

## **EFL Teachers' Online Assessment Practices at Primary School During the COVID-19 Outbreak**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The shift from face-to-face to online learning resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic demanded that teachers refine their assessment methods. Hence, this study investigated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' assessment practices during online learning amid the COVID-19 Pandemic and their challenges in assessing their students online. Using a case study design, two EFL teachers participated in this study through an in-depth interview. The research data were analysed by adopting the six stages of data analysis, namely familiarisation of the data, building codes, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and reporting. The findings showed that the EFL teachers selected various online assessment methods and used easy-to-use social media applications such as Google forms and WhatsApp. However, the results also revealed that the EFL teachers faced challenges when assessing online students. They were initially challenged with students' honesty in doing the test, internet access, communication barrier, and the time-consuming of giving feedback. The findings of the study imply that EFL teachers should improve their online assessment skills by adjusting the students' needs and the contexts of their learning, as the assessment method is distinct in the online classroom compared to the traditional classroom.

**Keywords:** EFL Teachers, Assessment Practice, Online classroom, COVID-19 Outbreak, students' honesty

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has pushed education institutions to adjust their curriculum, create feasible innovations and restructure students' performance evaluation systems in order to make teaching and learning on tract. As learning-centred environments also emerged in an era of dramatic change in the educational landscape, a focused-on process improvement when assessing students is urged (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002). However, there have been limited studies on the investigation and the examination of the assessment focusing on the process improvement during online learning especially examining the merit, feasibility, and effectiveness.

Since March 2020, school closures have impacted 62.5 million students, ranging from preschool to higher education (Gupta & Nurlaili, 2020; Pipit et al., 2020). This situation reinforces teachers to ensure that the quality of online learning instructions is achieved while, at the same time, maintaining positive attitudes toward online teaching, designing an effective learning environment, developing an interactive online teaching-learning community, and implementing accurate and rigorous performance assessments (Yang & Cornelius, 2005). Green, Ferrante, and Heppard (2016) suggested that such consequences, combined with the inevitable shift from traditional pencil-and-paper exams to software examinations, had already induced scholars to investigate various innovative testing procedures, including academic stress, preparedness, and how students perceive numerous test methods. Assessments in online education must promote active and genuine processes in order to achieve meaningful learning experiences for students. The evaluation results can be utilised to improve students' comprehension of the topic and assist teachers in lesson preparation (Yulianto & Mujtahid, 2021). Charteris (2015) stated that assessment would help English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students improve and make them more responsible for keeping track of their progress. Likewise, Garbati and Mady (2015) declared that assessments are an essential part of how educational programs are made because they let us see how well teaching objectives are being met. However, test questions must be made using the correct principles and steps to measure how well students have learned. Then, after the test is given, it can be decided if it is of better quality or not, making research on this assessment practice very pivotal.

Some scholars have investigated assessments in English Language Teaching before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The first study was carried out by Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002); they explored how critical portfolio assessment is for EFL students in Tehran. An E-portfolio is one of the conventional ways, and it is much more than just a way to collect proof of what learners have learned. Nevertheless, assessment should involve both students and teachers to discover what students have learned and take it to the next level. Furthermore, Chung and Choi (2021) in their study on the development of sustainable assessment during the COVID-19 outbreak in South Korea, found out that instructors set up a professional learning community so they could talk to each other regularly and try to come up with new ways to assess students that were more process-oriented and formative. They also mentioned that educators gave multimodal projects requiring students to actively use target language structures and functions. Students liked the new language assessment practices, while instructors liked them less. Another relevant study was also done by Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2021). They studied the online assessment of Iranian EFL

teachers amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. The results showed that the EFL teachers initially faced significant methodological, technical, administrative, and emotional challenges with the switch to online assessment, but as the course progressed, they adapted their technique to the new circumstances.

In contrast, Yulianto and Mujtahid (2021) reported that issues still impacted their online assessment even though the learning has been carried out for more than one year. They concluded that during the COVID-19 outbreak, teachers had negative perceptions of online testing due to unstable internet connection, the legitimacy of the exam, and the students' poor excitement were all challenges during the assessment test. However, studies have focused more on the middle to higher education, leaving a need to explore how online assessment is conducted in primary school with young learners. Little has been studied about the specific treatments or practices that EFL teachers implemented when assessing students online, as the challenges may be more significant than for older groups of learners. Online assessment mode may be far more challenging for children due to their limited digital knowledge and skills (Farmasari, 2021). Therefore, the present study explores the EFL teachers' assessment practice in online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic at a primary school in Indonesia. A further purpose of the study is to address the challenges the EFL teachers face in implementing online assessments in their online teaching.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative research design in the form of a case study with narrative inquiry to delve into a more depth analysis of the phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2014) define a case study as a qualitative method where the researcher looks at a real-world, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time. This is done by collecting detailed, in-depth data from various sources and writing a case description and case themes.

### *Sampling Method*

The sampling technique employed in this study was a convenience sampling. According to Ilker, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), the primary goal of using convenience sampling is to collect data from conveniently available subjects. Therefore, the researchers selected the participants based on the availability of the participants to meet their specific needs for a project. Thus, this study selected two EFL teachers teaching at an Islamic-Integrated Primary School in a remote district of Indonesia. It was chosen as it represents the new normal Islamic school during the open distance learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. They participated in semi-structured interviews which explored their online assessment practices and challenges when implementing them amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The following table shows the demographic data of the two EFL teachers.

Table 1  
The Demographic Profile of the Participants

	Age	Gender	Qualification	Grade
Teacher 1 (T1)	26	Female	Bachelor's Degree	5 and 6
Teacher 2 (T2)	34	Female	Bachelor's Degree	2

*The Research Instrument*

The only instrument used in this study was interview. The interview questions were adapted from previous research by Yulianto and Mujtahid (2021), Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2021), and Arif (2020). It consisted of nine questions related to EFL teachers' practices on online assessment and the challenges they faced in implementing it during the online learning.

*The Data Collection*

To collect the data, the researchers were using semi-structured interview questions. The participants were first informed regarding the purpose of the study, and a consent form was obtained from the participants prior to conducting the interview. Then, the participants were interviewed using a WhatsApp video call for more than forty minutes. The interview data were then recorded and tabulated for the transcriptions. Finally, the data were then analysed thematically using the six phases of data analysis from Braun and Clarke (2021), namely familiarisation of the data, building codes, generating initial themes, developing, and reviewing the themes, defining, and naming the themes, and reporting.

**FINDINGS**

In this section, two research objectives are addressed. The statements from the participants are explained anonymously to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants.

Research Objective 1: Determining the types of online assessments the EFL teachers used during online learning amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

The study reveals that the EFL teachers utilised easy-to-access online platforms and applications for their assessment. Similar findings were also found by previous studies (see Halil, 2020; Shankar, 2012). The dominant platforms and applications are WhatsApp, Google forms, and Quizzes. The teachers used the same media for teaching and assessment. The online evaluation was conducted both synchronously and asynchronously.

Table 2  
 Types of online assessment employed by the EFL teachers

	Mode	Type	Platform/Application	Form
Teacher 1 (T1)	Synchronous	Written Test	Google Forms Quizzes	Multiple-Choice Questions Multiple-Choice Questions
	Asynchronous	Written Test	WhatsApp	Multiple-Choice Questions Matching (Words) Open-ended responses
Teacher 2 (T2)	Synchronous	Written Test	Google Forms Quizzes	Multiple-Choice Questions Multiple-Choice Questions
	Asynchronous	Written Test	WhatsApp	Multiple-Choice Questions Matching (Words, Pictures) Open-ended responses

Table 2 shows that both participants utilized Google forms and Quizzes for synchronous online assessment and WhatsApp messaging for asynchronous evaluations. Furthermore, both teachers used only written tests on the online assessment. However, they usually provided the students with mini exercises or games during the online teaching and learning as preparations for the assessment, as in the following excerpt:

*..... the kind of assessment that I use in my classroom. It's in the form of games. So, I give assessment or measure my student's knowledge after presenting the materials by using games that we call, let me think it's quizzes. Quizzes application. Yeah. And then another way to give assessment to my students is by asking them to make a video, and then they will send it to me. And another one. I use what we call it. Google workshop. Yeah, kind of Google Forms, but Google Forms is only used in terms of the final test. So daily, after I teach my students through Zoom meetings, they are super excited when I assess them using Google Forms. They could compete with their friends. So, they enjoyed that. (T1)*

T2 also explained a similar situation in her online assessment practice. She mentioned that she dominantly assessed students asynchronously due to limited internet access in the area. The assessment documents were sent to the student parents' WhatsApp group so the parents could communicate the assessment to their children and provide necessary assistance, as stated below. Parents' help was needed as young learners (Year 1 and 2) possess limited capabilities in understanding the instructions and completing the assessment.

*We used Google Forms. We sent test documents to the students' parents because I teach second and first grade, so sometimes it's difficult for them to use Google Forms. So, we directly send the softcopy of the documents to them.*

In addition, the researchers also asked the participants how they managed to give the online assessment to their students. T1 mentioned that she frequently informed the students before giving assessments. The students were required to pay attention to the teacher's lesson. Moreover, when using google forms and quiz applications, the teacher first notified the students' parents through WhatsApp groups about tests. It can be seen from the T1 statements below:

*I informed the students at the beginning of the class, then wrote the link in Zoom chat. I sent the link to the parents' WhatsApp group for quizzes and Google forms.*

T2, on the one hand, expressed similar statements that she often used WhatsApp group when assessing her students. She usually informed the students' parents earlier if there was a test or quiz, including allotment time for answering the questions. Finally, the student's parents resent their children's test responses to the teacher's WhatsApp.

*If we had a test, we would first have informed the WhatsApp group parents. The document we sent contained the time allotment, the topics, and the due test date. The students had to complete the tests for four hours or two hours or something like that. The student's parents sent the assessment responses to us.*

Research Objective 2: EFL teachers' challenges when conducting online assessment

Table 3 below shows the challenges that EFL teachers experienced when assessing students online. More challenges were faced when the assessment was conducted synchronously through the google forms platforms.

Table 3  
 The challenges faced by EFL teachers when conducting online assessments

	Mode	Challenges
Teacher 1	Synchronous	The students' integrity
	Synchronous	Time-consuming for feedback
Teacher 2	Synchronous	Internet Access Representativeness of topics in the quizzes Communication barrier with parents
	Asynchronous	Misunderstanding of the assessment instructions

The table above shows that EFL teachers are not free from challenges when implementing online assessments. T1 admitted the difficulty of maintaining the students' integrity or honesty on the online assessment. Observing what the students did when they completed the tests online was extremely hard. Moreover, more time was required for feedback as she had to reschedule feedback sections several times when their students' internet access was not supportive.

*I can say the obstacle I face when teaching online is that I do not know if the students work on the tests honestly or not. I did not know whether they cheated or not because they could open their books easily at home or search for answers on the internet. Also, I had to call the students individually for feedback, and I could not meet the students directly. It's impossible to get feedback in general because the input is very individual. Their internet connection also affected our sections. I rescheduled the feedback section if the students' internet connection was terrible.*

Similarly, T2 also encountered challenges when assessing primary students online. We identified three themes from T2 responses: communication issues with parents, internet access, and difficulty in covering all topics or lessons in the quiz.

*One of them is we can't totally give the quizzes that we really want to, I mean any material, of course, there are material that you wish to briefly know the students whether they understand this material or not, but because it is online, so we must make little questions like 15. So, we must decrease the number of assignments. Also, I had difficulties communicating because sometimes the parents don't have internet data, so the students can't directly answer the questions. Some miscommunications with parents also occurred. They missed the instructions I gave, resulting in inappropriate responses to the tests.*

The vignette above implies that the communication between parents and teachers dramatically influences successful of online assessments for primary school students. It is not only about internet access, but the parent's understanding of the assessment instructions affected the

students' responses to the test questions. As a result, the test responses had to be returned to parents and completed by the students. In addition, the limited space in online assessment platforms or applications affected the number or amount of test items. T2 admitted that having equal representations of the topics in Quizzes and Google Forms was difficult.

## **DISCUSSION**

The present study's findings indicate that the unprecedented transition from face-to-face to online learning has forced EFL teachers to learn using online platforms and applications. The selection of the digital supports for assessment was based on the teachers, students, and parents' convenience and familiarity. WhatsApp, Google forms, and Quizzes were used as the three were easy and convenient. The three platforms and applications were also used for teaching. The study also reveals the dominant use of written tests through the three online platforms and applications. This finding supports the study by Yulianto and Mujtahid (2021). Google forms and WhatsApp messages are perceived as more accessible for sending and receiving assessment worksheets. Google forms were also viewed as a time-friendly platform for a vibrant and interactive learning environment (Iqbal et al., 2018). The use of WhatsApp messaging provides a variety of collaboration functions, including the exchange of text messages, pictures, videos, and voice notes among social networks, groups, and contacts; the construction of social media network groups where members can participate in discussions; and unlimited messaging (Baguma et al., 2019). Therefore, WhatsApp was able to promote online interaction and collaboration options in teaching and learning (Barhoumi & Rossi, 2013).

However, the two teachers admitted that observing the students' integrity during the online assessment was one of the biggest obstacles. This finding is in line with Abduh (2021), who revealed that nearly all of the interviewed teachers were worried about issues such as plagiarism, cheating, and determining the identities of people taking exams. In addition to this challenge, providing online feedback was another homework. T1 offered extra time for individual online feedback when the internet connection was unstable. Park and Bonk (2007) also delineated that issues with online assessment are all about the delay in giving and receiving feedback, high costs, and the inability to manage big cohorts.

Further, this study reveals various assessment types and forms when assessing students synchronously and asynchronously. More forms of assessments were used when the assessment was enacted asynchronously: multiple-choice questions, matching words, matching pictures, jumbled sentences, and open-ended responses. In contrast, only multiple-choice questions were used in synchronous online assessments. Time allotment and internet access appeared to be the most factors influencing the selection of assessment forms in synchronous meetings.

T2 encountered different issues regarding their challenges in conducting online assessments. First, she found it hard to communicate with the student's parents as they were busy working, which resulted in a lack of supervision of their children. T2 also denoted that another issue arose due to the internet access of the student's parents. Many studies have already investigated that internet access is becoming the central issue encountered by both teachers and students in an online classroom (Ramdhani & Kholidi, 2021; Yulianto & Mujtahid, 2021; Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). The participants also raised concerns

about the representativeness of topics, as the google forms and quizzes have limited spaces for assessment items. This finding strengthens Abduh's (2021) study, which highlighted that online platform had restricted possibilities for constructing questions. Consequently, the questions crucial for achieving the program learning outcomes had to be reduced.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### *Conclusion*

The present study sought insight into how the two EFL teachers conducted their online assessments of young learners during the online learning amid the COVID-19 outbreak and the challenges they encountered. The study reveals that the selection of the digital platforms and applications was based on accessibility and familiarity to all involved parties: teachers, students, and parents. Both EFL teachers used Google forms and Quizzes for synchronous assessment and WhatsApp messaging for asynchronous assessment. Written test was dominantly used. Challenges such as students' integrity, limited internet access, communication barrier, and time-consuming online feedback were identified to affect the effectiveness of the online assessment. This study sheds light on online assessment practices and problems in implementing them in a primary school context. However, the study implies the necessary actions to overcome obstacles during the online assessment and calls for digital literacy among teachers.

### *Recommendations*

This study recommends that it is necessary to upgrade the technological and pedagogical skills of teaching and to learn in online contexts, particularly in providing online assessments to provide more meaningful learning for the students. It can be done by providing various engaging ways to conduct online assessments, including utilizing several digital tools to support online assessments and varying the types of assessments. The teachers must also develop their online assessment autonomy in an online classroom. Popham (2009) suggest that the greater the liberty granted to instructors, the greater the chances they undertake their assessment practice and increase their knowledge ownership. This mandates professional development programs on the implementation of online assessments.



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