

## Evaluating Students' Performance through Online Assessments in Higher Education Context: Indonesian Teacher Educators' Voice

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### Abstract

#### **Background:**

The remote learning system creates challenges in many universities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its utilization has supported many lecturers in the teaching and learning process. However, making an appropriate learning assessment is still an issue.

#### **Methodology:**

The participants were 20 lecturers with education majors. Two types of data were collected in this study. The quantitative data were collected through an online survey distributed via g-form, while the qualitative data were obtained through interviews.

#### **Findings:**

This research revealed that video projects and group presentations were the two dominant techniques used to assess online students' performance. Moreover, Zoom was found to be the most used platform for learning among the participants. Last, three main challenges of assessing students online were uncovered, including lack of face-to-face interactions, supporting teaching and learning facilities, and students' integrity and honesty.

#### **Conclusion:**

Various assessment techniques and platforms were used, such as assessing students through video projects or group presentations have done online. Some challenges were also found to show that online assessments positively and negatively contribute to students' performance.

#### **Originality:**

Despite numerous research interests in online learning, there is meager literature concerning how to assess students' performance in online class. This research is aimed to provide comprehensive information concerning students' assessment in online classes during the pandemic through mixed methods.

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|---------------------------------------|---|
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has eroded teaching and learning activities (Zizek, 2020). This situation led to the ability of education practitioners to adjust themselves in classroom-based teaching. It is known as “buffering effect”, in which to respond to exogenous changes (Villar & Miralles, 2019). As the duration of the pandemic is undetermined, universities are forced to close, the buffering refers to random replacement of classroom-based teaching into remote-teaching. Due to this condition, the ways lecturers teach, engage, and assess students for their performance in learning will be adjusted within the remote-teaching framework.

Many studies revealed that lecturers struggle to explore the appropriate teaching strategies (Rapanta et al., 2020). In addition, many studies were still debating the suitable ways to assess students’ performance in remote teaching. This is caused by one of the characteristics of remote learning, in which students are mostly doing autonomous learning. Lecturers have lack controlling and monitoring of their students’ positive learning behavior (Hwang et al., 2021). The students are reported often not showing their internal motivation to learn in their own space during remote learning. They seem disobey the teaching instruction provided by the lecturers. It is because they have low literacy in general. They often skip the instruction if the words are too many (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020)

Despite the numerous research interest in remote-learning education in the higher education setting (Bryson & Andres, 2020; Hwang et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020), there is meager literature concerning how to evaluate students’ performance in the teaching and learning process. The learning assessment in remote teaching and learning still becomes an issue in higher education contexts. Based on the researchers’ experience, learning assessment in a remote learning were not just merely achieving students’ cognitive competence but also making sure that students’ positive learning behaviors had been affected. It is important to build mutual understanding that remote learning provides learning experiences similar to offline learning.

In higher education contexts, all lecturers have been encouraged to assess their students objectively. However, it becomes an issue when the lecturers have to assess their students’ remote learning. Due to its ubiquity’ of features of remote learning systems, for example, the availability to access anytime and anywhere, low cost, ease of use and interactive character usages. A remote learning system expects lecturers to be able to facilitate and stimulate students’ performance development.

Regarding assessment necessity in teaching and learning process toward students' indicator of success learning, the researchers ponder it to be an important component that requires further research. In this study, the researchers investigated the learning assessment practiced by the lecturers and the challenges in assessing students' performance in a remote learning context. This study reflects on basic research to explore the stepping stone of learning assessment in tertiary education. Three research questions were addressed as follows:

1. What are assessment techniques performed by the lecturers?
2. What are online learning platforms used by lecturers?
3. What challenges do the lecturers face in assessing students' performance?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

A mixed-method design was used to this current study. The quantitative design used survey to collect the data. A survey in research is "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 160). This form of research provides a range of approaches for participant selection, data collection, and various instrumentation methods utilization. Survey research can employ quantitative research procedures (e.g., using numerically rated surveys), qualitative research strategies (e.g., utilizing open-ended questions), or both (i.e., mixed methods). Twenty-four (24) statements were developed in a questionnaire. They covered issues such as medium of learning activity, types of learning assessment, procedures in teaching instruction, the availability of teachers' and students' feedback, the easiness of assessment access, and the availability of teaching and learning facilities. When the questionnaire was tried out and reached its validity, the researchers distributed it to participants. 20 lecturers took part in this study. They answered the questionnaire online since it was distributed through Google Forms. After the data were obtained, they were quantitatively analyzed. Once the data from the survey were tabulated, the discussion and conclusion were derived.

The qualitative data from this study were obtained through interviews with a number of willing participants. The interviews were carried out after the participants responded to the survey. The interviews were conducted through phone calls to avoid face-to-face interaction with the participants. The interview protocols were provided by explaining the aims of the interviews in the beginning before starting the interview. A list of interview questions was developed to get clear descriptions about the challenges the lecturers experienced in assessing the students in remote learning. The interview results were then transcribed and coded to get the emerging categories and themes through the thematic analysis.

### 3. FINDINGS

Three research questions were formulated to be answered in the light of students' assessments in online learning.

#### 3.1 *The assessment techniques performed by the lecturers*

During the Covid 19 pandemic, educators have been experiencing exceptional situations where they were required to conduct the instructional process online, and assessing students' performance was a challenge for them. To encourage this, they utilized several techniques to assess the students' knowledge and performance. The assessment techniques revealed from this study are shown in the following table.

**Table 1.** Assessment techniques used by lecturers

| No | Assessment technique                  | Percentage |
|----|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 1  | Video projects                        | 65.5       |
| 2  | Group work presentations on Zoom      | 65.5       |
| 3  | Essay writing                         | 62.1       |
| 4  | Online tests                          | 44.8       |
| 5  | Summarizing learning materials        | 34.5       |
| 6  | Giving comments on online discussions | 20.7       |

The data in Table 1 show that one participant selected more than one technique in the classroom, as shown by the high percentages in each technique used. The varied kinds of assessment techniques were the results of carrying out the learning assessment during the pandemic as the lecturers attempted to adapt the situations with the feasible techniques. The survey data conducted online revealed that video projects and group work presentations were the two highest choices of assessment techniques with 65.5%. The second highest was essay writing with 62.1%. It was then followed by online tests (44.8%), summarizing learning materials (34.5%), and giving comments on online discussions (20.7%). The preference was associated with the ease of use and usefulness of conducting assessment techniques from the lecturers' points of view. It was uncovered from the interview results of the selected participants. Participant 1 (P1) believed that the usefulness of the assessment techniques done through either synchronous or asynchronous platforms brought a meaningful impact on students' performance as well as the assessment results, as shown in the following excerpt:

*I am sure that when everything was done online, including the assessment part in my class, I provided my students with assessments which could be used to measure their work during the semester. Therefore, the assessments should be appropriately selected in order to give me my students' real competence despite the use of online mode.*

*Synchronous platforms were my choice as I could manage to assess my students directly. (Interview, P1)*

This belief was also supported by the other interviewed participant (P3) who mentioned his credibility in assessing students was very important. He avoided the students' perceptions of having an "easy" way to evaluate their performance in class during the pandemic as strongly claimed from the following excerpt:

*I know that situations were out of hand. It was very difficult to handle how to assess my students' learning during this pandemic. Most of the students felt that it was quite difficult for the lecturers to assess them due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. However, I tried a number of assessment techniques which eventually could give me genuine results of my students' performance. I had to be a bit persistent in assessing them as we are now in a difficult situation, so I need to work harder to do that. (Interview, P3)*

However, some of the lecturers felt that the use of online assessment during the pandemic burdened them since they lost face-to-face interaction and monitoring system towards the students' performance. This situation resulted in the difficulty of determining appropriate learning assessments to evaluate what students understood and could do in class. One of the interviewees (P5) asserted that she chose the assessment technique which was easy for students to show their skills and understanding towards the lessons as stated in the following excerpt:

*When I had to assess my students, I selected the easiest way to do that. For example, I gave them an online test through Googleform. That's the kind of test similar to the face-to-face class, but in a different mode. I considered many things such as the availability of internet connection around my students and the supporting devices. So, I think it's not fair if I pushed them so hard that they had to do some complicated assessments which, for some students, were hard to do. (Interview, P5)*

From the above excerpts, it was clear that there were two reasons in selecting assessment techniques which were associated with the use of technology during the pandemic. On one side, the lecturers prioritized the increasing performance of students by assessing them. This was supported by the selection of assessment techniques which resulted in students' authentic ability. On the other side, this problematic situation also resulted in choosing assessments due to their easy use in virtual class.

### **3.2 The online learning platforms used by the lecturers**

Based on the survey data, many e-learning platforms were utilized by the lecturers in their online classes during the Covid 19 pandemic. The following chart shows the use of various e-learning platforms to support classroom assessments.

**Table 2. Learning platforms used in online classes**

| No | Learning platform                        | Percentage |
|----|--|------------|
| 1  | Zoom                                     | 86.2       |
| 2  | WhatsApp                                 | 65.5       |
| 3  | Mulawarman Online Learning System (MOLS) | 65.5       |
| 4  | Google Classroom                         | 27.6       |
| 5  | YouTube                                  | 24.1       |
| 6  | Facebook                                 | 17.2       |
| 7  | Google Meet                              | 10.3       |

From the data in Table 2, Zoom is the top e-learning platform to be used by lecturers in the classroom. Despite its combination with other learning platforms, around 86.2% of the participants preferred using this platform while assessing the students in the virtual class. The assessment methods performed through Zoom helped lecturers monitor the students' activities easily as it was commonly used synchronously by the lecturers and students. It is followed by the use of WhatsApp Group and Mulawarman Online Learning System (MOLS) as the only platform on the list developed by the university IT team. Both learning platforms are used by the same number of participants which show the percentage of 65.5%. The use of the university Learning Management System (LMS) implies that lecturers feel comfortable in using it since it was developed based on the needs of classroom practices in the university. In addition, the use of MOLS to support the assessment procedures facilitates the lecturers to score the students and the scores are safely kept into the university database.

The other platforms did not disclose significant results as their use in class was below 30%. Compared to the minor results from other e-learning platforms, the top three learning platforms dominated the lecturers' preferences in assessing students online. Zoom as the first choice is categorized as a synchronous learning platform, while the other learning platforms are classified as asynchronous platforms.

### ***3.3 The challenges faced by the lecturers in assessing students' performance***

The data were collected from the personal interviews to five participants who were willing to spend their time being interviewed and were therefore written as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. Numerous factors turned into the challenges faced by the lecturers in assessing their students in online classes. It is shown from the data presentation below.

**a. The lack of face-to-face interaction**

First, the lack of interaction is one of the inhibiting factors in the implementation of learning assessments in online classes. The limited space the lecturers have to communicate and seeing what their students do in the classroom create awkward feeling between lecturers and students. This also influences how the assessments are administered. This was stated by one of the participants (P4) in the following excerpt:

*The lack of interaction between lecturers and students on a virtual meeting, such as Zoom, could not be done optimally. The real examples I tried to explained, mostly were not conveyed fully to the students compared to in the offline classroom, no need to mention the problems with internet connection. (Interview, P4)*

A similar view was also conveyed by the other participant (P1) as shown from the following excerpt:

*The students couldn't fully understand the lessons since there was no direct interaction. Although I also used WhatsApp group to communicate and ask, there seemed to be a barrier for communication among us in class. (Interview, P1)*

These opinions implied that direct interaction was a very important factor in instructional practices, including assessments.

**b. The lack of supporting teaching and learning facilities in online classes.**

Teaching and learning facilities are an important part in instructional practices. The lack of this factor can significantly impact students' performance, particularly when they need to use important devices to support their learning. During the pandemic, since the learning and teaching process is managed online, technological devices have been of the importance as a medium of interaction in virtual classes. The virtual classrooms can run well when the devices support them. However, the lack of availability in terms of teaching and learning facilities may lead to the decreasing motivation from both sides, lecturers and students, especially when the facilities are needed in the assessment process. The following excerpt illustrates the situation:

*In my class, it was very difficult for my students to understand the materials since what they really needed was the field practice so that they could focus to grasp the main points of the materials. In addition, another classical problem was about the online learning facilities such as the internet connection and communication devices like laptops or PCs in which some of my students may have lack of it. Most of them only depended on the smartphones that have limited access, particularly when you want, for example, open the files in your laptops or PCs, or write something longer than a text on the handphone. It is related, too, to the assessment process through handphones which have limited screen and features to do a more complicated assessment. (Interview, P2).*

Another point of view was presented by the other participant who asserted that the lack of students' responses towards the questions of the formative as well as the summative tests obstructed the process of assessing students' genuine competency as follows:

*Students were sometimes irresponsive whenever I gave them questions in virtual classes. It made me wonder whether they could hear me or not on Zoom or Gmeet, bad internet connection could destruct the teaching and learning process. (Interview, P3).*

This situation shows that lecturers and students rely on the use of technological devices as learning and teaching facilities.

### **c. The lack of students' integrity and honesty**

Having an online test as the technique to assess students' performance was still favourite for some lecturers. As shown in Table 1, 44.8% participants still employed this kind of assessment during the Covid 19 crisis. However, problems happened when the lecturers did not monitor the students directly through a synchronous platform that allows them to see students directly through the video camera on their respective devices. It was revealed from one participant in her interview results as follows:

*It was quite difficult to know whether students really comprehended the learning materials that needed the students to have such conceptual understanding. From my exams that I conducted; students had an opportunity to exchange answers. (Interview, P2).*

This lack of integrity and honesty from the students while doing a test has been one of the challenges for lecturers. They are required to carefully consider these factors more in determining the appropriate types of assessment in online class.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Based on the survey results, video projects were one of the most selected assessments done by the lecturers during remote learning. This is aligned with Stanley and Zhang (2018) who found that the video projects created by the students enhanced their learning engagement. In addition, educational videos can escalate students' participation in the classroom (Almuslamani et al., 2021). As emerged from the interview data, the lecturers based their techniques in assessment selection on two reasons, their students' authentic ability as teaching priority in class and the easy use of the selected online assessments. Based on the theory of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the lecturers believe that by using particular assessments will help their students' performance and competency (Chuttur, 2009; Granic & Marangunic, 2019; Kusumadewi et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). Moreover, the perceived ease of use in TAM becomes a dimension that affects the attitudes toward technology use (Davis,



1989). This implies that attitudes towards technology contributed to how the lecturers accepted the use of technology in the emergency situation such as Covid 19 pandemic.

E-learning platforms used in virtual classes are commonly used by most lecturers as it is a method of organising education because it promotes optimal content arrangement and engagement with students (Almarashdeh, 2016; Gomez et al., 2016). In terms of the used learning platform, Zoom dominated the lecturers' selection of the learning platform. The selection of the learning platforms leads to the readiness of lecturers toward teaching and learning innovation and to the promotion of their professional development (Prendes & Gutierrez, 2013; Sáez et al., 2014). There have been numerous factors that need considering when choosing an e-learning platform, such as the user number, their characteristics and needs, kinds of courses including their objectives, taught content, applied methods, and evaluation types (Holsapple & Lee-Post, 2006). Each aspect has its importance which results in selecting the most appropriate learning platform.

When it comes to online assessment challenges, as shown by the qualitative data, the importance of direct interaction becomes a very crucial challenge. This is in line with previous studies revealing similar results where students and teachers prefer direct interaction when conducting assessments (Zhou et al., 2022). Similar to the process of teaching and learning, the assessment process also depends much on technology as any kind of testing and assessment frequently were transferred through online assessment system which requires students to use virtual communication tools such as smartphones or laptops/PCs (Holsapple & Lee-Post, 2006). New regulations for remote learning, whether online or otherwise, necessitate quick changes in lecturers' activities, including everyday duties, obligations, and accountability. During the COVID crisis, they may be requested to design new alternative and diversified means to monitoring students' learning (from evaluating to remediating learning losses), including both formative and summative measures. In addition, they may be lacking in essential resources, training, and experience at home, particularly on digital learning platforms. When they return to campus, they also struggle to assess students' learning levels in order to determine whether pupils are on track, as well as any learning gaps or losses caused by the school and campus shutdown, and for corrective activities. Such assessments may influence the learning process and allow students to progress to higher semester levels. (Guangul, et al., 2020; Rutgers, 2020).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The lecturers use various assessment techniques in their classroom practices. Two techniques were highly selected by the participants, namely video projects and group presentations on virtual platform with the same percentage, 65.5%. Some other assessment techniques used were essay writing (62.1%), then followed by online tests (44.8%), summarizing learning materials (34.5%), and giving comments on online discussions (20.7%). These synchronous and asynchronous activities were selected due to the fact that lecturers considered both ease of use and technology usefulness in assessing their students. The top survey of online platform was Zoom. It has been very popular during the Covid 19 crisis as it has helped people around the world interact and communicate online easily. 86.2% of participants selected this platform, followed by others such as WhatsApp (65.5%), MOLS (65.5%), Google Classroom (27.6%), YouTube (24.1%), Facebook (17.2%), and Google meet (10.3%). Three challenges faced by the lecturers were identified from the interview data. The first challenge is the lack of face-to-face interaction. The second challenge has to do with the lack of supporting teaching and learning facilities in online classes, and the last is the lack of students' integrity and honesty in doing the online assessments.

This study is still far from perfection. A number of weaknesses have been recognized for further improvement in the future. First, future research should involve other participants from more than one university to ensure the complexity of data. Second, since Indonesia's pandemic level is decreasing, it is better for future researchers to investigate the hybrid assessment system that combines the assessment process done both online and face-to-face or offline. Third, the lecturers are also suggested to apply assessment techniques which are more varied considering the students' needs, interests, and supporting facilities that support their performance and competency.

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