EFL Students' Perceptions Of Online Assessment Tool In Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

As a new method of assessing students' learning, online assessment is playing an increasingly important role in the transformation of higher education. The purpose of this study was to explore EFL students' perceptions of online assessment tools in terms of perceived usefulness, perceived risk of cheating, and perceived self-efficacy in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. It also aimed to identify the different kinds online assessment tools used in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. This study used a quantitative approach and a Google Form questionnaire was administered to 91 EFL postgraduate students (63 females and 28 males) from a higher education institution in Malaysia. The results showed that EFL students believed that using online assessment tools positively impacted students' learning. Despite the risk of cheating, it showed flexibility and could make students more confident in doing online assessment. These results also had practical implications for educators and institutions, suggested that they could design intervention strategies to reduce cheating in online assessment. The present study helps increase the awareness of the positives and negatives of English online assessment in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions.

1.0 Introduction

Educational assessment is an important integral stage of learning that complements the different phases of learning, initially in placement and diagnostic tests, in the middle of the formative process and finally in the summative measurement of learning outcomes. In addition, assessment can be a cyclical process whereby learners can regularly assess their progress through homework and observation of the learning process. Learning outcomes or achievements, assessments can be contained in a quiz, a homework assignment, a set of questions, a test, a project, a portfolio or a presentation. With the development of learning delivery platforms and the extensive use of e-learning, assessment is also widely available online. By definition, online assessment is a method of using networked computers to deliver and analyse grades and performance tests.

Learning is conceptually related to assessment, where the quantity and quality of learning is measured on the basis of security, grading or feedback. Weleschuk et al. (2019) define online assessment as any way of assessing student achievement, providing feedback or moving students

forward in the learning process in a fully online credit-bearing course. These assessments can be completed online (e.g. online exams) or simply submitted online (e.g. essays). Assessments are often considered formative, for information only, or summative, aiming to indicate results in terms of scores (Kasimatis & Papageorgiou, 2019). In the same vein, Kundu (2021) states that e-assessment is "the use of digital technology to create assignments, assess and provide feedback for formative, summative, diagnostic or self-assessment." It is a new paradigm and approach to assessment that is playing an increasingly important role in the transformation of higher education. In short, online assessment is a method of assessing students' learning using any technological device through an online environment (internet) rather than a paper and pencil exam (Anwar, Shah, Abid & Qamar, 2018). As for feedback, it can be provided immediately, or later by the course administrator.

An assessment tool is used to measure and monitor students' understanding of the material being taught. According to Zuhriyah, S. and Pratolo, B. W. (2020), the implementation of online assessment has also allowed for a lot of online assessment tools to be utilized such as Edmodo, Socrative, Kahoot, Schoology, and Quizizz. The results of Alvina and Devinta's (2022) study showed that although there were barriers to the full implementation of Quizizz, the majority of students gave positive attitudes towards the use of Quizizz as an assessment tool. Similarly, the findings of Alhanouf et al. (2021) revealed that both students and teachers agreed that the use of Google Forms had a positive impact on student learning, despite the risk of cheating, and indicated that there were some limitations to the use of Google Forms by both teachers and students.

The extensive use of online assessment tools has transformed the nature of assessment in higher education. Due to this, it has become increasingly vital to examine students' perceptions of these tools, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Ismail and Sahari (2018) in their study argued the lack of understanding of EFL learners' perceptions of online assessment in the Malaysian higher education context as a problem, stating that "little is known about learners' perceptions of online assessment in the context of EFL learning in higher education institutions in Malaysia" (p. 8). Thus, this research aims to investigate EFL students' perceptions of online assessment tools in Malaysian higher education institutions through three variables: perceived usefulness, perceived risk of cheating and perceived self-efficacy as well as to identify the kinds of online assessment tools implemented in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions.

Azman, Azziz and Tuan (2020) in their study reviewed the acceptance and attitudes of Malaysian higher education students towards online assessment. However, it did not differentiate between EFL and non-EFL students. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific perceptions of EFL students towards online assessment tools in Malaysian higher education institutions.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

i. What are the kinds of online assessment tools implemented in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions?

ii. What are the students' perceptions of using online assessment tools regarding perceived usefulness, perceived risk of cheating, and perceived self-efficacy?

2.0 Literature review
2.1 Perceived usefulness

Perceived usefulness refers to how people believe that implementing a new technological tool can improve student performance (Lee, 2006). Several scholars have highlighted the advantages of a number of online formative assessment tools, namely Google Sheets, Blackboard, Clicker, Socratic, and Kahoot! (Alhabi and McDavid, 2020; Dobson, 2008; Elbasjouny, 2021; Fageeh, 2015; Jazir, Mangiasi, Firdaus, Chayani, and Rahmatika, 2020). These platforms are considered to

be positive tools for improving student performance in different ways. "They provide not only informative content, but also fun and interactive activities to improve learner response" (Elbasjouni, 2021, p. 50).

2.2   Perceived risk of cheating

The framework of perceived risk of cheating in this study builds on previous studies that have examined the likelihood of cheating in online assessments. In several studies, students who have used online assessments have indicated that it is easy to cheat (King & Gouyette & Pioroski, 2009; Rowe, 2004; Ozden, 2005; Roffia & Waluyo, 2020). Data collected through Ozden's (2005) survey indicated that most students agreed on the ease of cheating on online exams. Many students feel more comfortable in online exams and tend to cheat because what they are doing in the exam is out of sight (Rowe, 2004). Rofiah and Waluyo (2020) found that students in English colleges prefer to use online testing tools, such as Socratic style for vocabulary tests because it is easier to cheat. However, among more proficient students, cheating was less likely. Therefore, although cheating is a common phenomenon in education and cannot be removed from online or traditional assessments, it does exist to a greater extent in online environments (King, et al., 2009)

2.3   Perceived self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy plays a crucial role in English language learning and is defined as an individual's beliefs around his or her ability to influence the events of his or her life (Bandura, 1997). Most students who have positive attitudes towards online assessments have high perceived self-efficacy (Chiang, 2020; Fageeh, 2015; Genc et al., 2016). Furthermore, English learners' self-efficacy influences how said learners approach tasks and the effort required to complete them (Genc et al., 2016). Regarding online assessment, Fageeh (2015) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia with EFL undergraduate students to determine their self-efficacy for online assessment via Blackboard and found that EFL learners felt confident with low levels of anxiety during the online test (Fageeh, 2015). On the other hand, individuals with lower self-efficacy had more complex negative perceptions of things than in the past (Pajares, 1997). Students' negative perceptions of online assessments also stem from the time constraints of the test, which in turn increases anxiety (Abdel Karim & Shakur, 2016).

3.0   Methodology
3.1   Research design

This study used a quantitative approach and aimed to identify the kinds of online assessment tools implemented in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions and the perceptions of EFL postgraduate students towards online assessment tools. The quantitative data was collected through an online questionnaire and the data collected was analysed using SPSS software (version 29).

3.2   Samples

A total of 91 students participated in the survey. In particular, the participants included 63 females and 28 males, and they all voluntarily responded to the questionnaire. The participants were EFL postgraduate students from a higher education institution in Malaysia and have had experience in doing online tests using different online assessment tools since the outbreak of COVID-19. The participants are following a two-year postgraduate Master program and a four-year postgraduate PhD program in various majors in the English Department of the institution and the medium of instruction for their classes are in English. The students were non-Malaysians aged between 21 and 50. The majority of participants (89%) were enrolled in various Master programs, followed by PhD programs (11%). A convenience sampling strategy was used where individuals "who meet the required criteria and then selecting those who respond on a first-come-first-served basis until the sample size quotient is full" (Robinson, 2014, p.32).

3.3   Instrument

The instruments used was questionnaire. The study adapted the questionnaire from two past studies done by Alharbi, Alhebshi and Meccawy (2021) and Iskandar, Ganesan and Maulana (2021). This study used the online questionnaire tool Google From, which is a tool for creating and sharing questionnaires through an active hyperlink that was sent to students to complete. The online questionnaire consists of 6 parts. The first part is an informed consent to participate in the study. The second part explains the demographic data of the participants. The third part is on the types of online assessment tools. The fourth part focuses on students' perception of perceived usefulness. The fifth part is on students' perception of perceived risk of cheating and the sixth part address students' perception of perceived self-efficacy. A five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 - Strongly Disagree" to "5 - Strongly Agree" was used in the questionnaire.

3.4   Data collection procedure

A pilot study was first conducted with a convenience sample of 10 students to determine the feasibility and consistency of the questionnaire items before the actual data was collected. After that, the questionnaire was sent to 100 students and only 91 were collected back. Besides, the Google Form link of the questionnaire was sent to obtain the responses online over a two week period.

3.5   Data analysis

After collecting all the data from the students, descriptive statistics was performed using SPSS (version 29). The pilot test was run first to check the reliability of the questionnaire and is presented in the discussion section.

4.0   Discussion of analysis and findings

The results and discussion will be presented in four sections. The initial section provides a comprehensive overview of the specific online assessment tools employed by the participants in their studies. Moving forward, the second section presents the findings related to the students' perceptions of the usefulness of using online assessment tools. The third section explores the findings regarding the students' perceptions of the risk of cheating associated with online assessment tools. Lastly, the fourth section addresses the students' perceptions of their own self-efficacy when utilizing online assessment tools.

4.1   Online Assessment Tools Employed by The Participants

This section aims to provide an overview of the types of online assessment tools employed by the participants and their frequency of use. Table 1 shows the online assessment tools which were used by the participants. They utilized various online assessment tools for their academic activities. The analysis of the data revealed that Google Form was the most widely used online assessment tool, with 73.63% participants reporting its usage. This suggests that Google Form is a popular choice among the participants for conducting assessments in their academic endeavors. Following Google Form, the second most frequently used online assessment tool among the participants was P*Blast, with 47.25% reported users. P*Blast appears to be a prominent choice for a significant number of participants, indicating its relevance and effectiveness in the context of the study. Additionally, Quizizz was reported as the online assessment tool of choice by 26.37% participants. This finding suggests that Quizizz is moderately utilized by the participants for their assessment needs. Kahoot, another online assessment tool, was reported by 17.58% participants. While the usage of Kahoot is relatively lower compared to other tools, it still indicates its presence and potential usefulness within the participant group. Lastly, a small number of participants 12.09% reported the usage of other online assessment tools not specifically mentioned in the survey options. This finding highlights the diversity of online assessment tools employed by the participants, indicating a broader range of preferences and practices.

Overall, the findings indicate a varied usage pattern of online assessment tools among the participants, with Google Form being the most dominant choice. These findings provide insights into the prevalent tools and platforms used by participants in conducting online assessments, which will further inform discussions on the effectiveness and implications of these tools in the subsequent sections of the study.

Table 1: Online assessment tools employed by the participants

Option(s)	Subtotal	Percentage
Google Form	67	73.63%
P*Blast	43	47.25%
Quizizz	24	26.37%
Kahoot	16	17.58%
Others	11	12.09%

4.2   Students' Perceptions of Using Online Assessment Tools
In this section, the results and discussion pertaining to the students' perceptions of using online assessment tools are presented. Three aspects were investigated. They are perceived usefulness, perceived risk of cheating and perceived self-efficacy.

4.2.1   Perceived Usefulness
The first aspect that was focused was perceived usefulness of using online assessment tools. The data in Table 2 shows that students perceived the usefulness of using online assessment tools positively (Item: 5,6,7,8 and 9). The item 'online assessment is convenient and flexible' had the highest mean score of all other items (M=4). Additionally, almost all of the students agreed that online assessment is useful for language tests and it also provides immediate feedback about their performance (M=3.95). Item 7 showed that most students believed that online assessments enhance their learning quality (M=3.86). Finally, item 6, namely 'online assessment improves my exam performances' received the lowest score (M=3.76). The result of this study confirms that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students perceive online assessment tools as a valuable tool in terms of usefulness. This finding confirms with findings from previous studies that online assessment tools, in general is useful to students in assessments (Alhabi & McDavid, 2020; Dobson, 2008; Elbasjouny, 2021; Fageeh, 2015; Jazir, Mangiasi, Firdaus, Chayani, & Rahmatika, 2020). These studies have also reported that online assessment tools are perceived as useful tools by students across various educational contexts. The consistent findings across different studies suggest a consensus among researchers and learners regarding the positive impact of online assessment tools in supporting students' assessment needs. The current study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by reinforcing the concept that online assessment tools are valued by EFL students as effective and advantageous resources.

Table 2: Students' perceptions of using online assessment tools (perceived usefulness)

No.	Items	Mean
5	Online assessment is useful for language tests.	3.95
6	Online assessment improves my exam performances.	3.76
7	Online assessment enhances my learning quality.	3.86
8	Online assessment provides immediate feedback about my performances.	3.95
9	Online assessment is convenient and flexible.	4

4.2.2   Perceived Risk of Cheating
The second aspect that was focused is perceived risk of cheating of using online assessment tools. The data in Table 3 shows that students perceived the risk of cheating of using online assessment tools moderately (Item: 10,11 and 12). As shown in Table 3, the item 'I can easily translate difficult words during exams' had the highest mean score of all other items (M=3.55) followed by the item 'Online assessment facilitates cheating' which had a very similar score (M=3.53). Finally, item 12, 'I can screenshot questions during exams and share them with my

friends' received the lowest score (M=3.19). The result of this study confirms that the likelihood of cheating in online assessments. Due to the reason that all of the participants in this study were EFL postgraduate students from a higher education institution, the risk of cheating online is relatively low. This result confirms with findings from previous studies that although cheating is a common phenomenon in education and cannot be removed from online or traditional assessments, it does exist to a greater extent in online environments. However, among more proficient students, cheating was less likely. (King, et al., 2009). It is important to acknowledge that cheating, to some extent, may persist in online assessment environments despite efforts to prevent and detect such behaviors. However, the current study's findings imply that the specific context of EFL postgraduate students from the institution contributes to a lower risk of cheating in online assessments. These results have practical implications for educators and institutions, suggesting that a combination of measures such as promoting language proficiency, implementing anti-cheating strategies, and fostering a culture of academic integrity can help mitigate the risk of cheating and maintain the integrity of online assessments.

Table 3: Students' perceptions of using online assessment tools (perceived risk of cheating)

No.	Items	Mean
10	Online assessment facilitates cheating.	3.53
11	I can easily translate difficult words during exams.	3.55
12	I can screenshot questions during exams and share them with my friends.	3.19

4.2.3 Perceived Self-Efiicacy

The study also investigated the participants' perception of the potential risks related to using online assessment tools, particularly in relation to their self-efficacy (Item: 13,14 and 15). As shown in Table 4, the item 'I can remain calm when answering online quizzes and tests' received the highest mean score (M=3.91), while the items 'I feel confident using online assessment tools for taking online quizzes and tests' and 'I can perform well in online assessments compared to traditional assessments' also received high scores (M=3.85, M=3.77, respectively). The self-efficacy results showed that respondents had positive attitudes towards the online assessment tools, and generally students do not feel anxious when using online assessment tools. This study found that learners' perceived levels of self-efficacy were higher when using an online assessment tool by reflecting their confidence and positive performance. This finding is supported by Fageeh (2015) who reported higher levels of self-efficacy when assessing the perceptions of EFL foundation year students through online assessments. The results suggest that the use of online assessment tools has a positive impact on learners' self-efficacy beliefs, fostering a sense of competence and assurance in their abilities to successfully complete assessment tasks. By providing a user-friendly and accessible platform for assessment, online tools may empower learners, enabling them to navigate the assessment process more confidently and exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy. However, the current findings regarding the impact of online assessment on maintaining learner calm during testing contradict Abdel Karim and Shukur's (2016) findings on learner anxiety through online assessment, as they found that time constraints exacerbated anxiety during online testing. Therefore, increasing learners' self-efficacy through online assessment tools may be correlated with their impressions and awareness of the importance of online assessment tools. As learners gain confidence and belief in their abilities through using online assessments, they develop a stronger appreciation for the value of these tools in language learning. This connection between self-efficacy and perceptions of online assessment highlights the potential benefits of integrating these tools into language learning environments, fostering positive attitudes and recognizing their significance in the learning process.

Table 4: Students' perceptions of using online assessment tools (perceived self-efficacy)

No.	Items	Mean
13	I can remain calm when answering online quizzes and tests.	3.91
14	I feel confident using online assessment tools for taking online quizzes and tests.	3.85
15	I can perform well in online assessments compared to traditional assessments.	3.77

5.0   Conclusion and future research

This study investigated the students' perceptions of using online assessment tools regarding perceived usefulness, perceived risk of cheating, and perceived self-efficacy. The main conclusion drawn from this study is that online assessment tools are valuable and usefully enhances students' knowledge and self-efficacy. The results confirmed with findings from previous studies that there's a positive perception of the usefulness of online assessment tools. Participants recognized the convenience and flexibility of online assessment tools and believed that they enhance learning quality. Furthermore, the study examined students' perceptions of the risk of cheating associated with online assessment tools. The results indicated that participants perceived the risk of cheating to be moderate. Moreover, the study explored students' perceived self-efficacy when using online assessment tools. The results showed that participants had positive attitudes and confidence in using online assessment tools. The findings of this study contribute to advancing the field by providing evidence of the value and effectiveness of online assessment tools in supporting students' assessment needs. Educators and institutions can benefit from these insights to make informed decisions regarding the integration of online assessment tools into their teaching practices. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of addressing the risk of cheating and promoting academic integrity in online assessment environments. This study also has its limitations. The findings are based on a specific sample of EFL postgraduate students from a higher education institution, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Future research should consider a more diverse sample to ensure the broader applicability of the findings.

Author Contributions

Anis Shazwani Bt Saringat: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft Preparation; **Linggesh Dharani Thilagam a/p Dhanalaraj:** Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing; **Huang Yuxi**: Software, Validation, Visualization; **Ren Keyi**: Investigation, Resources, Project Administration

Conflicts Of Interest

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its Submission and declare no conflict of interest in the manuscript.

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