficulties registering for the online assessment.

Table 4. Students' Perception of Ease of the Instruction of Assessment Tools

Item Number	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
3	It is very easy to understand the instructions/prompts in online assessments	300	3,04	,640
18	Instructions or commands in online assessment can be understood easily	300	3,01	,620
19	The instructions/commands in the online assessment are very clear	300	2,95	,631
20	Online assessments are readable tools	300	3,11	,603
Total		300	3,03	

Table 4 shows the results of the analysis of students' perception of the instruction of online assessment tools as the second aspect. The students rated all items of the instruction of online assessment tools positively. The students easily understood online assessment tools' instructions, prompts, or commands (items 3 and 18). In terms of the clearness of instructions or commands, with a mean score of 2.95, the students also positively perceived the clearness of the instructions or commands in the online assessment. In addition, reaching a mean score of 3.11, the students agreed that online assessments are readable tools. It indicated that the students can read anything using an online assessment tool.

Table 5. Students' Perception of the Benefit of Assessment Tools

Item Number	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
5	I can answer questions anytime and anywhere if I use the online assessment	300	3,17	,782
6	I can change my answers when I do the online assessment	300	3,16	,695
7	Using online assessments requires less internet quota	300	2,71	,874
8	I have enough time to re-check my answers	300	3,16	,667
9	I can find out the score of the answers directly	300	3,06	,791
Total		300	3,05	

As seen in Table 5, the students agreed on some benefits of online assessment, such as the fact that they can answer questions anytime and anywhere if they use the online assessment, with the highest mean score of 3.17. The response indicated that the students perceived positively when they got the chance to carry out assessments at a time and place that they preferred. Other benefits of online assessment, referring to the results of questionnaires, were that the students have enough time to re-check and change the answers and find out the score directly (items 8, 6, and 9). From these responses, it can be said that the students positively perceived the flexibility to re-check and change the answers when they did the online assessments. The lowest mean score of 2.71 showed that the students still positively perceive that online assessment requires less internet quota. It revealed that the students do not mind paying for internet credit because conducting online tests does not cost much.

Table 6. Students' Perception of Ease of the Students' Motivation

Item Number	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
12	Online assessments are interesting; there are many variations of media, such as video, audio, and visual	300	3,17	,648
14	I get better grades when using online assessments	300	2,78	,721
15	I am always enthusiastic when using online assessment	300	3,00	,669
16	I feel motivated by the existence of online assessments	300	3,04	,683
Total		300	3,00	

As shown in Table 6, the statement that *online assessments are interesting* received a high score in the respondents' results (mean=3.17). Online assessments were interesting considering the variations of media such as video, audio, and visual that the students might have when doing online assessments. The mean score for items 14 (2.78), 15 (3.00), and 16 (3.04) demonstrated that the students had a positive perception of the motivation toward online assessments. It indicated that the students were enthusiastic and motivated by online assessment.

Table 7. Students' Overall Perception Toward Online Language Assessment

No	Aspect	N		Mean	Interpretation
		Valid	Missing		
1	Ease of access	300	0	3.04	Positive perception
2	The instruction of assessment tools	300	0	3.03	Positive perception
3	The benefit of assessment tools	300	0	3.05	Positive perception
4	Students' motivation	300	0	3.00	Positive perception
Total				3.02	Positive perception

Concluding all aspects discussed, each element of the online language assessment obtained a high mean score. The benefit of the assessment tools aspect got the highest mean of the data, with a score of 3.05. The lowest mean of the data came from the students' motivation aspect, with a mean score of 3.00. The total mean score of the questionnaire was 3,02, indicating that the students perceive positively toward online language assessment. Data results of the online language assessment questionnaire from the respondents revealed that the students have positive perceptions toward all aspects of assessment, including ease of access, the instruction of assessment tools, the benefit of assessment tools, and students' motivation aspects.

Secondary School Students' Preference on the Assessment Type.

Following the descriptive statistics analysis of students' perceptions, an inferential statistics analysis of the data was conducted to fulfill the second objective of this present study. The mean scores on the preference responses obtained from the same individuals were compared using a paired samples t-test with the following results.

Table 8. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Preference on Online Assessment	8,94	300	1,966	,114
	Preference on Paper-Based Assessment	7,97	300	1,756	,101

The paired sample statistics show a higher mean score on the online assessment preference than the paper-based one. With a mean difference of .970 points, online assessment preference scores are 8.94, while paper-based assessments have 7.97 (see Table 8). The data points appeared closer to the mean, indicating little data variance, as indicated by the values of both preferences, which were close to one standard deviation (1.966 and 1.756).

Table 9. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Preference on Online Assessment – Preference on Paper-Based Assessment	,970	3,041	,176	,625	1,315	5,525	299	,000

Further, the paired samples test presents a Sig. (2-tailed) value of .000. The value, which is lower than the alpha value ($.000 < .05$), indicates that the mean values of the two dependent groups differ noticeably from one another. This difference showed the preference's inclination. Consulting the mean scores presented in Table 8, in which the preference for online assessment got a higher mean score than the paper-based assessment, it can be concluded that students generally preferred online language assessment over paper-based assessment.

Discussion

This present study investigated the secondary school students' perception of online language assessment. The study did not concentrate on particular online assessment tools. However, the general data obtained from the questionnaire revealed the trend of frequently utilized applications in the online language assessment among the participants. In that order, they were Google Forms, Quizizz, Google Classroom, and Kahoot!. This finding was interesting as it confirmed a similar trend shown by some previous studies (Alharbi et al., 2021; Amalia, 2020; Bindiya & Fediyanto, 2023; Choirunnisa & Mandasari, 2021; Iman et al., 2021; Pertiwi, 2020) that investigated those applications specifically at the same educational level. It was slightly different from the higher education level, which showed Quizizz and Kahoot! as the frequently used and investigated applications (Mahbub, 2020; Nurhadiani & Pratolo, 2020; Nuri et al., 2022; Zuhriyah & Pratolo, 2020).

Secondary School Students' Perception of Online Language Assessment

Regarding the secondary school students' perception, four aspects were investigated. They were ease of access, the instruction of assessment tools, the benefit of assessment tools, and students' motivation (Amalia, 2020; Iman et al., 2021). Measured in four Likert scales, the results of the data analysis showed mean scores above 2.50 in all aspects. From the highest to the lowest, the mean scores were 3.05 for the perception of the benefit of assessment tools, 3.04 for the perception on ease of access, 3.03 for the instruction of assessment tools, and 3.00 for the students' motivation. Overall mean score of the perception showed 3.02. Those values indicated the tendency of students to have positive perceptions (Ismail et al., 2015) toward online language assessment, specifically, in the four aspects.

The results validated the earlier research conducted in the same educational context by Alharbi et al. (2021), Amalia (2020), Bindiya & Fediyanto (2023), Choirunnisa & Mandasari (2021), Iman et al. (2021), Pertiwi (2020). Further, the results also confirmed the findings of Fitriyah & Jannah (2021), Howe, (2020), Mahbub (2020), Nurhadiani & Pratolo (2020), Nuri et al. (2022), Shraim (2019), Yeboah (2023), Zuhriyah & Pratolo (2020) who investigated the implementation of online assessment in a higher educational context. However, this present study's overall finding contradicted Adanır et al. (2020) and Khan & Khan (2019). Rather than receiving positive feedback, the majority of respondents felt more negatively about the online exam, according to the study. They believed that the limitations of online exams had caused their grades to decline. As a result, they failed to see the significance of online testing.

Examining various online language evaluation platforms, such as Google Forms (Alharbi et al., 2021), Quizizz (Amalia, 2020; Bindiya & Fediyanto, 2023; Pertiwi, 2020; Zuhriyah & Pratolo, (2020) and Kahoot! (Iman et al., 2021; Mahbub, 2020; Nurhadiani & Pratolo, 2020; Nuri et al., 2022, some studies showed positive responses from the students toward online assessment. To be more specific, the students strongly agreed that the online assessment tools had an attractive display (Amalia, 2020; Pertiwi, 2020) and created a competitive atmosphere in the classroom (Amalia, 2020). In addition, the students also felt that their learning motivation had increased due to the use of online assessment (Iman et al., 2021). Those findings aligned with the present study's findings that showed participants favorable responses on the fourth aspect, students' motivation. The aspect included four indicators of motivation: 1) online assessments are interesting; there are many variations of media, such as video, audio, and visual;

2) I get better grades when using online assessments; 3) I am always enthusiastic when using online assessment; and 4) I feel motivated by the existence of online assessments. Each indicator showed mean scores of 3.17, 2.78, 3.00, and 3.04. Confirming the previous finding of the online assessment tools' attractive display (Amalia, 2020; Pertiwi, 2020), the highest mean score (3.17) shown in the present study was for the first indicator, online assessments are interesting; there are many variations of media, such as video, audio, and visual.

Additionally, the perception mean scores on the first and third aspects – ease of access and the benefit of assessment tools – were 3.04 and 3.05, indicating positive perceptions of the students. This aligned with the findings of some previous studies that presented participants' view that the online assignment tool was very beneficial for students because it was simple, practical (Choirunnisa & Mandasari, 2021), and flexible in terms of online assessment ubiquitously (Choirunnisa & Mandasari, 2021; Fitriyah & Jannah, 2021; Howe, 2020).

Secondary School Students' Preference on the Assessment Type

Further analysis of the students' preferences was conducted using a paired samples test. The analysis aimed to know whether there was a significant difference in the students' preferences for online language assessment compared to its counterpart, the offline assessment. The significant difference in the mean score indicates the tendency of the preference. The results showed the students' preference toward online assessment compared to the traditional offline assessment ($8.94 > 7.97$, Sig. (2-tailed) = .000). The preference tendency confirmed the results of limited studies investigating the same focus (Amalia, 2020; Shraim, 2019; Yeboah, 2023). Employing a qualitative design on 20 high school students, Amalia (2020) found that her participants felt online assessments were better than traditional offline assessments. The results of an earlier study by Shraim (2019) on 342 undergraduate students showed that online assessments were perceived to have significant benefits over traditional, paper-based assessments. The results of the latest study, which investigated 213 students at the same education level as Shraim, indicated that students tended to have a preference for online assessments (Yeboah, 2023).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study investigated learners' perceptions of online assessments in three different East Javan cities, in addition to the preference of online and paper-based assessments. According to the data, four well-known online evaluation applications were discovered: Google Classroom, Google Forms, Quizizz, and Kahoot!. The responses to the online assessment questionnaire revealed that students perceive all aspects of assessment positively, including ease of access, benefit of assessment, student motivation, and instructional aspect.

Students feel that paper-based assessment is easy to use since registration access is very easy to enter, the feature is easy to use, and it additionally very easy to save assessment results and feedback as evaluating material in online assessment. Students will easily comprehend the instructions, prompts, or commands in online assessment tools since they are clear and readable tools. When students are given the opportunity to complete assessments at a time and location that is convenient for them, they respond positively. Students positively perceived the flexibility to re-check and change the answers when doing the online assessments. The existence of online assessments has encouraged and motivated the students.

The paired sample data demonstrate that online assessment preferences have a higher mean score than paper-based assessments. It is reasonable to assume that students preferred online language assessments over paper-based assessments.

Suggestion

The study's findings suggest that students respond positively to online assessments. It is recommended that teachers employ popular online assessments since students are excited and motivated by the availability of online assessments. Several factors to consider while employing online examinations include the benefits of having voice, video, and photos, as well as the ease of logging in and using the features. Further researcher are invited to investigate and compare each aspects of both online and paper-based assessment.

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