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Decision Letter (EZS-2023-0075.R1)

From: panayotova@swu.bg

To: heny@unika.ac.id

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Subject: Ezikov Svyat/Orbis linguarum - Decision on Manuscript ID EZS-2023-0075.R1

Body: 26-Dec-2023

Dear Dr. Hartono:

It is a pleasure to accept your manuscript entitled "ONLINE ASSESSMENT: A STUDY OF ELT TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND BELIEFS IN CENTRAL JAVA" in its current form for publication in the Ezikov Svyat/Orbis linguarum. The comments of the reviewer(s) who reviewed your manuscript are included at the foot of this letter.

Thank you for your fine contribution. On behalf of the Editors of the Ezikov Svyat/Orbis linguarum, we look forward to your continued contributions to the Journal.

Sincerely,
Prof. Magdalena Panayotova
Editor-in-Chief, Ezikov Svyat/Orbis linguarum
panayotova@swu.bg

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Comments to the Author
(There are no comments.)

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ONLINE ASSESSMENT: A STUDY OF ELT TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND BELIEFS IN CENTRAL JAVA

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Abstract

Due to its convenience, online assessment has become one of the most essential components in English Language Teaching (ELT). Online assessment has been more intensively used in English Language Teaching practices as a companion to conventional assessments. However, the success of online assessment implementation in ELT depends on the teachers' perspectives and beliefs in online assessment itself. This paper explores the perspectives and beliefs of teachers in Central Java towards online assessment in ELT and the factors underlying their perspectives and beliefs in the effectiveness of online assessment in ELT. This study employed a qualitative research design and collected data through semi structured interviews with twelve elementary school teachers in Central Java, Indonesia. The teachers under this study were those who experienced online classes because of the school lock down during the outbreak of covid 19. The findings indicate that while they have positive perspectives towards the potential benefits of online assessment, they also express concerns on the reliability and validity of online assessment. Teachers under this study highlight the need for training and support in designing and implementing online assessments which allow them to combine online and traditional assessment methods. Teachers mostly believe ELT is best applied through direct communicative interaction. Overall, this study sheds light on the complexities of online assessment in ELT.

Keywords: online**,** assessment, teacher, beliefs, ELT, online, perspectives

1.   INTRODUCTION

As one of the most important components of teaching and learning cycle, assessment is crucial not only to measure learner's achievement in a particular subject or learning unit but also to provide feedback to the teachers about the teaching and learning process. In a normal learning cycle, assessment can be done in the class in the form of formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment allows teachers to daily assess learners' performance through the classroom interaction and the learning activities. Direct feedback can be given by teachers to improve learners' understanding and ability. Scheduled assessment is mainly arranged by teachers following the school academic schedule within the semester, in the middle of the semester, and at the end of the semester.

The presence of advanced technology has indeed helped teachers conduct their daily tasks including doing assessment. The integration of technology in the classroom is not new particularly in English Language Teaching. Technology enhancement in ELT has been practiced for decades including the introduction of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (John, 2018; Chen, X. L., Zou, D., Xie, H. R., & Su, F, 2021; Lim, M. H., & Aryadoust, V, 2022), Mobile Assisted language Learning (MALL) (Jeong, K. O, 2022; Li, F., Fan, S., & Wang, Y, 2022) and the presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Van Moere & Downey, 2016; Simamora, B., & Tenrisanna, R , 2023; Rukiati, E., Wicaksono, J. A., Taufan, G. T., & Suharsono, D. D. (2023).). The enhancement of technology in ELT has brought significant impacts to the development of teaching methods, teaching techniques, and assessment. Technology has helped teachers develop their creativity in employing teaching techniques in the classrooms as there are massive teaching materials freely provided on the internet. Therefore, technology has given learners more flexibility in accessing various resources (Ardinengtyas & Himawan, 2021).

Technology has also been a great assistance for teachers in correcting students' works. The presence of auto-correct facilities in computers, grammar error check application, and online dictionaries are very helpful and handy for teachers. In higher levels of education, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has also come as both a benefit and treat for teachers and students in terms of integrity and honesty. In short, technology in education comes just like the two sides of a coin. How teachers perceive technology and how they believe that technology can enhance the teaching and learning process will affect and determine the success of integrating technology in the teaching and learning process.

The covid 19 outbreak gave educational institutions a hard time because teachers and students had to undergo an unusual educational process. The school lock downs had made schools and teachers changed some policies in the teaching and learning practices. During the harsh times, classes were conducted as distance learning in various forms. Although technology is not new in the educational field, teachers and students struggled to adjust themselves with the new ways of learning. The covid 19 outbreak has impacted all countries in the world, including Indonesia. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture issued the Circular Letter Number 4 of 2020 which recommended schools to hold online classes to provide a meaningful learning process for learners. In response to the Circular Letter, schools conducted online classes through the School Learning Management System (LMS). Before the Covid 19 outbreak, it was reported that the LMS mostly used was Moodle (Pratama & Kusuma, 2021) while other LMSs such as Classdojo, Brightspace, and Microsoft Teams were never used due to the unfamiliarity to the platforms (Setiawan, 2021).

During covid-19 outbreak, just like other countries in Asia such as Bangladesh (Hossain, M.M & Haque, M.N. (2022), most of the learning activities in Indonesian schools were conducted online despite the unreadiness of

schools, teachers and students to face the sudden changes. There were not many schools used Learning Management System (LMS) before the covid-19 outbreak. In fact, the supporting system including the digital infrastructure, internet connection, and the technology literacy of the human resources were still far from being sufficient to support the online learning. In 2020, it was reported that 19% of educational units in Indonesia had difficulties in accessing the internet (Pusdatin Kemdikbud, 2020). It could be one of the reasons why teachers and students were not ready for the new ways of conducting the online teaching and learning process.

One among the issues related to the challenges of online learning is the online assessment. Despite the benefits of online assessment, there are always debates among teachers about the trust issues and the effectiveness of online assessments. It is worth analysing how teachers perceive and believe in online assessments. This paper presents the results of a qualitative descriptive study which portrayed the practices of online assessment by elementary school English teachers in Central Java, Indonesia, their perspectives towards online assessments in ELT, their beliefs in the online assessments, and the factors underlying their perspectives and beliefs. The results of this study are expected to enrich the pedagogical field, particularly in all efforts to embrace technology in ELT.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars have defined assessment as a process of collecting evidence to give support or confirmation on certain facts in a particular field. Taking one of those definitions, we get a definition of assessment practice as an inquiry that integrates multiple sources of evidence, whether test-based or not, to support an interpretation, decision, or action (Burn & Richards, 2009). In a nutshell, an assessment consists of two basic components: questions or problems and evidences. These evidences are utilized to answer queries or solve issues and to back up interpretations, choices, and actions. The sorts of assessments, viewpoints, and opinions linked to assessment in ELT are described in the sections below.

2.1. Assessment in ELT

Assessment in ELT is held for some purposes such as to measure how far the learners have achieved proficiency in the target language and to provide feedback of the difficulties faced by the learners (Tosuncuoglu, 2018). Tests and assessments are frequently used interchangeably. Tests are described as "a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain" (Brown, 2003, p. 3). According to this concept, some test elements correspond to a test's function in a teaching cycle. Method, measurement, performance, and the provided domain are some of these components. A test is viewed as a method since it is an explicit and structured instrument that includes a set of techniques, processes, or items. These items can include multiple-choice questions, filled-in questions, writing prompts with grading rubrics, oral interviews based on question scripts, and more (Brown, 2003).

Additionally, a test is a tool for measurement, which in the social sciences is understood to be the process of quantifying a person's traits in accordance with clear guidelines and standards (Bachman, 1995). While some exams examine general skills, others focus on extremely specialized qualities. Tests are used to gauge performance, but the outcomes also reveal test-takers' skill. The outcomes of assessments in ELT imply the test-takers' English proficiency. Tests are mostly administratively designed for specific times during the academic calendar or school curriculum.

During the learning activities, formal and informal assessment can take place. It may take the form of "incidental, unplanned comments and responses along with coaching and other impromptu feedback to the students" (Brown, 2003, p. 5). Teachers' comments such as "fantastic!" and "Did you say ship or sheep?" as well as "Okay, I guess what you mean is I went to the gym, not I go to the gym" are some examples of informal assessments. Formal assessments, on the other hand, are "exercises or procedures specifically designed to tap into a storehouse of skills and knowledge" (Brown, 2003, p.6). Teachers utilize this form of assessment as a planned scientific evaluation to determine their students' intellectual progress. Given that tests are frequently quite time-constrained, it can be said that all tests are formal assessment although not all formal assessment is testing such as portfolio which can be seen as a formal assessment although it is hardly called as a test.

Within the framework of teaching and learning processes, assessment can be viewed from two perspectives: formative and summative. The bulk of informal assessments in the classroom can be categorized as formative assessments. This also involves teachers making comments to improve students' skills. Therefore, the formative assessment mainly concentrates on how well learners' linguistic abilities are evolving over time. Meanwhile, teachers create summative assessments to gauge their students' progress at the end of a course.

The presence of technology has enabled teachers to conduct assessments traditionally or digitally. While formative informal assessments can be done personally by teachers and students in the class, formal assessments or a test should follow the basic principles of a formal assessment. These following aspects should be considered by teachers: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback (Brown, 2003). Both traditional and online assessment should always consider the important aspects of assessment. In ELT practices, there are always

pros and cons of traditional and digital or online assessments which are influenced by one's perspectives and beliefs in ELT.

2.2.   Perspectives and Beliefs in ELT

How a person perceives a phenomenon influences the way he or she interprets, responds, makes opinions and decisions (Covey, 2020). Oxford Learners' Dictionary provide some definitions of perspectives as the following: "a particular attitude towards something, a way of thinking about something, the ability to think about problems and decisions in a reasonable way without exaggerating their importance" With those definitions, how teachers perceive all the cycles in ELT process including assessment represents their attitude and affect their opinion and decision to use online assessment.

Collin Dictionary defines belief as a principle, a proposition to accept things as true. In relation to language learning, there are various views and previous studies related to learners' beliefs in language learning as reviewed by Ellis, 2008; Cheng, Y. S, 2001; Al-Osaimi, S., & Wedell, M, 2014). There are three main beliefs in language learning which are related with learning about the use of the language, learning about the language, and importance of personal factors (Ellis, 1994). Learning about the language requires learners to learn the language in a natural way by doing a lot of practice with native speakers, studying or staying in the countries where English is used as the first language. Learning about the language emphasizes learning the language grammatically, attending language classes, receiving feedback, and being mentally active in the learning process. Personal factors involve some factors such as attitude, aptitude, and motivation which are more individual. How teachers perceive online assessment are influenced by their perspectives and beliefs of how English should be learnt and acquired.

3.   METHODS

This study was developed based on these following research questions (1) How do the teachers perceive online assessments? (2) What are teachers' beliefs in online assessment? This study employed a qualitative approach which is defined as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This method is meant to dig and gain data from natural settings (Cresswell, 2009, 2014). This study involved 12 English teachers of 4 elementary schools in Central Java, Indonesia. The respondents were chosen using convenient sampling with main consideration of their experiences of implementing online assessments during and after the covid-19 outbreak.

The instruments used in this study were semi-structured questionnaire in the form of open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews. To conduct the in-depth interviews, the writers used voice recorders and the recorded interviews were turned into written data by transcribing the spoken data. The use of respondents from different schools and two different instruments in this study are parts of the triangulation process. The triangulation process refers to the use of multiple methods of data collections and analysis to strengthen the reliability and internal validity (Merriam, 2015). The data collected from this study were analysed using narrative analysis methods by identifying, analysing, and interpreting respondents' stories. Narrative inquiry makes use of stories to better understand the phenomena (Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Within the educational field, narrative analysis is meaningful as it allows the respondents to share their personal experiences to construct and reconstruct the personal and social stories of learners and teachers, and present the stories narratively (Abrar, 2019). In this study, the writer reconstructs the knowledge behind the stories of the research participants through interpretation and revelation of the meanings behind the stories. The stories were collected through the open-ended questionnaire and the transcribed interview results which were then coded, grouped, and interpreted.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of data analysis show some interesting facts related to the participants of this study including how long the respondents have been teaching, how long they have been familiar with online learning, and what platform they use for teaching and learning. From the results of the questionnaire, it was found that 30% of the respondents have been teaching for more than 10 years, 50 % have been teaching for more than five years, and 20% have been teaching for less than three years. This result also indicates that the respondents of this research come from Y generation and Z generation. The Y generation, also called as the millennials, were born between 1981-1996 in the era of globalization. They rely much on electronics. Meanwhile, the Z generation who were born between 1997-2012 are known as the digital native, they were born in the era of advanced technology (Primastio, Masyithah, & Maulero, 2023).
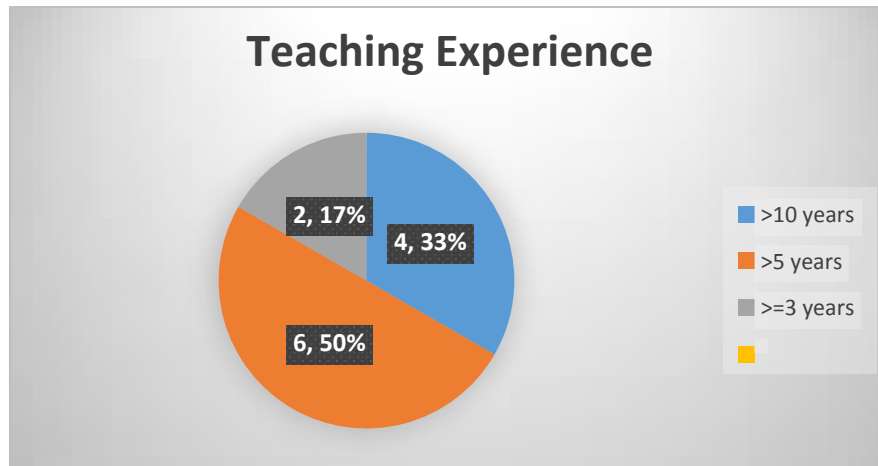
Graph 1. Participants' Teaching Experience

Most of the respondents started to be familiar with online learning lately or at the time when the learning process was fully conducted online. Graph 2 shows 83% of the teachers were active in online learning and only 17% of them had been familiar with online learning for more than three years and none of the respondents had been familiar with online learning for more than five or ten years. This fact may affect teachers in their adjustment to the new mode of learning. Moreover, the pandemic does not give teachers and students another choice but online mode to conduct the learning process. Because of this, both teachers and students have to struggle with the adjustment to this new way of learning. Despite the fact that some of the teachers are generally digital native, they still have to struggle with this fully online learning system. This fact is confirmed during the in-depth interview that though teachers knew there were some digital teaching applications but they preferred to use conventional teaching. The digital learning platforms were commonly used as additional tools to vary their teaching techniques. However, the pandemic time and the school lockdown or closure made them use the online learning mode to conduct the teaching and learning practices.
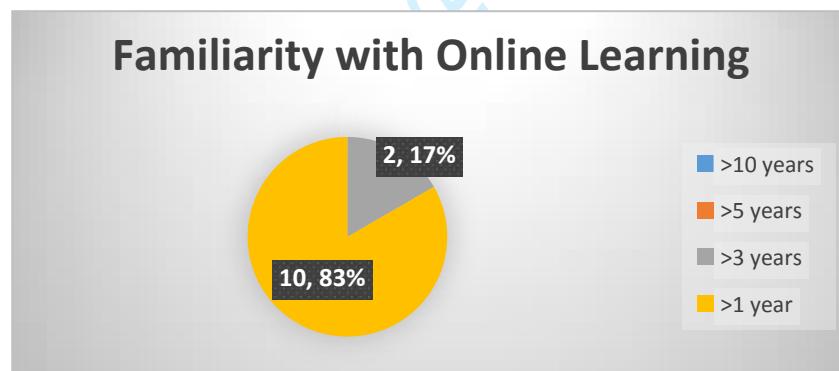
Graph 2. How long the teachers have been familiar with online learning

Regarding the platform used by the teachers to conduct the online classes, zoom was the platform mostly used by the teachers while other platforms used by the teachers were google meet, google class, Microsoft Team, and WhatsApp. From the interviews with the respondents, it was confirmed that zoom was mostly used because it provided some features such as poll and breakout room which helped teachers arrange their class activities. Google meet was also seen as a friendly user platform and it was free of charge without time limitation. Some schools, due to some reasons which are mostly the low level of technology literacy and internet connection problems conducted the learning process through WhatsApp application.

4.1 How Teachers Perceive Online Assessment

The next analysis below shows how teachers under this study perceive the online assessment. The discussion below was summarized from the results of the in-depth interviews with the teachers. Regarding the formative and summative assessment, all teachers mentioned that they had to conduct both kinds of assessments. The summative assessments were conducted at least twice each semester, the mid-term test and the final term test. The tests were scheduled by the schools. 80% of the teachers used google form for their summative assessments. The reason behind their choice is the practicality of the assessment. They may have to spend more time preparing the questions

and setting the answers in the google form but once the answers were collected by the students, the scores would directly appear in the excel form. Thus, the teacher can just download the excel form. One of the respondents said during the interview,

> "Using google form is practical and time saving. We don't have to spend more time to correct students' work"
>
> (R1 in an interview 12 February 2022)

Meanwhile, another respondent added that the google form was easy to be shared through any platform including WhatsApp.

> "We can share the link to students in our WhatsApp group. It is very easy" (R2, in an interview 16 February 2022)

From what most respondents explained during the interview, it can be said that google form is seen as the most favorable assessment tool to use in online learning. The teachers were also familiar with the features in google form. Although google form is seen as an effective assessment tool, the teachers also realized that conducting online assessment using google form was tricky and risky in some ways. Students might copy the answers from other students, cheat, or ask their parents or other people to do the test for them.

Two schools applied different methods of teaching and giving assessment to their students. For example, during the pandemic, the two schools, as reported by the teachers, applied online assessment by using WhatsApp which is commonly used to share messages. The application has a feature named group chat. Each teacher from each class makes their own group chat, for example group chat for 1st grade and 6th grade. The group consists of the teacher, the parents, and the students who already have their own smartphone. To start the class in the group chat, the students have to complete the attendance form with Google Form. Students or parents need to fill in the name, class, and the subject. For the teaching and learning process, the teachers only provide the materials and ask the students or parents to open and learn from the student worksheets or textbooks (e.g. asking them to open and learn from page 5-8). Although the teachers already offer help if the students or parents get difficulties in understanding the materials, most of the students do not ask for help from them.

The same way applies for the students' assessment. The teachers only give instructions to do tasks or even tests (quizzes) by sending the files of the worksheets. The students do the tasks or tests in their exercise books. If they have done the tasks or tests, they take pictures of the page(s) then send them to the group chat. Not only in texts, the students are sometimes asked to make videos or send voice notes.

Datelines or time limit of tasks submission have been given by the teachers but they still accept late submission because they know students have to share their smartphones with their parents. What the teachers are concerned about is that they have trust issues on the results of the students' tasks or tests. It is because some of the tasks or tests are done by the parents. The teachers assume it through the handwriting of the students. The teachers who are already familiar with their students' handwriting sometimes find that the tasks were done by their parents. In addition, most of the tests are open-book so there is a chance for the students to cheat.

One of the teachers (R2) who teaches at schools with students coming from middle to upper class background said that her school mostly asked students to do a project for their final assessment. Then, students were asked to present their projects in front of the class through zoom. This kind of assessment requires more energy and is more time consuming in terms of reviewing and scoring students' performance. However, teachers feel more secure about the reliability and validity of the assessment.

In general, teachers who can conduct online classes with video conferences prefer to have day to day assessment or formative assessment. By this way, they can secure the validity and reliability of the assessment. They could also observe the effect or washback of the assessment during the online class interaction. Other aspects of assessment such as the authenticity, the teachers could create a task which related to the real-world situation (Douglas, 2000, p. 17) or in other words, the task should encourage students to be able to apply the theories in real-world situations. This is the reason why R2 said that her school preferred to give students a project for their assessment.

Overall, teachers under this study have trust issues related to online assessment. Although google form is seen as an assessment tool which is practical, teachers still think of other aspects of assessment including the reliability, validity, authenticity, and the washback. They perceive online assessment as an emergency solution to assess and evaluate the students. They cannot trust the results of the assessment as a real description of students' competence. Good scores do not always represent students' high competency. Teachers under this study perceive that daily-basis assessment is more accurate in assessing students' competences. This formative assessment can be done through classroom interaction between teacher and students. However, considering that not all teachers and students can use video conferences in their classes, it still leaves a problem for them to assess students' performance. Therefore, the teachers under this study perceived online assessment as not ideal for elementary school students.

From the results of the data analysis outlined above, the following figure shows how teachers perceive online assessment.
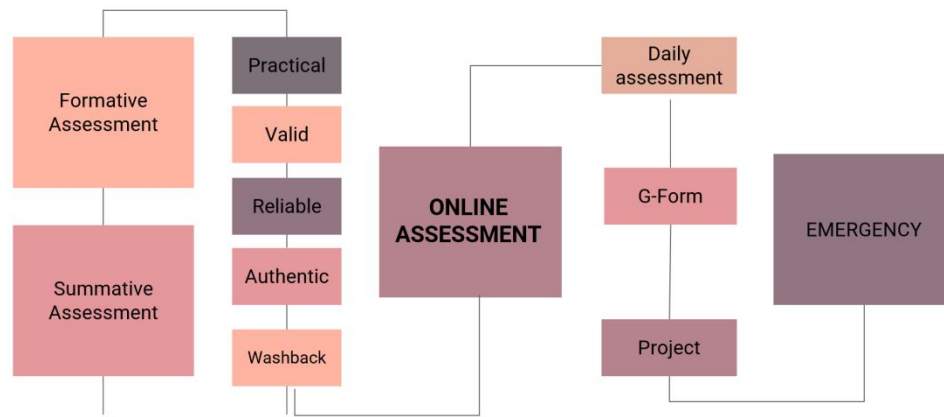
Figure 1. How Teachers Perceive Online Assessment

Figure 1 illustrates how teachers under this study perceive online assessment. They agree that online assessment should concern with the five basic principles of assessment (Brown, 2003) but in daily practices, there were three main ways they used for online assessment which include daily assessments through video conference, tests or quizzes with g-form, and project. In general, they have positive perspectives towards the integration of technology in ELT but they perceived online assessment for elementary students as not ideal. They perceive it as a helpful way to do assessments during emergency contexts such as during the school lock down.

4.2   Teachers' Beliefs in Online Assessment

An interesting finding dealing with teachers' beliefs in language learning shows that 8 out of 12 teachers or 83% of the teachers believe their students need to receive direct communicative feedback from teachers. This way is believed to be more effective to improve students' ability. Teachers believe daily assessment through interaction in the class taking forms as question and answers, observation on students' engagement in class activities help them assess their students' performance. It is in line with a previous study conducted in Italy which revealed that teachers did not find valid assessment for long distance learning due to the lack control of their students (Feretti et al, 2021, p 3, pp12-14)

Around 17% of the teachers mentioned assessment mode will not affect students' performance in ELT class as they believe those students have high aptitude in English which are supported by positive attitude and high motivation. However, they also realize that the results of the online assessment do not really represent some of their students' ability. Here, the teachers' belief is also influenced by the trust issue.

Overall, teachers' beliefs in online assessment are affected by their beliefs in language learning itself. Most teachers believe that language learning is about learning how to use and about the language. Therefore, they need a supportive environment to help them develop and improve their proficiency in English. Schools with competent teachers are seen as the most appropriate place for the students to improve their English proficiency through the teaching and learning process. Moreover, if the students go to an immersion program where English is used daily both inside and outside the classrooms, students will significantly improve their English proficiency. This study confirms that teachers' beliefs are rooted in the way they perceive assessment as an ongoing process performance assessment which can be applied even in the online context (Wu, P., Wang, Y, 2021, pp.630-631)

5.   CONCLUSION

Online assessment has been playing an important role in ELT, particularly for distance learning such as many schools have practiced between the years of 2020-2022 during the covid-19 outbreak. The findings of this study indicate that while teachers have positive perspectives towards the potential benefits of online assessment, they also express concerns on the reliability and validity of online assessment. Teachers under this study highlight the need for training and support in designing and implementing online assessments which allow them to combine online and traditional assessment methods. Teachers mostly believe ELT is best applied through direct communicative interaction.

This study is limited to English teachers of elementary schools. There will be more comprehensive results if this study also involves teachers of higher levels of education. For future research related to this topic, the researchers recommend further studies on how the online assessments are applied in higher education as response to the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

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