Online Assessment in the Digital Era: Moroccan EFL University Students' Experiences, Perceptions and Challenges

Nourreddine Menyani
Ecole Normale Supérieure, Meknes, Moulay Ismail University, Morocco

Ahlame Boumehdi
Ecole Normale Supérieure, Meknes, Moulay Ismail University, Morocco

Oumaima El Jaadi
Ecole Normale Supérieure, Meknes, Moulay Ismail University, Morocco

Abstract

After the scientific consensus on the proliferation of COVID-19, a lethal virus, educational institutions worldwide have swiftly migrated to online learning. This upheaval has propelled online evaluation and assessment to be the norm during this period. The principal objective of the study and research is to explore students' experience with online emergency learning as well as online evaluation. This paper also investigates how Moroccan English as a foreign language (EFL) university learners perceive online assessment in comparison to face-to-face assessment. Data were collected from a sample of 93 Moroccan EFL university students using a self-designed questionnaire. The findings of this research revealed that the students experienced technical issues while submitting their exams. They have also expressed their disappointment with the lack of feedback provided by their professors, not to mention their constant worry about academic honesty. This has led them to lose interest in their studies and possess doubts about reliving this dissatisfactory experience. Therefore, the results implied that participants perceive online assessment as an insignificant factor for performance improvement. This unprecedented experience has had an unadulterated negative impact on students as it has left them both dissatisfied with their experience regarding distance learning and apprehensive about their future educational experiences. It is, then, recommended that the notion of online assessment should be given much attention in higher education in the Moroccan context.

Keywords: challenges, feedback, online assessment, students' perceptions

Since the unforeseen advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide, including Morocco, have imposed severe regulations that prohibit social gatherings and galvanize self-isolation. As a strategy to prevent this virus from proliferating, several educational institutions have abruptly shuttered their doors and shifted not only to online learning but also to online assessment. The COVID-19 crisis has rapidly accelerated the digital transformation of education globally, as colleges and universities have had to make numerous changes to their teaching styles, research processes, and collaborative relationships Chan (2021). This rampant health crisis has triggered irrevocable ramifications on the educational sector and thus led to its incontrovertible exacerbation in the sense that it has reshaped the delivery and reception of knowledge and skills. Online education is not a novel issue, but COVID-19 pandemic has been a stimulant force for the adoption of online learning in education in general (Chan, Bista, & Allen, 2021). The use of the Internet as an interface between students and teachers has become tremendously ubiquitous, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. These changes have prompted educational institutions to implement several preventative measures to stop this vicious cycle from perpetuating itself, resulting in the shift from the traditional "chalk and talk" learning/assessment to remote/virtual assessment as the sole outlet that ensures the successful progression of courses. The pandemic has transcended national and regional boundaries, generations, and social classes – the many categories utilized to make sense of society. The pandemic has also served as a catastrophic reminder of the absolute necessity of higher education for knowledge generation and human well-being (Blanco, 2022).

During this period, the adoption of remote assessment/invigilation was a necessity rather than a luxury. For most Moroccan university students, this was the first time they had to take an online exam. Likewise, students were in a complete turmoil due to the lack of a supporting infrastructure. This served as an opportunity for both stakeholders and students to realize that what works well with traditional assessment is not adequate enough for a reliable online assessment experience. The online paradigm holds that learning itself may be different in the online environment and, if that is true, then the methodology for measuring it should also be different or should measure those things that are, in fact, different (Milam, Voorhees, & Bedard-Voorhees, 2004). Educational assessment is a systematic process of gauging information to extrapolate pertinent results about the accuracy of the program, students' progress and performance, and achievement of outcomes. Assessing is a general term to describe all those activities and processes involved in judging performance (Peters et al, 1988). In the same vein, assessment has become the term of choice in education for determining the quality of student work for purposes of identifying the student's level of achievement (Mabry, 2005).

Continuous outbreaks of new COVID-19 variants are anticipated to compel future stringent lockdowns, necessitating preparation, particularly in the educational sector. In this regard, investigating students' perceptions and experiences with online assessment is of paramount importance to successfully deal with the unpredictability of the situation. Readiness to learn online, or E-learning, as set forth by the government is almost non-existent (Sakkir, Dollah, & Ahmad, 2021).

Hence, this paper endeavors to explore students' experience with online emergency learning as well as online evaluation. In addition, it seeks to explore the utility and effectiveness of online assessment from a student perspective. Lastly, it sets out to investigate students' readiness to go through the same experience in the future. Therefore, this study aims at answering the following questions:

1. How do Moroccan English as a foreign language (EFL) university students perceive online assessment?

2. How effective is online assessment from students' perspective?
3. To what extent will the Moroccan EFL university students be ready for a complete online learning experience in the future?

The use of online assessment is increasing because of multiple grounds. Despite the heavy resort to online assessment, especially during the period of COVID-19 in the Moroccan context, there is a paucity of research that investigates students' perceptions of online assessment in the educational context in general, and the effectiveness of online assessment systems or platforms in particular. This pandemic laid bare the sinister underbelly of e-assessment in education. That being the case, exploring Moroccan EFL university students' experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of online assessment will certainly lead to fruitful implications and will decipher myriads of qualms surrounding this topic. Therefore, the findings of the research under investigation are significant as they would provide enough information about the parts of the online assessment to be given much attention due to their importance, and the parts of the systems to be improved or rectified to overcome potential challenges and to reach promising outcomes.

Literature Review

The entire globe has been in a state of emergency since late 2019 to early 2020, with face-to-face education suffering severe setbacks that have been compensated for by online learning. However, due to a multitude of factors, this abrupt shift has not been entirely successful. Two of these are the unpreparedness for taking it as the sole mode of learning and the inability to meet the conditions for fair online assessment. According to Jamiai (2021), the debate over the effectiveness and quality of online learning is also highly controversial in the sense that researchers' perspectives differ on the levels of validity and credibility of the unexpected new pedagogy adopted in Moroccan higher education. In the same vein, Neuwirth, Jović and Moukherj (2021) have stated that the real issue with e-learning is ''how should faculty approach maintaining rigor and delivering quality education as well as provide support for their students' ongoing ability to engage in meaningful, interactive educational activities in the context of a crisis such as this pandemic?" (p. 42).

For the purpose of this research paper, the review of literature will be aligned with the objectives for this study. In that sense, the focus will be on online assessment, its techniques, importance, limitations, and solutions along with students' perceptions.

The Importance of Assessment

A review of previous literature reveals that there is no clear-cut definition of assessment. According to Bachman (2004), there appears to be no consensus on what assessment technically means given its multifaceted interpretations and the diversified ways in which it has been used in the field of language and educational testing. Therefore, the concept of assessment resides in the eye of the beholder. It has many definitions, so it is essential that anyone who writes or speaks about assessment defines it at the outset (Kinzie, 2015). For starters, Brown (2004) has defined assessment as any act of interpreting information about student performance, collected through a variety of means or practices. By the same token, Benson and Brack (2010) has averred that when assessment is thought of, it is often equated with examinations and assignments, as well as grading the performance of students in order to decide if they are eligible to "pass" a particular subject or part of it. In addition, Palomba and Banta (1999) have posited a more crystallized definition of assessment wherein they asserted that it is the systematic

collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. In line with assessment, Weleschuk, Dyjur, & Kelly (2019) have suggested that online assessments can be defined as any procedure or course of action for assessing students' learning performance, providing feedback, or pushing students along in their learning process in completely online credit courses.

Given the miscellaneous definitions of assessment, it is critical to discriminate between formative and summative assessment. The former is mainly concerned with students' progress and learning process. In the same line of reasoning, Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis (2011) have defined formative assessment as:

> the iterative processes of establishing what, how much and how well students are learning in relation to the learning goals and expected outcomes in order to inform tailored formative feedback and support further learning, a pedagogical strategy that is more productive when the role is shared among the teacher, peers and the individual learner. (p. 2337)

Thus, feedback of this particular type is crucial as it helps students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that require improvement. The student needs feedback in order to see deficiencies and mistakes (Senel & Senel, 2021). Moreover, given the epidemic's imposed status quo, feedback is essential to ensure interaction between faculty members and students in distance education. As Senel and Senel (2021) have contended, in the same article mentioned above, "monitoring and "feedback", which is a part of formative assessment in distance education is gaining more importance. Feedback can be considered as the primary means of student-faculty communication and interaction" (p. 182). On the other hand, the goal of a summative assessment is to compare students' learning at the end of an instructional course to a benchmark. According to Biesta (2009), summative evaluation has a directing influence as it drives the impetus to make important decisions such as passing a course, enrolling in a higher education institution, and receiving a diploma or certificate. In a similar vein, Mogboh and Okoye (2019) have stated that "summative assessment sums up what a student has achieved at the end of a period of time, relative to the learning aims and the relevant state/national standards" (p. 39). In the same breath, the authors have referred to two types of assessments: summative, which is used to grade students against a set of standards or criteria and formative, which is used for tracking students' progress.

As a result, assessment practices affect students by leading their consideration of certain aspects of module material and by stipulating how to process information (Baleni, 2015). Therefore, assessment is critically important to education both for accreditation and to support learning (Taras, 2008).

Online Assessment Methods and Techniques

Bearing in mind that neither the circumstances nor the settings of traditional and online assessment are similar, new techniques are necessarily being created to survive online assessment challenges that are likely to result in assessing desired learning outcomes with a degree of compromise. It has been suggested that a variety of assessment techniques should be employed to effectively assess student performance online (Pallof & Pratt, 2009).

Palloff and Pratt (2009, p. 41) have provided the following techniques:

- The provision of regular, ongoing communication with and feedback to students as a means by which to embed assessment in the course itself,
- The inclusion of dynamic interaction, defined by the use of group work, collaboration, and a high level of interaction through discussion,
- The modification of traditional assessment tools, such as essays, discussion question responses, and projects that require demonstration of skill acquisition and problem - solving ability, and
- The use of alternative assessments, such as performance-based assessments, authentic assessments, and the use of e-portfolios.

Palomba and Banta (1999) have bifurcated between direct and indirect assessment methods. Direct measures divulge what students have learnt. They include objective tests where students get to choose the right and wrong answers and performance measures where they produce their own content as in essays, comprehensive portfolios, and so on. On the other hand, questionnaires and interviews are examples of indirect techniques that require students to reflect on their learning instead of demonstrating it.

Students' Perceptions of Online Assessment

There is a scarcity of research scrutinizing students' perceptions of online assessment. Additionally, there exist multiple remarkable disparities in how students perceive online assessment. For some, online evaluation is favorable, and they uphold its enactment. Other views are juxtaposed to the optimistic, favorable ones; online assessment does not bode well for them. For instance, Rolim and Isaisas (2018) have demonstrated that both students and instructors positively accept the accessibility of online assessments. Likewise, Tran, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Tran (2021) have suggested that the future of e-assessment is tremendously propitious because the majority of students were enthusiastic towards its adoption during the pandemic era. Moreover, Huda, Kabir, & Siddiq (2020) have reported that learners perceive online assessment favorably; yet, they indicated that some students have conflicting feelings of comfort and apprehension. On their part, Alsalhi, Qusef, Al-Qatawneh, & Eltahir (2022) in their research have implied that the "students were in favour of online assessment as students' degree of acceptance of online assessment during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, from the students' own perspective, the degree of acceptance of online assessment was at a high level" (p. 23). However, they went on to say that students' perspectives towards online assessment vary according to gender, college, and academic year.

Khan and Khan (2018) have conducted a study in the United Arab Emirates where they discovered that what matters for students the most regarding online assessment is a well-planned transition. They suggested that "It is evident through this study and in literature that one of the most essential elements to the acceptance of online assessments is how the transition from traditional assessments is made" (p.673). They have also found out that students crave meaningful interactions with their instructors as well as a constructive and timely feedback. From this study, it is clear that in order to make online assessment more acceptable for students, it is important that the interaction with instructors must remain personalized, active, and meaningful. This is consistent with the results of another comparative study in the UK, South Africa, and Hungary conducted by Cranfield, Tick, Venter, Blignaut, & Renaud (2021), which demonstrated that students yearned for physical interaction and preferred face-to-face delivery of information.

Online Assessment Challenges

One of the most serious challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is the unpreparedness of teachers and students to undergo online assessment. Teachers lacked familiarity with online assessment and did not have enough time to create effective online assessments as COVID-19 took them by surprise (Baciri & Sahli, 2020). While every institution of higher education likely has contingency planning for the short term, many did not have long-term continuity plans for the transition from in-person courses to an online modality (Chan et al., 2021). They have added, "The sudden transition to online coursework left some faculty members scrambling to redesign courses to follow a modality they may never have taught in" (p. 13). In addition to that, mentioning online assessment without talking about the plagiarism epidemic and cheating is futile, especially given that many higher education institutions lack online and physical security to safeguard assessments and cheating, and thus circumstances such as COVID-19 might indeed necessitate some compromise in assessing intended learning outcomes (Tuah & Naing, 2021). Finally, yet importantly, COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing disparities between students. Problems of connectivity are only the tip of the iceberg. COVID-19 restrictions have widened the digital gap across all teaching and learning spaces (due to the lack of a national response to the public health crisis), while exacerbating economic and structural inequalities with regards to ICT access (i.e., Internet, electricity, computers) among historically vulnerable populations (e.g., rural children, families of color, students with disabilities, students of refugee status) (Salmi, 2021 as cited in Chan, et al., 2021).

Previous Research/Studies

Since the sudden outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting shift to online education and assessment, numerous researchers have endeavored to demystify the multifarious angles of this issue and thus provide the basic platform for stakeholders to manage and deal with this new trend of education. Senel and Senel (2021) have conducted a study on remote assessment and discovered that rapid assessment and feedback were insufficient for effective learning. Students have also reported that online test scores do not necessarily reflect their scholastic aptitude. The same study pointed out that despite the accessibility to remote assessment, students still prefer conventional exams. In the same context, another study conducted by Montenegro-Rueda, Luque-de La Rosa, Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, & Fernández-Cerero (2021) demonstrated that online assessment was accompanied with myriads of challenges that heavily affected both students and faculty members. These problems include a conspicuous shortage of platforms designed specifically for online assessment that lay the groundwork for academic dishonesty, connectivity issues and technical problems, and privacy issues. Concerning teachers' perspectives, Anasse and Rhandy (2021) through their research have revealed that there is a tendency among participants to favor paper-writing assessment to online ones. This is because EFL Moroccan teachers lack prior experience with online assessment, not to mention digital illiteracy. While many pieces of research have provided diversified definitions of assessment, delved deeper into online assessment's techniques and practices, and focused on the impact of online education on students as well as teachers, few tackled the problem of online assessment from students' perspectives, experiences, and perceptions. Students' experience with online assessment is very important to improve the educational process since they play an important role in the learning process so does their experiences with certain learning processes.

Method and Methodology

This section will describe and discuss in detail the research design and methodology used in this study, as well as the population, the sample, and the geographical areas where the study was conducted. It also examines the data collection instrument and the data analysis procedures. The research under study adopted an exploratory research design as it sought to explore several issues regarding online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely students' perceptions of online assessment, its effectiveness, and challenges.

This study targeted Moroccan EFL university students. Therefore, the participants of this study were ninety-three (N= 93) Moroccan EFL university students, namely from Moulay Ismail University, Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) Meknes, and Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. The participants were second-year students (Semester 3) and third-year university students (Semester 5). The sample was composed of males and females aged between 18 and 24. This study was conducted using a quantitative method manifested by a questionnaire as a data collection instrument (Creswell, 2014). Based on a thorough review of the literature and based on the objectives of the study, a questionnaire (Schommer & Walker, 1995) was designed, reviewed, and then circulated online via various platforms, primarily Gmail and WhatsApp, to undergraduate students to complete (Creswell, 2012). Data collection took place during the eleventh month of 2021. The sampling method was of a convenient/purposive nature. For the data analysis procedure, it was planned to use the SPSS version 19 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), but because of the nature of online questionnaires, the analysis of the results was generated automatically which were mainly descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

The aim of this section is to analyze and interpret the collected data from the online survey questionnaire that was administered to the ninety-three Moroccan EFL university students attending numerous institutions. Generally, the overall analysis of the obtained data is carried out in accordance with the research questions of this study and in alignment with the survey questions. More precisely, the quantitative data, represented by the questionnaire, described the overall tendency of the informants.

Students' Readiness and Perceptions of Online Assessment (RQ1)

Students' readiness and motivation for online assessment would truly aid in building a mental model of how they perceive the experience and would definitely identify the success and utility of online assessment. Hence, the students were provided with closed-ended questions, and they were asked to respond to how ready they were for taking online exams. As reported in the figure below, the majority of the respondents (72%) claimed to be unready and had no intention to sit for online exams. Nevertheless, 28% of the informants indicated that they were ready for such experience.

Figure 1

Students' Readiness for Accessing Remote Assessment

The ease or difficulty of Internet access is a significant factor in measuring not only the success of online learning but also online evaluation as it unquestionably enhances the students' access to their tests remotely. Accordingly, the results, as shown in Figure 2, revealed that more than one-third of participants (36.6%) stated their uncertainty and neutrality regarding the ease of accessing the Internet or difficulty of accessing their exams online. However, almost half of the informants claimed that it was either easy (32.3%) or very easy (7.5%) for them to access their exams using the online model. On the other hand, a lesser amount of them revealed that it was either difficult (15.1%) or very difficult (8.6%).

Figure 2

Difficulty in terms of Internet for Accessing Exams Online
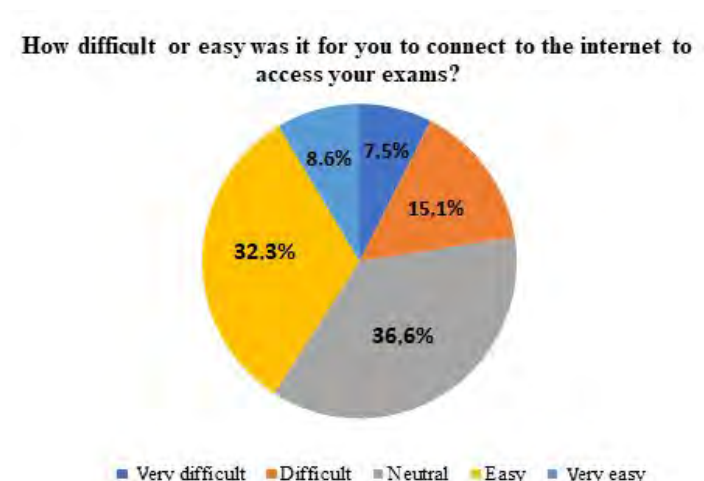
Giving and receiving feedback is commonly regarded as a form of assessment employed to improve students' performance. In this respect, the informants were required to respond to a five-point scale (1= always, 2= usually, 3= often, 4= sometimes, 5= never) concerning receiving online feedback as far as their performance was concerned. The obtained results, as illustrated in Figure 3, suggested that the majority of the participants (41.9%) claimed that they sometimes received feedback, some of them (17.2%) usually received feedback, a minority (10.8%) often

received feedback and the smallest number of participants (7.5%) revealed that they always received feedback. Several respondents (22.6%) declared that they received no feedback.

Figure 3
Instructors' Feedback to Students' Online Performance
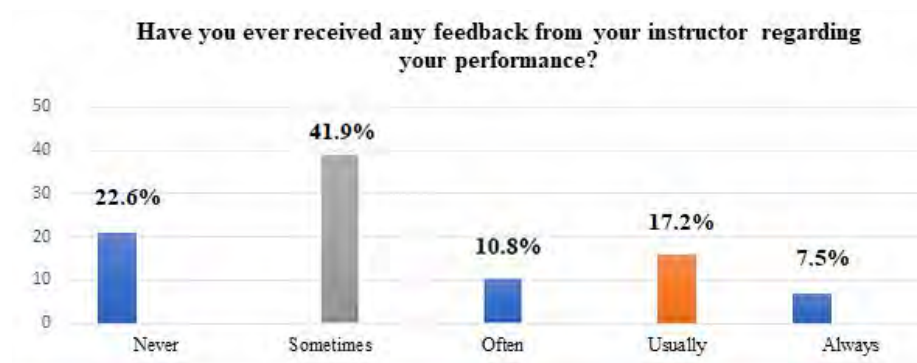
In this study, students' perceptions were issued as a focal point of the investigation. As a result, learning about the participants' perspectives on online assessment was vital. The obtained data demonstrated that the majority of the respondents (41.9%) perceived their experience with remote online assessment as insignificant or average. Moreover, several informants described this experience as either challenging (30.1%) or unfruitful (9.7%). However, some respondents agreed that this online evaluation experience was fruitful (17.2%). Overall, the number of informants who expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the online assessment experience was close to the same number that considered the feedback insignificant.

Figure 4
Students' Perceptions of their Online Assessment Experience
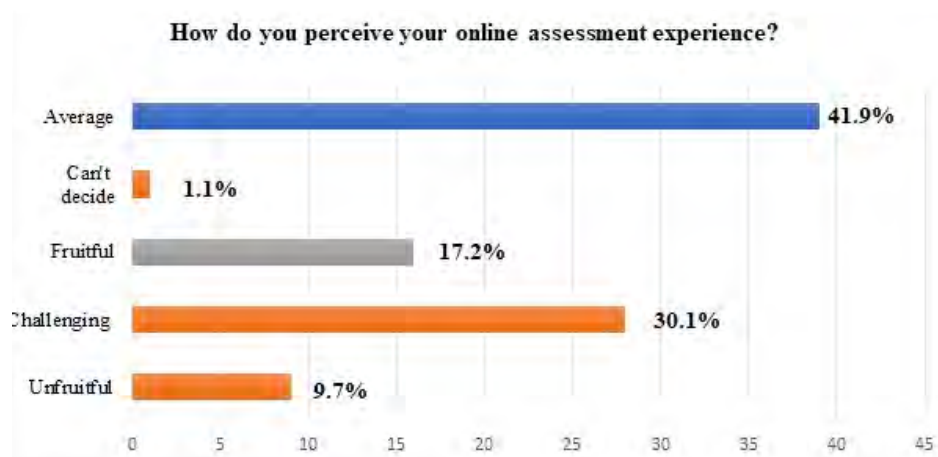
**The Effectiveness of Online Assessment (RQ2)**

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, students had only been exposed to traditional onsite evaluation throughout their scholastic careers. Therefore, gaining an insight into the effectiveness of online assessment from a student perspective was at the core of the present study. For this reason, students were required to respond to a yes-no question regarding the effectiveness of online assessment in comparison to a traditional face-to-face assessment. The

obtained results implied that 73.1% of the respondents believed that online assessment is not effective when compared to a traditional face-to-face assessment. Conversely, 26.9% of the informants thought that online assessment could be as effective as onsite assessment.

Figure 5
*Belief in Online Effectiveness for Assessment*
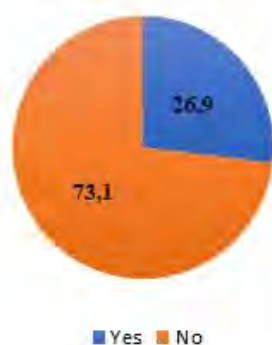
Concerning assessment challenges and pitfalls, students were required to respond to whether they adhered to the ethics of taking exams or not. Accordingly, the survey data, as shown in Figure 6, revealed that the vast majority (64.5%) adhered to exam-taking ethics, while 26.9% stated that they did, albeit only to some extent. Nonetheless, a minority admitted not respecting the principles of taking exams as they resorted to cheating.

Figure 6
Did Student Stick to Proper Exam Taking Ethics
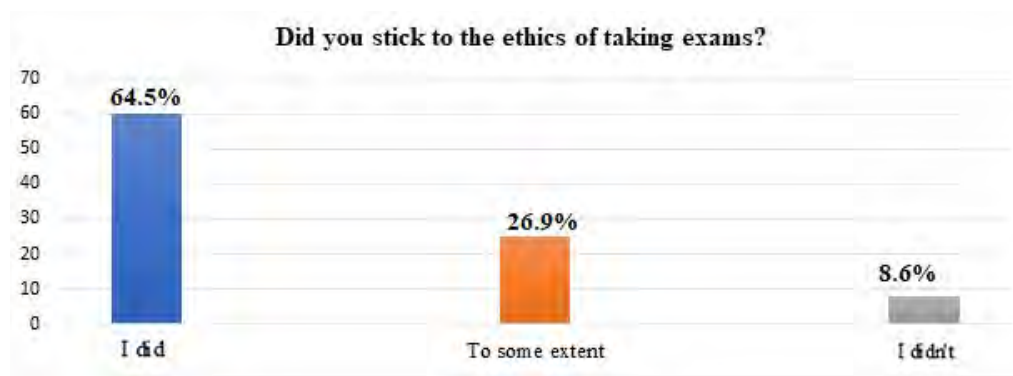
One of the biggest concerns of online assessment was the inequality among test takers. It was evident from the students' responses that the majority of them (65.6%) claimed that online assessment did not provide equal opportunities as traditional assessment; 21.4% of the informants believed it did to some extent. However, 6.5% of the subjects were uncertain about whether the chances offered by the online assessment were similar to those offered by face-to-face assessment.

Figure 7

*Students' Beliefs: Online Assessment Provides Equal Opportunities as Face-to-Face Assessment*
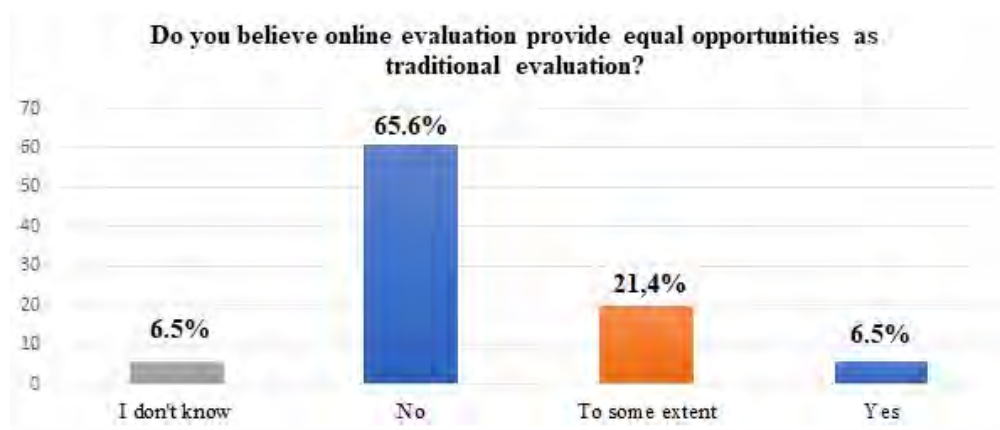
**Students' Readiness for an Entire Online Learning and Assessment Experience (RQ3)**

Doubtless, students' readiness to experiment with something new or go through a similar experience determines its success or failure. This might also lead one to learn about the students' perceptions regarding online assessment. In accordance with this, the informants were to state if they were open to the same online assessment experience in the future. The results illustrated that most of the respondents were either uncertain (38.7%) or not ready (35.5%) anew for such an experience. However, some participants revealed their readiness for the same online assessment experience in the future.

Figure 8

Students' Readiness for the Same Online Assessment Experience in the Future
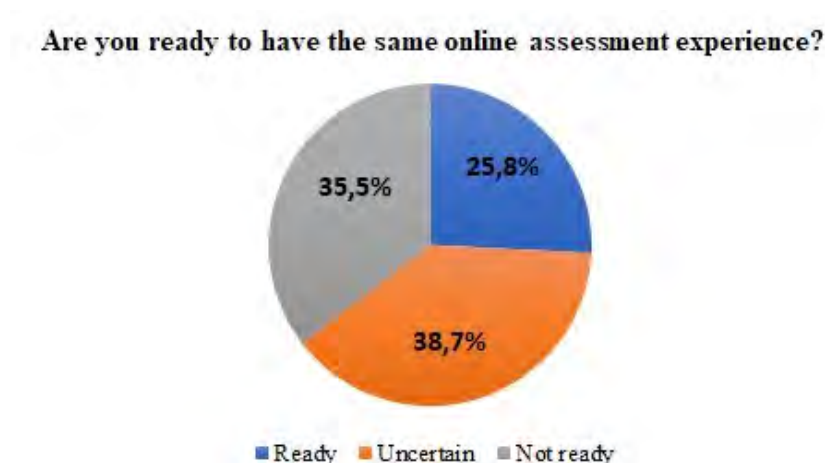
Gaining insights into students' learning preferences unequivocally entails how they perceive the issue of remote assessment. For this purpose, students were to highlight their preferred learning mode. The participants' replies demonstrated their tendency towards hybrid and traditional learning modes. To illustrate, more than half of the informants (51.6%) chose the hybrid mode as their preference, whereas 45.2% of them opted for the choice of a traditional face-to-face learning mode. Still, only a minority (3.2%) preferred the online learning option.

Figure 9
Preferred Learning and Assessment Modes
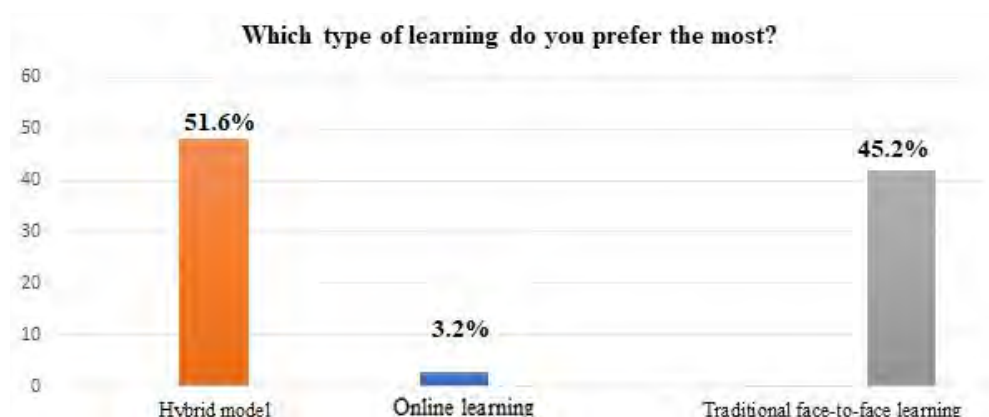
Online Assessment Challenges, Drawbacks, and Advantages

Online Assessment Challenges

One of the primary objectives of this study was to unveil the challenges Moroccan EFL university students faced while sitting for their very first online assessment. In fact, the survey findings revealed that online assessment created numerous hurdles for students, including work overload, increased stress, connectivity issues, and technical problems. The following are examples of what most students stated regarding online assessment challenges:

> "Difficulties in having clear conversations with professors regarding problems and instructions"
> "Time shortage, technical problems, weak bandwidth"
> "Time management"
> "Blockage of the website in which students had to submit their documents"
> "Enormous amount of stress"
> "Due to Internet issues, I could not download some exams on the spot"
> "Internet connection issues"

Online Assessment Drawbacks

This study not only investigated online assessment challenges encountered by students, but it has also aimed at deciphering the shortcomings hovering around this experience. Along with the aforementioned challenges, students in a response to online assessment drawbacks asserted that academic dishonesty was the most feared side effect of online assessment. Examples of such comments include:

> "It allows students to cheat without being caught"
> "Academic dishonesty will always be one the cardinal problems in online assessment"
> "Inequality: some do breach the ethics of exam taking"
> "It did not demonstrate the real level of students since most of them cheated to some extent"
> "Constant troubleshooting of technical problems along with cheating which leads to an utter inequality in grades"
> "The school not being ready for this kind of assessments"

Online Assessment Advantages

This study also sought to determine whether students associate any positive characteristics with online assessment. Though the results point to the majority of participants believing there is no advantage to online assessments, a minority believe that online assessments adapt to diverse learning styles and requirements. These advantages include:

> "Flexibility and lack of peer distraction"
> "Online assessment has enables me to work comfortably and thereby produce satisfactory outcomes since I have the proclivity to study alone in a distraction-free, hassle-free environment"
> "It encourages autonomous learning"
> "I had the opportunity to listen to music while taking the exam"
> "It provides feedback about one's progress"

Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on exploring Moroccan EFL learners' experiences, perceptions, and challenges with online assessment. A number of noteworthy inferences can be made from the data, as represented in the figures in the Data Analysis section and based on the interpretations of the results. Additionally, having obtained data from the sample leads to robust findings and insights that could possibly be generalizable.

Generally, as reported in Figure 1, the findings reveal students' lack of readiness to online assessment. Such status may be related to students' unfamiliarity with online learning, or due to their lack of experience. Simply put, online assessment was not a choice, but it was imposed on the learners owing to the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, the research's findings, in response to RQ 1, imply that online assessment has been perceived as insignificant, challenging and unfruitful. This is clearly demonstrated by the percentages and scores (See figures 1 & 4). Students' lack of readiness and the negative perceptions they hold towards online assessment is heightened by the inconsistency of the feedback they receive from their instructors. Not surprisingly, the participants reveal their reluctance to go through the same experience anew in the future even though they experienced online assessment. They also stick to the traditional conventions of assessment (See Figures 8 & 9). Therefore, it is difficult for learning to take place in online conditions since the students viewed the experience with dubious confidence in its success. The findings are consistent with those of Senel and Senel (2021). The findings also align with Anasse and Rhandy's (2021) research on teachers' attitudes towards online assessment as the same factors are applicable to teachers.

Additionally, in response to RQ 2, the findings from the informants' responses, reveal interesting outcomes concerning the effectiveness of online assessment. Apparently, from the findings of the questionnaire (Figure 5) the majority of participants tend to believe that online assessment is not as effective as face-to-face assessment. Its ineffectiveness stems from the unequal opportunities, as demonstrated by the results (Figure 7), it offers regarding students' performance. This is due to the drawbacks online assessment entails, including cheating. With respect to this, the findings of this research corroborate with other researchers' findings (Khan & Khan, 2018; Jamiai, 2021).

As for students' readiness for a complete online learning experience in the future (RQ 3), the current study's findings, as shown in Figure 8, reveal that respondents were reluctant to relive the same online assessment experience in the future. This is also justified by the choice of the

learning mode learners opted for in their replies. More importantly, students' own answers regarding the challenges and drawbacks of remote assessment reveal much to consider. These challenges include work overload, increased stress, connectivity issues, and technical problems. The drawbacks revolve around academic dishonesty. With regard to previous research findings concerning online assessment challenges and drawbacks, the findings of this study are consistent with those of other researchers such as Chan et al. (2021) who have extrapolated that online learning has engendered myriad stumbling blocks for students in low- and middle-income countries, with many expressing concerns that learners are unable to access the Internet due to poverty and destitution, Benson and Brack (2010) who linked challenges to submission of items (connectivity, size, print paper preference), automated assessment, online discussion for assessment, and Rogers (2006) who listed some challenges of online assessment which revolve around mechanics of assessment and the prevention of digital cheating.

Limitations and Recommendations

It stands to reason that no research can be carried out without encountering some obstacles and shortcomings. The present research has confronted many limitations, which made it difficult but not impossible. First, the findings of this study may not be widely generalizable. However, any findings from any research are generalizable only within that situation and within the context of the work, which is declared in advance. Second, the sampling population is not large enough (93 Moroccan EFL university students) to make the study more representative on a large scale. It is also possible that the adoption of another sampling technique apart from the one used in this study could yield better outcomes. Third, the methodology implemented in this research study has limitations resulting from the innate nature of the data collection instruments. Moreover, students' perceptions and attitudes are subject to change over time. There is also a shortage of references and studies dealing with online assessment from a student perspective.

Based on the findings of the quantitative study derived from the collected data, the following implications and recommendations are made for integrating online assessment and conducting additional study. Consequently, it is required that policy makers, stakeholders, and decision makers rethink the process of assessing learners online. Secondly, educational institutions should provide platforms specifically designed for online assessment. Thirdly, both teachers and students should be trained on how to use a given online assessment platform. Finally, teachers must provide students with clear instructions regarding any online assessment. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should focus on online assessment from teachers' perspectives. In addition to that, researchers should investigate students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges with online assessment from a larger scale. Lastly, more investigation is required to assess other effects of these assessments on long-term knowledge retention.

References

Alsalhi, N. R., Qusef, A. D., Al-Qatawneh, S. S., & Eltahir, M. E. (2022). Students' perspective on online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic in higher education institutions. *Information Sciences Letters, 11*(1) 37–46. https://doi.org/10.18576/isl/110106

Anasse, K., & Rhandy, R. (2021). Teachers' attitudes towards online writing assessment during Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, 3(*8), 65–70. https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.8.9

Bachman, L. F. (2004). *Statistical analyses for language assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667350

Bachiri, H., & Sahli, R. (2020). The need of distance learning in the wake of COVID-19 in Morocco. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 2*(3), 240–256. https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v2i3.326sa

Baleni, Z. (2015). Online formative assessment in higher education: Its pros and cons. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 13*(4), 228–236

Benson, R., & Brack, C. (2010). *Online learning and assessment in higher education: A planning guide*. Cambridge: Chandos Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1533/9781780631653

Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 21*(1), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9

Blanco, L. (2021). Foreword. In Chan, R.Y, Bista, K., Allen, R.M, *Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19: International perspectives and experiences*. Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge.

Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. Pearson Education.

Chan, R. Y., Bista, K., & Allen, R. M. (Eds.). (2021). *Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19: International perspectives and experiences* (1st ed.). Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003125921

Cranfield, D., Tick, A., Venter, I. M., Blignaut, R. J., & Renaud, K. (2021). Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during COVID-19—A comparative study. *Education Sciences, 11*(8), 403. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080403

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*. Boston, USA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approache*s (3rd ed.). Sage publications, Inc., California.

Gikandi, J. W., Morrow, D., & Davis, N. E. (2011). Online formative assessment in higher education: A Review of the Literature. *Computers & Education, 57*(4), 2333–2351. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.06.004

Huda, S. S. M., Kabir, M., & Siddiq, T. (2020). E-Assessment in higher education: Students' perspective. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology, 16*(2), 250–258.

Jamiai, A. (2021). Measuring master students' online learning perceptions and satisfaction during Covid-19 crisis in Morocco. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 3*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v3i1.488

Khan, S., & Khan, R. A. (2019). Online assessments: Exploring perspectives of university students. *Education and Information Technologies, 24*(1), 661–677. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-018-9797-0

Mabry, L. (2005). Assessment. In S. Mathison (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milam, J., Voorhees, R. A., & Bedard-Voorhees, A. (2004). Assessment of online education: Policies, practices, and recommendations. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2004*(126), 73–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.156

Mogboh, V. & Okoye, A.C. (2019). Formative and summative assessment: Trends and practices in basic education. *Journal of Education and Practice, 10*(27), 39–45.

Montenegro-Rueda, M., Luque-de La Rosa, A., Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, J. L., & Fernández-Cerero, J. (2021). Assessment in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review. *Sustainability, 13*(19), 10509. https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910509

Neuwirth, L. S., Jović, S., & Mukherji, B. R. (2021). Reimagining higher education during and post-COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 27*(2), 141–156. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971420947738

Palomba, C. A., & Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education. Higher and adult education series.* Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2009). *Assessing the online learner: Resources and strategies for faculty*. Jossey-Bass.

Peters, M. A., Rizvi, F., McCulloch, G., Gibbs, P., Gorur, R., Hong, M., Hwang, Y., Zipin, L., Brennan, M., Robertson, S., Quay, J., Malbon, J., Taglietti, D., Barnett, R., Chengbing, W., McLaren, P., Apple, R., Papastephanou, M., Burbules, N., & Jackson, L. (2020). Reimagining the new pedagogical possibilities for universities post-Covid-19. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 1*–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1777655

Rogers, C. F. (2006). Faculty perceptions about E-cheating during online testing. *Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges, 22*(2), 206–212.

Rolim, C., & Isaias, P. (2018). Examining the use of E-assessment in higher education: Teachers and Students' Viewpoints. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 50*(4), 1785-1800. doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12669

Schommer, M., & Walker, K. (1995). Are epistemological beliefs similar across domains? *Journal of educational psychology*, *87*(3), 424. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.87.3.424

Senel, S., & Senel, H. C. (2021). Remote assessment in higher education during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education, 8*(2), 181–199 https://doi.org/10.21449/ijate.820140

Taras, M. (2008). Summative and formative assessment: Perceptions and realities. *Active learning in higher education, 9*(2), 172–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787408091655

Tran, T. T., Nguyen, P. L., Nguyen, N. H., & Tran, D. T. (2021, December). An empirical study on students' perception and satisfaction towards online assessment and testing in tertiary eucation. *In 18th International Conference of the Asia Association of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (Asia CALL–2-2021)* (pp. 207–216). Atlantis Press.

Tuah, N. A. A., & Naing, L. (2021). Is online assessment in higher education institutions during COVID-19 pandemic reliable? *Siriraj Medical Journal, 73*(1), 61–68 https://doi.org/10.33192/Smj.2021.09

Weleschuk, A., Dyjur, P., & Kelly, P. (2019). Online assessment in higher education. *Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Guide Series. Calgary, AB Taylor Inst Teach Learn Univ Calgary*. Accessed from: http://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/guides

Corresponding author: Nourreddine Menyani
Email: m.nourreddine@umi.ac.ma