



**INVESTIGATING ONLINE EFL
ASSESSMENT CHALLENGES:
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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Abstract:

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes and challenges in language teaching and learning in almost every country worldwide. Many countries have effectively embraced various online teaching platforms for language teaching tasks. However, one challenging aspect of online teaching for many teachers is the online assessment task. This study examines teachers' perceptions of online EFL assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia. A survey research design is adopted for the study. To this end, quantitative data were collected using a closed- and- open-ended questionnaire. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that teachers exhibited positive perceptions towards online assessment because it is easy to be administered and marked. It also saves teachers' time and effort and provides instant feedback for students, allowing them to improve their performance. Moreover, teachers positively perceived online formative assessments because they allow students to develop their learning skills. Furthermore, the study's findings posed some challenges faced by teachers while giving online EFL assessments. It is challenging to ascertain its credibility as several technical factors affect the smooth evaluation process. Therefore, some recommendations are forwarded for further studies and practitioners.

Keywords: Covid-19; online EFL assessment; Saudi Arabia; teachers' perceptions.



1. Introduction

For many years, technology has been generally used in teaching and learning, specifically in English language teaching. Such teaching methods are E-learning, online learning, electronic learning, digital learning, and technology-enhanced learning. Technology is mainly employed in the teaching and learning environment to improve the teaching and learning process, especially in instruction, tutoring, and assessment (Wheeler, 2012). Many educational institutions across the globe have effectively embraced technology, either fully or partially, in their teaching and learning activities. Studies have shown that technology has provided remarkably promising results in improving students' skills and learning outcomes in various fields of knowledge.

Saudi Arabia is one of the countries which has partially embraced technology in the teaching process, known as blended learning, particularly in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many educational institutions across the country. However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic forced the Kingdom, as well as many countries, to fully embrace the use of technology instead of the physical teaching method in EFL teaching and learning. This has been conducted to avoid the spread of the Coronavirus among people and, therefore, there was a total closure of educational activities. Various online platforms, such as Blackboard, Teams, Telegram, WebEx, Zoom, and many others, have been used by educational institutions in Saudi Arabia for EFL teaching and learning. The most prominent and utilized Learning Management System (LMS) in the country is Blackboard®. It is designed for both synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning (Al-Samiri, 2021).

Many studies investigated the use of technology in EFL teaching and learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The results revealed that it has many benefits for both teachers and students. One key advantage is teaching and learning flexibility, whereby students can attend classes anywhere and anytime. This helps them save time, and can be a good way to easily join universities (Al- Jarf, 2020; Dahmash, 2020). Also, the use of technology in EFL teaching and learning provides students with the

freedom to access their lectures and finish coursework at their pace using different types of devices and software (Aljaber, 2021).

Similarly, Mabrook and Mabrook (2020) observed that students use their mobile devices to attend online classes regardless of their environment, at home, in the office, in the car, or even in bed. In general, using technology in EFL teaching and learning improves students' learning outcomes and language skills (Alsowayegh et al., 2019). As for teachers, using technology can provide them with ample and flexible opportunities to deliver teaching as they can teach from different countries in different parts of the world, even when there is a big difference in the time zone (Yandell, 2020).

Assessments in EFL teaching and learning are regarded as aspects which can get more benefits from online practices. Assessments have become more flexible because they can be administered anytime, provided that Internet coverage and smart devices are available. Students are given more freedom to decide when and where to take the assessment (Khan & Khan, 2019). The online assessments also give students more autonomy to become independent learners. They can provide prompt feedback for learners, facilitating learning and improving learning outcomes (Alruwais et al., 2018).

Despite the benefits of technology in improving EFL teaching and learning activities, studies found some disadvantages or challenges associated with the online learning environment, especially in Saudi Arabia. Previous studies found that students' lack of motivation to learn is one of the principal factors influencing online learning (Al-Hoorie, 2017). During the Covid-19 period, technical issues, such as poor internet connectivity, can be another factor affecting the effectiveness of online EFL learning (Mabrook & Mabrook, 2020). Al-Nofaie (2020) added that the lack of digital readiness and technology skills among students also contributes to the effectiveness of online EFL learning. In the area of assessment, studies have identified some challenges which affect the effectiveness of online assessments, such as the lack of physical contact with instructors and students, difficulties in determining students' identities, challenges in navigating within the system, lack of technological skills and experience by some teachers and students,

low integrity levels of online assessments, lack of enough interaction and appropriate feedback (Al-Nuaim, 2012; Kanaan et al., 2013; Masa'deh et al., 2013; Tarhini et al., 2016).

Therefore, to overcome the challenges of online assessment in EFL teaching and learning, there is a dire need to examine the teachers' perceptions of online assessment practices. Understanding the teachers' perceptions and attitudes would enable educators and policymakers to redesign the online assessment to improve students' learning outcomes. For instance, the teachers' perceptions about the ability of online assessment tools to effectively assess students' performance would enable policymakers to recommend an effective tool that gives effective feedback to improve students' learning performance, teachers' performance, and their teaching delivery.

However, most studies, which examined online EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia, focused on teaching and learning, neglecting other important aspects, such as the online assessments. Previous studies focused mainly on students' perspectives on online English language teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in KSA (Almekhlafy, 2020; Al-Nofaie, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Alsuhaibani, 2021; Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Alzamil, 2021). Very few investigations were conducted to examine the teachers' perspectives of online EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia (Khafaga, 2021; Hakim, 2020; Rahman, 2020). For instance, Chatta et al. (2022) revealed that Saudi faculty members have positively perceived online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic but prefer traditional face-to-face classes. Abduh (2021) reported that Saudi EFL teachers initially displayed positive perceptions of online assessment; they said there are challenges in assessing students online. However, the conducted study has yet to identify these challenges and difficulties.

Similarly, Algethami (2022) mentioned that Saudi teachers have exhibited positive experiences and attitudes toward EFL online teaching. However, there were concerns regarding students' engagement and assessment reliability. This emphasizes the need for further research to fully examine the teachers' perceptions of online assessment in teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia. There is also a need to reveal teachers' perceptions towards online EFL assessment. This would pave the way to properly plan and implement online EFL teaching and learning practices in Saudi Arabia. Studies

revealed that online language teaching can be as effective as face-to-face teaching when well-planned (Gacs et al., 2020; Enkin & Mejías-Bikandi, 2017; Moser et al., 2021).

Addressing the existing research gap, this study aims to delve into the perceptions and attitudes of Saudi EFL teachers towards online assessment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. By doing so, it seeks to unearth the particular hurdles educators encounter in the online assessment landscape. The anticipated outcomes of this research highlight the challenges inherent in the online assessment process, thereby providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers in Saudi Arabia to strategize and enhance online assessment methods. The following research questions guide the investigation:

- 1) What are the perceptions of Saudi EFL teachers regarding online assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 2) How do Saudi EFL teachers perceive online formative and summative assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 3) What are university EFL teachers' primary challenges in online assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Assessment and Online Assessment

Carrying out an online assessment is an intricate process of evaluating students' learning and providing valuable feedback, motivating them to learn in a successful learning environment (Slack, R. & Priestley, M., 2023). Assessments are generally described as a fundamental factor of effective education, aiming to improve both the teaching and learning process and outcomes (Muñoz et al., 2012). It also enables teachers to evaluate their teaching and the curriculum. Assessments are "activities designed primarily to foster student learning" (Webber, 2012). On the other hand, online assessment is a process of assessing and measuring students' learning outcomes and giving feedback for better performance via online platforms (Iskandar et al., 2021; Weleschuk et al., 2019). As explained previously, scholars have pointed out some benefits and challenges of online assessment. There is a dire need to explore teachers' perceptions to

improve the process . Assessment mainly enhances learning and teaching and provides useful information about the students' performance and progress (Muñoz et al., 2012). Therefore, teachers' perceptions and evaluations concerning assessment should be based on the four crucial areas: improving teaching and learning, institution accountability, student accountability, and treating an assessment as irrelevant (Brown, 2004). As for other scholars like Davis and Neitzel (2011), teachers' perceptions of assessing students' progress should align with four characteristics that differ from those of Brown (2004). These are 1) the effectiveness and efficiency of the feedback provided by teachers, 2) the frequency of students' use of their cognitive and metacognitive factors in the learning process, 3) students' ability to work individually or in a group, and 4) teachers' understanding of the purpose of their daily assessment.

In a previous study, Alsubaiai (2021) argued that teachers' perception of formative assessment determines whether they give the assessment and the type of strategies to use. The study also observed that teachers' teaching experience and education level influence their perceptions of formative assessment. In the tradition of face-to-face teaching, it is believed that the summative assessment is the most preferred assessment by many Saudi teachers (Al-Wassia et al., 2015) because they focus more on students' final test or examination, not on gaining, retaining, applying theories and concepts (Rana & Zubair, 2019). Many are indifferent to the formative assessment because they consider it unnecessary (Alotaibi, 2019).

Many scholars have proved that formative assessment can considerably improve students' learning performance (Brunfaut & Harding, 2018; Kremmel & Harding, 2020). In their study, Alahmadi et al. (2019) found that formative assessment positively impacts the English-speaking performance of some Saudi EFL learners. However, many teachers would prefer to give formative assessments to their students. Many factors have been identified as responsible for this issue, and one of these factors is teachers' perceptions of assessment. Other factors are academic workload and teachers' knowledge of the assessment concept itself (Al- Wassia et al., 2015).

Previous studies by Hakim (2015), Rana and Zubair (2019), and Klatt et al. (2020) revealed that teachers' perceptions of formative assessment have a positive correlation with their willingness to accept curriculum changes. Therefore, when teachers have positive perceptions towards online language assessment, they will effectively administer it to students, which can, in turn, develop the students' learning outcomes. This study examines Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of online formative and summative assessments and the challenges that university EFL teachers encounter in online assessment. This is based on the findings of Alharbi and Meccawy (2020) when they introduced a mobile-based Socrative formative assessment. They observed that many Saudi EFL students preferred paper-based formative assessments. However, they shifted their preferences in favor of the mobile-based Socrative formative assessment towards the end of the process. This indicates that Saudi EFL teachers may positively perceive online language assessment. The literature highlighted the need to establish the status of Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of online assessment. It requires a different teacher effort in administering and grading than the traditional paper and pen assessment. The findings of this study were expected to guide Saudi policymakers to depend on a more scientifically proven ground to make appropriate policies and guidelines concerning online assessment using their cultural values.

Although several studies regarding Saudi teachers' perceptions of online assessments have been conducted, they might still do a lot better. For example, Abduh (2021) found that teachers need to recognize the challenges involved in administering an online assessment. Furthermore, based on these above-mentioned studies, it can be noted that, to the best knowledge of the researcher, no previous study has been conducted to investigate learners' perspectives of online assessment and their challenges while taking online tests or examinations. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to investigate both teachers' and students' perceptions of online assessment.



2.2 Previous Studies on Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Online Learning

Numerous scholars carried out many studies to investigate the teachers' and students' perceptions of online EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia to improve the process.

For example, Algraini (2023) conducted a study on Saudi EFL University Instructors' Perceptions of Online Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study sought to ascertain how EFL university instructors perceived online learning. The participants were 32; 87.5% of them were females while 12.5% were males. they belonged to numerous universities in Saudi Arabia. Online questionnaires were used to gather data. It was divided into four sections: (1) participant demographics; (2) benefits of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) drawbacks of online learning during the pandemic; and (4) effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic. The results of the study showed that, although some of the participants believed there were some drawbacks to online learning activities, the majority of them had a more predominately positive view towards them.

Furthermore, Alsuhaibani (2021) examined the Saudi EFL students' perceptions of using Blackboards before and during the Covid-19 period. The data for the study were collected from a total of 381 Saudi EFL students using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that students positively perceive using Blackboard in online classes. Alashwal (2020) also reported that Saudi students had positive perceptions of online learning. They perceive it as an excellent opportunity to provide access to education for more diverse groups. Its flexibility allows students to learn at their own pace, especially those with other commitments. Alkhalaf (2021) examined the Saudi EFL students' perceptions of learning phonology using online platforms. The study data were collected from female students in a local university in the country using an online survey. The findings revealed that students exhibited positive perceptions of the online learning of phonology. Students showed positive perceptions of the teachers' interactive role in online learning.

On the other hand, Hakim (2020) reported that despite the challenges of poor internet connection and motivation among students, Saudi EFL teachers have positive attitudes toward using Blackboard in the online teaching environment. This has been supported by the findings of Rahman's survey (2020), as the results showed that most teachers believed that student motivation and student-teacher interaction are the most challenging issues of online teaching. Thus, most teachers believe that face-to-face teaching is better than online teaching. Studies have generally assessed online teaching and learning instead of investigating online assessment, and very few studies focused on the assessment, such as Abduh (2021) and Algethami (2022). The authors need to categorically point out the challenges teachers face in online EFL assessment in their studies. Therefore, further studies are required to comprehensively examine the teachers' perceptions of online assessment in teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia.

3. Methodology

A survey research design used in this study to investigate Saudi teachers' perceptions of online language assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research design is adopted because it allowed the researcher to collect a considerable amount of quantitative data without direct contact with the participants. In addition, the data can be collected from many participants during a short period via a questionnaire (Creswell, 2012). Although there were some disadvantages to using a questionnaire, the study adopted some measures to avoid such problems. The disadvantages included incredibility from the participants while completing the questionnaire. Thus, only those who were willing to participate in the study completed the survey. Another disadvantage of using a questionnaire was selecting the improper participants. To avoid this problem, the researcher ascertained every participant's identity before completing the questionnaire.

3.1 Data Collection Instrument

This study used a questionnaire only for collecting data. The questionnaire used in this study was adopted from Mäkipää et al. (2021). However, it had been modified to suit the current research. The questionnaire was classified into three sections A, B,

and C. Section A elicited the participants' demographic data, while sections B and C gathered data on the participants' perceptions of online EFL assessment, its effectiveness, and challenges. Section B used a Likert scale from which the participants are required to indicate the extent to which the study participants agree or disagree to the questionnaire items. Section C consisted of open-ended questions, which require the participants to express their views freely and as much as they like concerning the online assessment and the advantages and disadvantages of an online assessment. This section also included a question regarding the participants' views of formative and summative online assessments.

Section C was added to enable the participants to express their perspectives on issues not included in section B of the questionnaire. Section C was also incorporated in the survey because of the impact of Covid-19 on face-to-face interactions worldwide, which made it impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews. Finally, EFL teachers' perceptions of online assessment, their challenges with the online assessment approach in Saudi Arabia and possible ways to overcome the challenges are included.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a panel of experts checked the wording of the items. As for reliability, a pilot study was conducted with some teachers in Saudi Arabia before the actual research to ensure that the target participants fully understood all the terminology. A reliability analysis was also performed, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .78 was obtained, which ascertained the reliability of the items as the coefficient of .6 and above is considered acceptable.

3.2 Study Participants

The current study's total number of participants was seventy-eight Saudi EFL teachers from eight universities in Saudi Arabia. The participants were males and females, and more than 80% had more than three years of teaching experience in different universities in the Kingdom. All the participants had experience utilizing at least one online platform in teaching and assessing students' progress and performance. However, the Blackboard platform was the most used online platform by most institutions in Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Results Analysis

The data collected from the closed-ended questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics via implementing SPSS software. The results were also supported by the results of the questionnaire's open-ended items to address the

study questions. The open-ended items enabled the participants to express themselves freely and clarify their responses to the closed-ended items more. Thus, the study's results are presented in three themes in the following subsections.

4.1 Saudi EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Online Assessment during Covid-19 pandemic

Based on the findings, the participants (Saudi EFL teachers) positively perceived the online EFL assessment. First, concerning general satisfaction with the online assessment, the majority (75%) of the participants showed satisfaction with their assessment practices during the online teaching, as indicated by item 2 of the questionnaire. About 80% of them noted in the open-ended questions that they had positive perceptions of online assessment because it is easy to be administered and marked, especially the multiple-choice questions. Also, teachers could spend a little of their time grading students' answers. As for the students, a participant added that by using online assessment, students can receive instant feedback, which allows them to improve their performance.

Saudi EFL teachers also showed that they were quite satisfied with the online EFL assessment regarding the number of assessments given and the areas covered. This is supported by items 5 and 6, where the majority (75%) of the teachers also agreed that they could give regular feedback to their students in online teaching and learning compared with the face-face teaching mode (refer to Table 1). The online assessment enabled teachers to comment on students' learning progress. One of the participants added in answering the open-ended questions section that he frequently gave online assessments during classes.



Table 1:
 Saudi EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Online Assessment

S/ N	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	I was able to assess students equally during online teaching.			75%	15%	10%
2	I am satisfied with my assessment practices during the online teaching.			25%	50%	25%
3	The online assessment was more challenging for me than the paper- and- pen assessment.			25%	40%	35%
4	In my opinion, the assessment of students during online teaching does not realistically reflect their learning outcome.		10%	15%	25%	50%
5	During online teaching, I gave more feedback than in face-face teaching.		10%	15%	25%	50%
6	I regularly gave feedback to my students.		7.5%	12.5%	50%	30%
7	I regularly commented on my students' progress.	10%	15%	25%	25%	25%
8	In my opinion, the final online assessment was fair.			25%	50%	25%
9	I think the final online assessment alone is enough for the students.			10%	57%	33%
10	In my opinion, the grades on the final assessment are better than before.			50%	25%	25%
11	The final online assessment of the students was not realistic.	5%	5%	10%	66%	14%

4.2 Saudi EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Online Formative and Summative Assessments

As for the Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of online summative and formative assessments, many teachers believe there is a dire need to give regular and multiple assessments before the final assessment because the final assessment does not provide the real performance of the students. This was indicated in item 9, where most participants (more than 80%) strongly disagreed that the final online assessment alone was enough for the students. They think the final assessment could be more realistic in revealing the real performance of the students concerning the learning objectives, as shown in item 11(see Table 1). The responses to the open-ended questions align with these findings, which substantiated that online assessment allows teachers to administer multiple assessments before the end of the semester. One of the participants explained that she administers an online assessment every week, two weeks or a month depending on the subject or topic. Also, multiple assessments give the students more opportunities of being assessed.

However, a few of the participants stated that they strictly give assessments based on the course description as given by the school management. One respondent particularly explained that in her school, teachers must provide two to three assessments before the end of every semester.

4.3 Challenges of Online Assessment Faced by Saudi EFL Teachers

Finally, the findings unveiled various challenges which are encountered by Saudi EFL teachers while administering online assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results revealed that the online assessment is more challenging for many participants than the traditional paper-and-pencil assessment, as indicated by item 3. This is because most Saudi EFL teachers believe that online final assessments do not realistically reflect students' learning outcomes, as shown by item 4. According to the results, many participants are unsure if the students are assessed equally during online teaching and learning, as shown by item 1(see Table 1). The results of the open-ended questions also supported this finding that the online assessment was rather difficult, particularly for teachers, to ascertain



the credibility of students' answers. Whether a student responded to the answers by themselves or with the help of someone, teachers cannot easily judge. Another participant added that it is difficult to monitor students while responding to an exam question, unlike in the traditional face-to-face exams, because a teacher may not know if a student was focusing.

Also, most of the participants (about 80%) indicated that technical problems constitute another challenge of online assessment in Saudi Arabia. For instance, one respondent explained that many of her students do not attend the online assessments due to poor internet connection or lack of proper appliances or devices. Another respondent wrote that the major challenge she experienced in online assessment is the lack of a proper and quiet place because her children disturb her at home.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, the findings of the open-ended questions showed some positive benefits of online EFL assessments. Most participants explained that the first and major one was that it provided a solution to EFL teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The online assessment made distant learning possible in many parts of the world. It was also easy to collect grades and collect students' results within a short period.

4. Results Discussion

Based on the descriptive analysis results, this study advanced three major findings. First, it showed that Saudi EFL teachers have positive perceptions of online EFL assessment because it saves their time and effort during administering and grading students' performance. It allows teachers to comment on students' learning progress and performance. These findings were not surprising because teachers in many parts of the world complain that grading students' exam scripts is one of the most difficult parts of their job. Therefore, since online assessment can help them accomplish this task, most teachers would be happy with this development. With online assessment, teachers can administer assessments to many students at a particular time. It is also easy for the teachers to grade the students' quizzes, assignments, or examinations. This could explain why some teachers give many assessments before the end of a semester.

These findings are in line with the results of previous studies, such as Chatta et al. (2022) and Algethami (2022), who revealed that many Saudi EFL teachers had positive perceptions of online teaching and learning, particularly about conducting effective online assessments (Abduh, 2021) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings also agreed with the conceptual definition of assessment by Webber (2012), which states that it is “primarily designed to foster student learning”. The findings of this study revealed that most Saudi EFL teachers agreed that the online assessment allowed them to monitor students’ learning progress and provide appropriate feedback for improvement. This result also supported the definitions of online assessment provided by Iskandar et al. (2021) and Weleschuk et al. (2019).

Secondly, the study revealed that most teachers positively perceive online formative assessments. Most teachers believe there is a dire need to give regular and multiple online formative assessments. This finding was surprising because previous studies have shown that Saudi teachers were reluctant to provide formative assessments to students (Alahmadi et al., 2019). Also, many Saudi teachers preferred summative assessment only (Al-Wassia et al., 2015) because they focused more on students’ final test or examination than on gaining, retaining, and applying theories and concepts (Rana & Zubair, 2019). Many are indifferent to formative assessment because they consider it unnecessary (Alotaibi, 2019).

Nevertheless, this finding was a significant development, i.e., a paradigm shift toward improving EFL teaching and learning in KSA. Unlike the results of previous studies, the current study showed that teachers now begin to consider formative assessment better than summative one. This is because the final assessment mostly encourages cramming among students. It does not encourage the student's assimilation of concepts, as they may need help to learn and apply concepts in other environments. In addition, the final assessment alone may not give the students equal opportunities to acquire essential skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, it is proven that formative assessment greatly helps improve learning performance (Brunfaut & Harding, 2018; Kremmel & Harding, 2020). For example, Alahmadi et al. (2019) pointed out that formative assessment positively impacts the English-speaking performance of some Saudi EFL learners.



Finally, the study's findings unveiled many challenges Saudi EFL teachers face while giving online assessments. They consider it more challenging compared to traditional paper-and-pencil assessments. This is because it is difficult to ascertain the credibility of the students' answers, monitor students, some technical problems, the need for appropriate devices or appliances for students, and the need for a quiet place for teachers at home. These findings are similar to the results of Hakim (2020), who reported that poor internet connection was one of the major problems associated with online teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. Similar to the results of this study, Rahman (2020) also stated that many teachers complained of poor student-teacher interaction as it is the most challenging aspect of online teaching. Also, previous studies showed that many teachers have concerns regarding the low integrity of online assessment and the lack of effective student interaction and appropriate feedback, among others (Al-Nuaim, 2012; Kanaan et al., 2013; Masa'deh et al., 2013; Tarhini et al., 2016).

However, there are some significant findings related to this study. First, none of the teachers mentioned the lack of appropriate devices, poor internet connection, proper training/practice, or motivation on the part of the teachers as challenges towards online assessment. This shows an improvement in online teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia because previous studies pointed these out as major challenges in the Kingdom. Other challenges, such as low credibility and differences in the time zone between countries, may be overcome eventually.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of online EFL assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that the teachers had positive perceptions towards online assessment because it is easy to be administered and marked, which saves teachers' time and effort and gives instant feedback to students, allowing them to improve their performance. They also positively perceived multiple online formative assessments because students can effectively develop their learning and skills. The findings of the study also revealed some challenges Saudi EFL teachers face in online assessment. It is not easy to ascertain the credibility of the assessment. Some technical factors also affect the smooth

running of the assessment, such as poor internet connection and the students' lack of appropriate devices/appliances. Some teachers also found it difficult to provide a quiet place at home.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the analysis only surveyed the teachers' perceptions of online assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic. It did not compare the assessments before and after the pandemic or the results of the online and traditional paper-and-pencil assessments. Also, the study was limited to a small population compared to many EFL teachers in the country. Moreover, the study did not consider the teachers' experiences or skills in the online assessment.

Similarly, the study did not consider using different online platforms to assess students' EFL performance. Perhaps, teachers might have different perceptions on various platforms. In addition, other variables, such as gender, teachers' educational qualifications, and the academic workload of teachers, had not been investigated. Therefore, future studies should consider these factors for further investigation. Despite the limitations, the results of this study could be beneficial for policymakers, school proprietors, administrators, and teachers in designing and conducting effective online assessments.

Based on the insights from the study's findings, a set of recommendations emerged to address the identified challenges. The study highlighted a notable concern surrounding the subpar interaction between students and teachers in online assessment. Thus, a pivotal imperative arises to proactively bolster the quality of student-teacher engagement within the online teaching and learning environment. Introducing mechanisms such as live-video coverage through video conferencing platforms is a promising strategy to mitigate the issue of insufficient student-teacher interactions, particularly during online assessments.

Furthermore, a two-pronged approach is suggested to tackle the multifaceted challenge of technical glitches in online assessments. Firstly, facilitating unfettered access to the Internet for students, either through cost-free provisions or at subsidized rates, coupled with measures to elevate its overall quality, could be instrumental in curbing the technical impediments encountered during online assessment processes. Secondly, implementing stringent regulations



during assessments can bolster the verification of student identities and safeguard the integrity of the evaluation process.

Confronting the backdrop of a disruptive auditory environment, a pragmatic solution is allowing educators to utilize their office spaces even when physical schools are closed during the Covid-19 pandemic. This measure would offer instructors a serene setting to conduct online assessments, particularly benefiting those facing challenges securing a noise-free environment in other locations. By comprehensively addressing these recommendations, educational institutions can chart a course toward an enhanced online assessment experience that effectively bridges the digital divide and ensures the academic integrity of remote evaluations.

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