

Transition to Online Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges for Language Lecturers in the EFL Tertiary Context



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Abstract Online assessment practices have been affected by various factors ranging from teachers' technological competence to devices and tools offered and made available both to teachers and students. The current study aimed at exploring challenges and issues experienced by language lecturers in Turkish tertiary contexts during their transition to online/distance learning and teaching. The participants of the study included seventy-five language lecturers at the School of Foreign Languages and the Department of Foreign Language Education at various state universities in Turkey. The study used quantitative data provided by the participants' responses to the online survey which included several short-answer questions regarding how they assessed students during the pandemic. The survey was created through Google Forms and shared with the participants via emails and social networking sites. The major results of the study indicated that a great majority of the participants did not have any power in the selection of the assessment types as the university senates determined the main assessment to be assignments or projects. The results also showed that academic integrity and grading were other concerns during the online assessment, in addition to technical problems, limitations, and devices available to lecturers and students.

Keywords English as a foreign language · Online · Assessment · Testing · Challenges · Opportunities

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1 Introduction

Much has been discussed about the importance of assessment and also the influence of technology in enhancing learning and teaching practices (Ferdig et al., 2020; Ferdig & Pytash, 2021; Garg et al., 2021; Hadjipieris et al., 2020; Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2020). Increased use of the internet, high-speed connections, and recent developments in technology have paved the way for several changes in both teachers' and students' lives in several ways. It is due to note the historical turn after the Covid-19, which enforced the use of technology. Before the pandemic, technological competence and availability seemed to be a matter of preference, but technological competence and availability are a must today. The main concern today is to determine how to utilize technological tools and websites including the audio and visual materials available, rather than whether to use these resources (Krajka, 2021; Stickler et al., 2020). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, quite a few teaching and learning practices have been conducted online and remotely either in a synchronous or asynchronous mode, and a variety of tools, and websites have been put into use by teachers and students (Krajka, 2021; Mann, 2021; Stanly, 2019). These include but are not limited to the emergence of new pieces of software enabling delivering tests online, personalized learning applications, and automated assessment of student essays. However, technology has failed to live up to our expectations. This might be attributed to the fact that we tend to focus too much on technology at the cost of learning design, and schools and faculty members might be unprepared for how technology can be integrated.

Assessment is an indispensable part of learning and teaching practices, and language learning is not an exception to this, as language educators need to use a variety of assessment instruments to reach various decisions regarding learners' or candidates' performance. This might involve decisions about learners' performance in the language classroom, such as determining learners' weaknesses and strengths, while in society assessment might serve accountability (Purpura, 2016).

Simply said, assessment is a collection of processes of gathering data on students' knowledge and performance related to their educational experiences. Formative and summative assessment are the two most common methods of evaluation (Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). Formative assessments occur inside an online course or lesson and are used to gauge how effectively a student is understanding the topic. They are continual, and constant, and give crucial feedback to learners. William (2018) underscores the main function of formative assessment as follows:

They can validate how well training or course content supports the course's overall learning goals. The effective use of formative assessment would increase achievement by between 0.4 and 0.7 standard deviations, which would be equivalent to a 50 to 70 percent increase in the rate of student learning (p. 38).

Summative evaluations, often known as final exams, examine what a student has learnt after finishing a course (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018; Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021). Assessment information gives feedback to teachers and students in

the classroom to help them learn and teach better. Teachers can utilize the information acquired to both inform learning (formative assessment) and make a judgment on learning at a certain moment in time (summative assessment) (Absolum et al., 2009).

Especially during the pandemic shift to online assessment, many stakeholders believed that teachers could move the face-to-face assessment practices to online platforms and/or contexts and benefit from technology-mediated practices. These great expectations turned into monumental challenges and opportunities, especially in assessment practices. As a result of this sudden shift, most universities have also determined and forced all the lecturers and students to use the same or choose among the given options of assessment, in most cases without providing enough training or technical resources, which resulted in forced online assessment without considering the aims and nature of the courses offered (García-Peñalvo et al., 2021; Moser et al., 2021).

2 Literature Review

Learners can be provided with resources in and outside the classroom by using the available tools and websites on the Internet (Gimeno-Sanz et al., 2014; Lomicka & Lord, 2019; Son, 2017, 2020). For example, learners' listening comprehension can also be assessed through websites such as Edpuzzle (<https://edpuzzle.com>), a website where videos can be turned into assessment instruments including multiple-choice and open-ended questions. In addition to videos on various types of content, language structures and functions can be practiced and reviewed through game-like activities using websites such as Kahoot! (<https://kahoot.com>) and Educaplay (<https://www.educaplay.com>). In addition to these structures and functions, lexical items based on videos, listening materials, and coursebooks used can be practiced through online flashcards. Flippity (<https://www.flippity.net>) is a website that can create online flashcards based on Google spreadsheets. A variety of review/assessment activities can be created, such as virtual board games and click-and-drag objects. Coursebooks used in the face-to-face classroom before the pandemic can also be utilized in online classrooms by turning activities into interactive tasks for learners to do in a variety of exercise types, such as matching and multiple-choice questions. As indicated by Özer (2022), the teachers who used printed worksheets to review vocabulary and grammar topics before the pandemic started to use digital platforms such as Wordwall to turn these worksheets into interactive and game-like activities for assessment.

The research conducted on using online assessment recognizes various advantages of utilizing online assessment or e-assessment in the classroom. For example, the study conducted by Rolim and Isaias (2019) investigated the views of teachers and students regarding online assessment in Portugal and found that online assessment was highly valued by the participants, underscoring its advantages such as the easy track of learner process and fast assessment practices though with some

reservations such as the increased amount of teacher work. Kılıçkaya (2017a), for example, investigated the views of ELF teachers on the use of GradeCam Go!, a tool to score students' answers to multiple-choice questions in the face-to-face classroom. The results of the study also indicate that this tool was found to be useful in various aspects, such as immediate feedback and determining learners' progress.

As for the changes introduced into the existing language tests, Wagner and Krylova (2021) investigated how an oral communication test was moved online at Temple University. Rather than moving the test online, the administration created a new test, which would be conducted in an online context. Therefore, the test was delivered through an online meeting software, Zoom, which enables participants to converse online. Among many others, the feature of the new test which enabled test-takers virtually with a human being seemed to enable assessing authentic conversation competences as opposed to the previous test which asked test-takers to record their voices as a response to a question or a prompt.

Similarly, Green and Lung (2021) discussed how an English placement test was changed so that it could also be conducted in an online context at the test takers' homes. The small liberal arts university moved the test items online using the quiz feature of Canvas, and the exam security was ensured using a lockdown browser, sound, and camera monitoring on test takers' computers. It was also indicated that during the test, the exam proctoring system, Proctoria application, was used to check the test takers' rooms. The challenges included test takers' irregular Internet connections leading to technical problems which might question the results of the tests. The other challenges were related to the environment where the test-takers answered the questions, such as noise coming from other resources.

Ockey et al. (2021) indicated that Iowa State University decided to hold the placement test of oral communication face-to-face with strict limitations regarding health safety measures. This face-to-face decision was due to several limitations, but mainly security issues regarding determining the test taker's identity and the limitations of technology. Zhang et al. (2021) investigated Chinese EFL teachers' practices in online assessment practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and collected data through semi-structured retrospective interviews. The results indicated that teachers introduced several changes to their assessment practices, such as changing group work into individual activities, reducing formative assessment practices, and including more written assignments as alternative assessments due to concerns regarding cheating.

Mahapatra (2021) explored online formative assessment and feedback practices of three ESLT teachers that work in tertiary education in Nepal, Bangladesh, and India via conducting classroom observations, in addition to interviews and document analysis. Pertaining to the research question investigating how these three ESL teachers held their online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that the selection and the use of assessment tools for formative assessment were determined by the teachers' knowledge, and the affordability and the Internet availability to the teachers, leading to the adoption of free digital tools such as Google Docs and Forms over the paid and more advanced tools.

Comparing traditional exams with alternative assessments (Gordon, 2020), several researchers indicated major advantages of alternative assessments, such as take-home written tasks. For example, Harper et al. (2020) indicated that exams are more prone to cheating than take-home written tasks, and other tasks such as reflections lead to a decrease in cheating (Bretag et al., 2019). However, despite various precautions to be taken, no exam/assignment can be a secure form of assessment, whether they are conducted online with time limits or randomized questions or they are given as assignments.

Considering all these findings and discussions, it can be argued that technology has paved the way for assessing language online in a variety of ways via several websites and tools available for improving language learning and teaching and has become an indispensable part of teachers' and learners' lives. However, it seems that there is further research needed on the issues and opportunities of online assessment since there is little research conducted up to this day on online assessment in tertiary contexts, especially issues and opportunities, and this remains an insufficiently examined field, which requires further investigation.

3 Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by language lecturers in the tertiary context due to the rapid shift to online assessment practices. Based on the issues and challenges indicated in the relevant literature review in the tertiary context the following research questions guiding this investigation of online assessment are stated as follows:

1. How did language lecturers assess their students online at the tertiary level?
2. What were the opportunities faced during the online assessment at the tertiary level?
3. What were the challenges faced during the online assessment at the tertiary level?

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study benefited from qualitative data through online surveys through which the participants responded to several short-answer questions regarding how they assessed their students in the courses offered during the pandemic and the opportunities and challenges faced during this process. The survey was created through Google Forms and shared with the participants through emails and social networking sites such as Facebook at the end of the Spring Semester in June 2021, and the responses were collected for 3 weeks.

4.2 Research Context and Participants

English is taught and learnt as a foreign language in classrooms at educational institutions ranging from primary schools to universities in Turkey. In addition to English, several other language courses such as German, French, Chinese and Japanese are also introduced at high schools as well as universities, and language planning and policy implementations were conducted on minority languages and foreign language education to promote multilingualism (Ünal Gezer & Dixon, 2021). Before pandemic, online instruction was an option for language instructors who were willing to take some of the courses online through Learning Management Systems (LMS) and activities on several platforms such as Nearpod and Wordwall (Akayoğlu, 2021; Özer, 2022). Most of these courses were conducted asynchronously, leading the students to complete the assigned work self-paced.

The study included seventy-five language lecturers working at the school of foreign languages, and foreign language education departments of fifteen state universities in Turkey. responded to the short-answer questions regarding their online assessment practices. Of these participants, 45 were female and 30 were male. Their ages ranged from 27 to 48, and their average teaching experience was 10.3 years.

4.3 Data Collection and Procedure

The data of the study included the responses of seventy-five participants to the online survey, with brief answers. The participants were first provided with basic information about the study and the aims and then were asked to confirm their consent on Google Forms to continue providing responses. The survey included six basic questions about the participants' experience with online assessment in their institutions:

1. Have you used any form of online assessment in your courses? If yes, in which courses? If the online assessment has not been possible, could you please share the reason for this?
2. Have you decided on the assessment form by yourself or has it been mandated by your institution?
3. What has/have been the main reason(s) for your/ your institution's decision regarding the assessment form?
4. What tools/websites have you used or have been provided by your institution to conduct the online assessment?
5. Are there any advantages/opportunities of your/your institution's online assessment practices? Could you please explain briefly? and
6. Are there any disadvantages/challenges of your/your institution's online assessment practices? Could you please explain briefly?

5 Data Analysis

The data analysis included the content analysis of the participants' responses. The responses provided to the questions of the survey were subject to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is a qualitative data analysis requiring the careful reading of data collected via interviews or open-ended questions. In this analysis, the patterns and themes are identified and investigated in the qualitative data. Google Forms were used as the data collection platform as the responses were automatically recorded in the database for content analysis. Based on the semantic content, the responses were checked for emerging themes and codes. The initial analysis was completed by the researcher himself; however, an expert in qualitative data collection and analysis checked the responses, the themes, and the codes.

6 Results

The themes and the codes that emerged as a result of the content analysis are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3, which also include several representative quotes to exemplify participants' responses to the open-ended questions. In Table 1, the results are provided as to the first research question: How did language lecturers assess their students online at the tertiary level?

Table 1 The themes and codes that emerged from the responses regarding the assessment formats

Theme	Code	Sample response
Assessment formats	Asynchronous exams	<i>I created several online quizzes for my learners for almost each unit so that they can be ready for the topics that we will discuss. I have also used them as part of their midterm scores. They were required to answer the questions within a few days before the online class started.</i>
	Synchronous exams	<i>As I had many students and offered several courses, I decided to use Multiple-choice questions as synchronous exams. These exams had to be given on a specific day and within a limited amount of time. But they saved me a lot of time.</i>
	Assignments (take-home)	<i>As my university required all the lecturers to use assignments or projects for the midterms and finals, I prepared several tasks which would require the students to do some research on the topic and synthesize what they obtained. I tried to ask questions or creates tasks that would not lead them to copy and paste the information from the internet.</i>
	Tools/websites	<i>My university used Moodle to provide the content and to conduct online exams as well as using assignments. The exam or quiz function of this platform enables us to create quizzes with traditional item formats such as multiple choice and fill in the blanks. Using the assignment function, the students could upload their assignments in word processing or pdf formats.</i>

Table 2 The themes and codes that emerged from the responses regarding the opportunities of online assessment

Theme	Code	Sample response
Opportunities of online assessment	Instant feedback	When I used selected response items such as multiple-choice questions, my students immediately were informed of the correct answers. They did not need to wait for several days.
	Easy scoring	Our university was using the Moodle platform as a learning management system and the scoring was automatically done by the quiz function of this platform. The results were prepared just in seconds.
	Flexibility	I think one of the main advantages of online assessment is that students could take the test without being limited to any place or time. They could submit their assignments until the deadline using the internet.

Table 3 The themes and codes that emerged from the responses regarding the challenges of online assessment

Theme	Code	Sample response
Challenges of online assessment	Technical issues	During the synchronous exams, several students lost their Internet connections, or they had some other problems. That was the substantial challenge that I needed to face during this type of exams. However, we did not have these problems as there were certain time available to submit the assignments.
	Academic integrity	As there were no precautions regarding the security of the exams such as online proctoring and lockdown browser, it was not possible to determine whether the answers were provided by the students themselves. This is also valid for the assignments. Somebody else could do the assignments.
	Grading assignments	It was difficult for me to grade all those essays. There were around 75 students in my class, and spent several days to grade every paper. I believe this is the great challenge when you have to read all those papers on the screen.
	Limitations	Assessing the speaking skill is a really challenging task during online assessment. As there were many students in my class, it was not possible to practice speaking. In my classes, I asked them to record their presentations using their mobile or desktop computers but often I noticed that they were just reading the notes that were written.

The theme ‘assessment formats’ includes four codes: asynchronous exams, assignments (take-home), synchronous exams, and tools/websites. Many of the participants ($n = 55$) indicated that they benefited from asynchronous exams, which were conducted through online channels without real-time interaction. As responses also indicated, these exams were used for low-stakes testing. These exams were also used as ‘synchronous exams’, which learners had to take online at a specific time and day, together with the other students. In addition to the asynchronous and synchronous exams, most of the participants ($n = 60$) stated that due to the university

regulations and senate decisions, for the final and/or retake exams and/or high-stakes testing, they had to assess their students through assignments or projects in the form of take-home assignments. In this specific research context, while final and retake exams were considered as high-stakes testing since these exams had a crucial role in passing or failing the class, low-stake exams included mini-quizzes or mini-tasks which contributed to the final grades, but to a limited extent.

In Table 2, the results are provided as to the second research question: What were the opportunities faced during an online assessment at the tertiary level? The theme, 'opportunities of online assessment' includes three codes: instant feedback, easy scoring, and flexibility. As for the opportunities, the great majority of the participants (n = 65) pointed out that through asynchronous exams and synchronous exams, which included multiple-choice and short-answer questions, the lecturers could complete the scoring easily, and the students could get immediate feedback regarding their answers, together with correct and incorrect answers. One participant expressed this as follows:

When you have many students, I believe that you can use quality multiple-choice questions in the online exams to assess your students' ability appropriately and adequately. In addition to this, you can get the immediate results, and get these results to your students immediately [Participant ID5].

In line with this opportunity, the participants also stated that through learning management systems (LMS) such as the Moodle platform, the results of the exam were provided instantly without any manual calculation or grading process. Another useful characteristic of online assessment, as stated by the participants, was related to the flexible nature of assessment in terms of time and place. In other words, via online assessment tools available, it was possible for both teachers and learners to conduct and take the tests regardless of the place and time, except for the synchronous exams. One participant pointed out this by saying:

I think the great advantage of online assessment is its flexible nature. I mean, you do not have to be in a specific location, and sometimes you can take the test whenever you want. You can also submit your assignments online. This is the main benefit [Participant ID6].

In Table 3, the results are provided as to the third research question: What were the challenges faced during an online assessment at the tertiary level? The theme, 'challenges of online assessment' included four codes: technical issues, academic integrity, grading assignments, and limitations. One major concern of the participants regarding synchronous exams was the technical issues or problems experienced. Almost all the participants (n = 70) expressed that losing the Internet connections or experiencing other problems such as computer breakdown was the major issues for the students during online exams. However, they added that this was not a problem for the asynchronous and take-home exams, as the students were provided with some time to carry out the tasks. One participant stated that,

Conducting synchronous exams on a specific day and within a limited time was a risk-taking action for many lecturers and students alike. This was because when a technical problem occurred; it was necessary to take the test again. This meant several problems for the students as well as the lecturers [Participant ID67].

Academic integrity was another challenge of online assessment since many participants ($n = 64$) expressed that as there were no precautions taken against cheating during the online exams and it was not possible to determine the authorship of the assignments and projects submitted. Regarding this, one participant expressed that:

It is not possible to avoid cheating or prevent students from getting others to do the work. This is a genuine concern if there are no precautions taken about the security of the exam. It was really difficult to know who was the actual author of the assignment submitted [Participant ID7].

Grading exams was another issue indicated by most of the participants ($n = 60$). It was stated that as some universities required final exams to be conducted as the assignments and/or projects, and many classes were overcrowded, the participants had difficulty in meeting the deadlines in terms of submission of grades as well as providing appropriate and necessary feedback to the students. One of the participants expressed this as follows:

We did not have the choice to select the assessment format at our university. It was communicated to us that the final and retake exams would be assigned as the assignments. I was teaching over one hundred students in several classes, and it was really a significant challenge to read and score all those pages on the computer screen [Participant ID25].

Related to grading essays and projects, several participants ($n = 23$) expressed that in addition to the hours spent in front of the screen before and during online teaching, reading and grading assignments and projects caused eye fatigue, reading efficiency, and speed. The fourth challenge that occurred in the participants' responses was related to the limitations regarding assessing skills online, such as speaking. Although several participants ($n = 24$) indicated that their institutions enabled them to use Zoom and other online platforms to assess productive skills, it was not possible to do so due to the number of students, the technological devices available, and some other connection issues. One participant stated that:

Speaking and writing activities were a little problematic during online assessment as it was not possible to allocate enough time for each student to speak or write, not to mention the technical problems that occurred such as loss of Internet connection and the background microphone noise [Participant ID42].

7 Discussion

The responses indicated that pertaining to language assessment, the participants had two options: (1) Online exams through recognition-based questions such as multiple-choice questions, or (2) Assignments (sometimes also known as take-home exams). Many university language lecturers are mandated to assess student learning at the end of the semester, which is also known as a summative assessment. This form of assessment mostly consists of an in-class examination in which students sit for the test, a project, or a take-home examination in which students react to various questions that incorporate scenarios and integrate several topics. However, owing to

recent events, lockdowns, and a rapid shift from in-class examinations to online assessment, professors have been required to assess students using other assessment approaches and activities. While some teachers were given the option of using the most appropriate tool for their courses, classrooms, and skills practiced, others were forced to administer online examinations in the form of short-answer or multiple-choice questions. The results of the study indicated that the majority of participants had no involvement in the assessment types since the assessment type (one high-stakes test) was predetermined by university senates. Regarding online assessments in the form of quizzes, many participants expressed that synchronous and asynchronous exams in the multiple-choice or short-answers formats had certain merits such as frequent testing, easy track of learner progress, and preparing students for the next classes, which is in line with the findings of other studies (Kılıçkaya, 2017a, b; Rolim & Isaias, 2019).

The overall picture shows that the participants utilized a variety of quiz tools (Aydoğan Yenmez & Gökçe, 2021; Buczek-Zawiła, 2021) such as the quiz function of Moodle and Kahoot!. Using LMS's assessment tools or applications allows lecturers to use online assessments, especially when recognition questions in the form of multiple-choice questions are used as they are easier to mark and report the results (Aziz & McKenzie, 2020). However, online assessment was inevitably influenced by what technological tools were provided to the participants by their institutions.

Accordingly, the online assessment practices were limited to what was offered by the institutions and what digital features were provided (Freddi, 2021). Even though several participants tried to benefit from other tools and websites, they later decided not to do as they needed advanced features that required upgrading, which was not affordable to some extent. The (un)availability of technological tools and devices, institutional support, and training programs could affect the participants' resilience (Bihu, 2021; Carvalhaes et al., 2020). In other words, when the participants were faced with adversity or stress, their ability to adapt could be lessened.

The findings of the current study might prove beneficial for language lecturers and various stakeholders, including learners and administrators, regarding the challenges and opportunities of assessing language online both during and after the pandemic. The data indicate that language lectures who assessed students prior to the pandemic through exams and quizzes that included selected response items continued to do so online using the resources provided by their universities; however, they were also asked to consider academic integrity while assessing their students, such as cheating (getting help from others, sharing answers, etc.), and contract cheating (getting somebody else to do the exam).

In several cases, the participants were asked to replat with either continuous assessment with various forms of assessment such as mini-quizzes and low-stakes assignments or with take-home assignments to be submitted in the next ten or fifteen days. Many participants did not have the chance to minimize the weight of the final examination. Therefore, in some institutions, decisions were left to the lecturers, who were asked to consider facing technological problems students might have while taking exams online on a specific day and time. As indicated by the

participants, most of the assessments in the university courses were offered as two exams: (1) the midterm, and (2) the final exams. Despite some minor variations, the midterms were conducted towards the end of the seventh week of the semester, while the final exams were to be taken after the 14th week. These were mandatory assessments required by the universities where the participants worked and they needed to be conducted as evidence of assessment to determine whether the learners met the requirements of the courses.

The assignments were also mainly done asynchronously in the format of assignments (take-home) to be submitted in a given time to avoid technological problems such as loss of Internet connection or unexpected computer breakdown. Harper et al. (2020) showed that synchronous exams are more prone to cheating than take-home written tasks, and tasks such as reflections and personalized tasks lead to a decrease in cheating (Bretag et al., 2019). However, participants in the current study stated that take-home examinations were extremely difficult in terms of marking and academic integrity, as lecturers were required to assess hundreds of student papers and examine these papers for similarity using multiple websites.

It may be claimed that both methods of evaluation have advantages and disadvantages. Online tests, for example, are administered using web-based apps and have stringent time constraints. Depending on the capabilities of the tools used, questions might be randomized for each student. Take-home tests in the form of assignments, on the other hand, are unsupervised, and students can use their course-books, lecture notes, and other resources to complete them. However, academic integrity, authorship, screen reading, and test security appear to be the issues faced in both assessment methods (Green & Lung, 2021), which was also indicated by Çetin and Kılıçkaya (2019), and Bearman et al. (2020). The major challenges included technical problems such as the Internet connection and the exam environment issues such as the noise in the learner's room (Green & Lung, 2021).

Although formative assessment is valued in online contexts (Goertler & Gacs, 2018) and the participants underscored the importance of formative assessment to inform both themselves and their learners about their progress showing strengths and weaknesses, in most cases it was not possible to achieve this due to the number of students, and the irregular Internet connection, which might cause disadvantages for some learners. As indicated by the survey participants, due to the requirement for reliable Internet connection and the fewer technological problems, asynchronous exams, mainly assignments, were given priority over synchronous exam methods, which is in line with the findings of the other recent studies (Muhammad & Ockey, 2021; Rahim, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Therefore, as indicated by Jin et al. (2021), having a reliable internet connection and access to necessary equipment appears to be the most crucial factor in ensuring online teaching and assessment practices, which is also consistent with the findings of other studies (Huber & Helm, 2020; Jiao & Lissitz, 2020; Mahapatra, 2021). When these exams were conducted as synchronously as online live tests on a specific day and time, they were not controlled using security precautions such as lockdown browser and remote or onsite proctoring. The responses also reveal that although the participants wished to use remote proctoring services during the exams, most institutions requested them to

find ways and strategies that would enable exams to mitigate cheating. Since academic integrity appeared to be a significant concern for the participants, they tried to conduct exams whose questions prioritized thinking rather than selecting the right or wrong answers.

In terms of limitations, participants were unable to assess specific course objectives such as fluency and pronunciation in speaking classes, and multiple low-stakes exams in the form of quizzes or assignments were not possible due to a variety of factors including university regulations, student numbers, and technical resources available to students. The attendees also expressed their worries about student involvement and equitable promotion. Another participant's concern related to the reliability of scores obtained on the online assessment was the learners' experience with these tools and their typing speed on electronic devices. As indicated by Zhi and Huang (2021), the test-takers whose typing skills are superior to others might achieve success over others on activities or responses which require typing proficiency. In other words, open-ended questions where learners are required to type their responses in the online text boxes or take-home word processing documents will place more onus on learners (Apps et al., 2020).

8 Conclusion and Implications

Assessment is an indispensable part of any teaching and learning context, and language learning practices are not an exception to this. Assessment practices have been crucial in tertiary education, as in many other contexts, and this has received further attention in online contexts, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current study aimed at exploring how language lecturers assess their students online at the tertiary level, and the challenges and opportunities faced during online assessment at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results mainly showed that the use of online assessment and the format of the assessment were determined by several factors such as the policy and the decision of the university senates, the tools and websites provided to the lecturers and students, and the technical resources including the Internet connection and speed. The results also indicated that although there are certain advantages of online exams, including recognition-based questions such as multiple-choice items, assignments and projects were found to be challenging in terms of scoring and providing feedback. About the ethical issues, the participants also raised concerns about academic integrity, which is related to the students' unethical behavior in their academic work especially when completing assignments and projects.

One implication of this study is that university staff also needs more training for digital competences (Cengiz et al., 2017; Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez & Akayoğlu, 2015), and teacher education programs should consider providing training on infusing digital technologies into assessment into their classroom by normalization (Bax, 2011) so that these skills and information practiced in these training should also be modeled by their pre-service language teachers (Akayoğlu, 2021; Bates, 2019;

Krajka, 2012; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). This is very crucial since language educators do not have enough prior experience in terms of technical and practical aspects of assessing language online (Carnegie Mellon University, 2020). The training should cover topics and practical information to answer questions such as What “tech-tools” should I use to offer a final test or exam, remotely? How to ensure academic integrity during offering/taking the exam? and how should I grade the test/exam offered remotely? as part of their technological pedagogical content knowledge (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). The training might also provide practical workshops on academic integrity, e.g., increasing awareness on cheating and including cheating in academic integrity statement, being flexible with (late) submissions, focusing on the process for assignments and projects, submission of multiple drafts of assignments (proposal, interim drafts, and feedback), determining alternative assessment based on the course content and lectures in addition to mini-presentations on the assignment. It is suggested that the Higher Education Council or any other institution that is responsible for tertiary education should provide country-wide licenses for websites or tools which teachers can use for advanced features such as creating open-ended questions and securing browser actions.

In addition to these suggestions, it should be also considered how lecturers and students could cope with challenges and also opportunities regarding the lack of digital competence or may be more important, the unavailability of the tools, devices or necessary tools discussed and used in the training programs and/or the teacher training curriculum. Moreover, it is also necessary to discuss and deconstruct the myth that technological advances surely bring efficiency. Therefore, unavailability and efficiency could also be considered from a counter-perspective.

9 Further Research

Several suggestions for further research can be put forward as regards the findings of the current study. Considering that the study was conducted online with a limited number of participants at the tertiary level, it is due to note that the findings might be transferrable to similar contexts, although it might not be possible to generalize to a larger population. The study focused mainly on perceptions or the responses as provided by the participants. In other words, the study relied on the participants’ self-reported data, and the findings should be considered with caution, as the views might not accurately reflect the actual practices and perceptions of language lecturers, and the participants’ actual practices could not be investigated. Therefore, as a triangulation of the data, assessment papers or tests as used by the participants could be analyzed. Further research can also focus on the effects of sudden or unplanned decisions on the assessment types and formats, and how resilience can be maintained when faced with the unavailability of the necessary tools, and the lack of competence.

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