

## **An Informative Study of the Transition to Online Learning and Assessment in a Global Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

*With the COVID-19 pandemic taking the world by storm and disrupting all businesses and occupations, we saw how every industry had to adapt to newer ways of working. The education sector was no exception to this. Universities, schools and other educational institutions quickly acknowledged the need to move to remote ways of learning. It meant that teachers and their students had to get accustomed to newer technology and platforms. Although this was a necessary change that came in at the right time, some significant challenges came along the way of teachers. This study has sought to understand the challenges and benefits the teachers came across during the online method of instruction. A questionnaire-based survey was designed and distributed to 700 secondary school teachers of Vadodara city to gather insight. The survey results reflected that the teachers encountered challenges with technology, supervision and assessments, which were not seen before in the traditional model of in-person learning. The survey also brings out benefits that come with online learning, like flexibility, instant feedback. The study indicates that a fair amount of work still needs to be done to improve the online mode of learning.*

*Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, Online assessment, Benefits, Challenges, Survey.*

## Introduction

Assessment is an indispensable tool in education and plays a vital role in the educational process. Assessment is defined as "an action in which evidence of learning is collected in a planned and systematic manner and utilised to form a judgement about learning" (Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2002: 1). All modes of school assessment are grounded in practice and provide 'information on students' thinking, achievement, and growth' (Crooks, 2001:1). Online learning and assessment should be sighted as a system for educating students and assessing their academic performance. Adapting online learning and assessment is critical when educational institutions are under increased pressure to demonstrate accountability, growth, and excellence. In online instruction and assessment, technology, delivery, pedagogy, learning styles, and learning outcomes must be balanced. The assessment's primary goal is to evaluate and categorise student performance, inform and improve learning, and track student progress toward learning outcomes. Teachers can plan their instruction, classify and grade their students, and provide feedback based on the proper evaluation. Assessment allows students to comprehend knowledge in the subject presented and ensures that learning objectives are met. The assessment procedure enhances teaching and learning capacities, and learners will be able to train their brains to adapt to new knowledge and recall facts and figures more easily.

The assessment pattern provides not only subject knowledge but also the skills to gain creativity. Learning experiences designed for students can help pupils to improve their subject-specific and general learning skills. As assessment forms have changed, educators and scientists have been more interested in the requirements of assessment methods in teaching and the learning process. The assessment techniques concerned with authenticity, practicability, reliability, validity, and washback are the fundamental principles of assessment in foreign language teaching and learning. Assessment is a critical component in improving performance and the overall quality of teaching and learning in education. A pupil's learning is heavily influenced by how they believe they will be assessed (Biggs & Tang, 2007). All assessments result in student learning, but the critical challenge is motivating the proper kind of learning. As a result, assessment processes must be designed to give the proper signals to students in influencing the efficacy of their learning by informing them about what and how they should learn.

Assessment serves several functions, including providing feedback on learning, facilitating improvement, quantifying achievement, inspiring learning, and upholding standards. Always be concerned with the quality of assessments rather than their quantity. Well-designed assessment assignments will impact how students approach challenges, improving the quality of their learning. As a result, student involvement and the time that students invest in any particular learning experience are closely tied to how much they believe they will benefit from the experience. The term "learning-oriented assessment" refers to assessments designed to maximise opportunities for meaningful student learning (Carless 2007).

This research paper focused on school teachers' benefits and challenges during the current global pandemic and the possible facilities and solutions that can be delivered to overcome these problems in the future. The significance of the present study is to explore the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the teaching-learning process. The unpredictable change in the post COVID-19 crisis will occur in all institutions and mainly in the educational sector, which needs wise leaders to make new policies and guidelines for reshaping the future of all the sectors.

### **Methodology**

To study the shift in online assessment techniques adopted by secondary school teachers of Vadodara city in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Objectives**

- 1) To study the teacher's approach towards online assessment.
- 2) To study the teacher's preparedness and the ability for online assessment.
- 3) To weigh the benefits of the online assessment.
- 4) To study the challenges faced by secondary school teachers for conducting online assessments during the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Method**

The research is designed to be descriptive, and it does that by investigating the attitude and receptivity of teachers towards online assessment techniques. A questionnaire-based survey was created via Google Forms and distributed to respondents through communication channels like WhatsApp and Emails. The questionnaire included 20 questions that tried to embrace all the objectives of the study.

**Population**

The study population included 700 secondary school teachers engaged with online teaching and learning processes in various schools of Vadodara city with an 82% (574 out of 700) response rate from the teachers.

**Sample**

The sample size of the study consisted of 574 secondary teachers from various schools in Vadodara city. Convenient random sampling was used as the sampling technique.

**Research Instrument**

For investigation and data collection, an online questionnaire-based survey was designed to understand the benefits and challenges felt by teachers during the teaching and learning process, with particular regard to the unprecedented global health and economic crisis. The survey form consisted of a total of 20 questions. The question types included - Yes/No, Multiple correct answers and open-ended answers. In addition, the questions were divided into a set of topics that could best encapsulate information about:

- Student demographic status
- Learner experiences with online learning platforms (like Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams) and their features.
- Problems encountered with remote online learning.
- Level of satisfaction with remote online learning.
- Any other extra information that they wished to add.

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Category	Characteristics	Percentage (%) approx
<b>Gender</b>	Male	25.8
	Female	74.2
	Transgender	0
<b>Age</b>	Below 30	14.60
	30 to 40	26.13
	40 to 50	39.37
	50 to 60	19.90
<b>Medium</b>	English	100
<b>Platform used for communication</b>	Google meet	10
	Zoom	20
	WhatsApp	40
	Microsoft teams	2
	Google classroom	25
	Google forms	30
<b>Classes</b>	Secondary (9 <sup>th</sup> ) & 10 <sup>th</sup> )	100
<b>Status of school</b>	Government	10.51
	Semi government	22.34
	Private	67.15
<b>Board</b>	GSEB	100

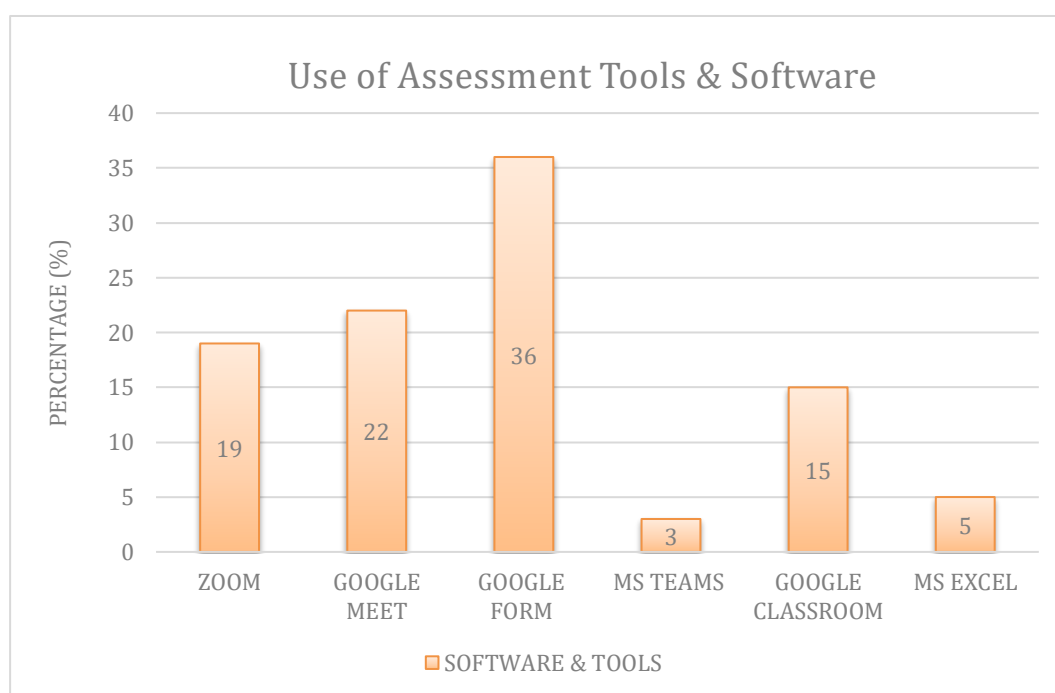
Table 1: Demographic distribution of the respondents

### Changes brought by COVID-19 to the system of assessment at school.

According to the teachers, there was a sudden shift in the teaching-learning process from face-to-face to online remote learning. Teachers have become more dependent on the internet, software and applications that govern the online teaching-learning space. It was observed that initially, teachers had found it challenging to understand and get accustomed to the online assessment methods. There is a gap in technical knowledge between both teachers and students. However, they believe that they might see a shift in the future. With everything that has become the new normal, they have come to terms with these online teaching methods.

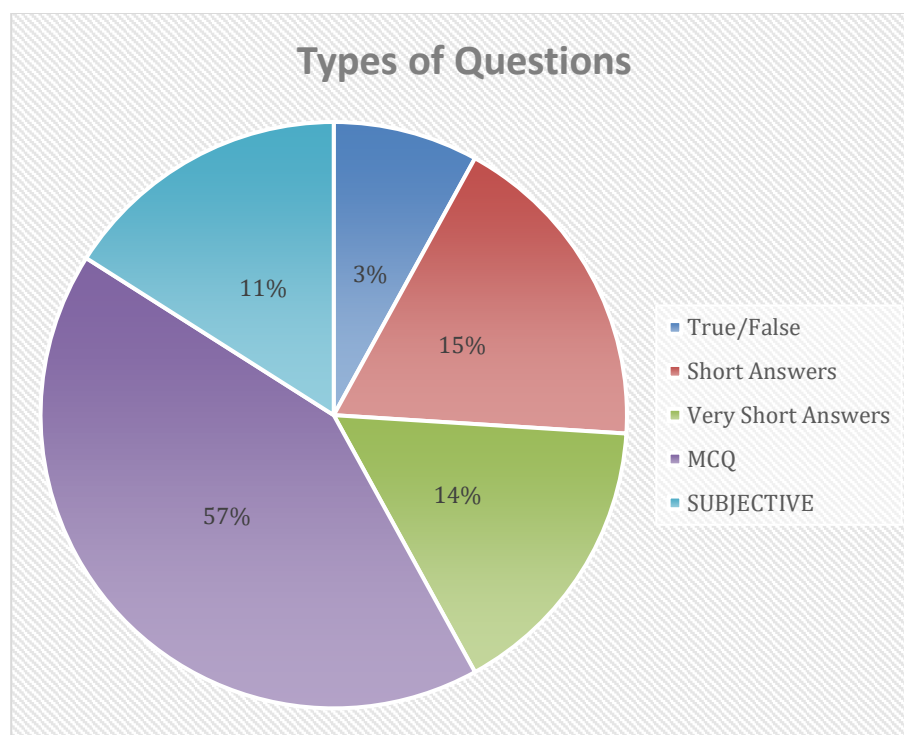
### Online Tools/Apps/Software used for online assessment.

This question saw a variation in responses. The teachers mentioned that they used platforms like Google Forms, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Zoom and Microsoft Teams to evaluate students. Google Forms was the most preferred platform among the teachers. According to them, Google Forms aids in creating questionnaires, quizzes, surveys, etc. While Google Classroom is a platform that allows the teachers to make class announcements, collect assignments and organize meetings and lectures. Teachers use MS Excel to keep track of student progress.



## Types of questions to create an online Assessments

From the data below, we observe that most of the teachers have answered that they use close-ended objective type questions like MCQs and True/False. A short note was also a prominent method of questioning among the teachers. Finally, they mentioned using long descriptive questions for a summative pen-paper test on Google meet.



## Supervision of students during online Assessment

In data analysis, we found that the teachers supervise their students by instructing their students to keep their cameras on during the exams, but they do differ in the way in which they carry this out:

- By warning the students that indulgence in any unfair means will debar them from giving any other examination.
- By focusing on the activities and movement of the students during the examination.
- By distributing the proctoring tasks to a group of teachers.
- By not letting the students leave until the examination is over.
- By instructing parents to supervise their children also.

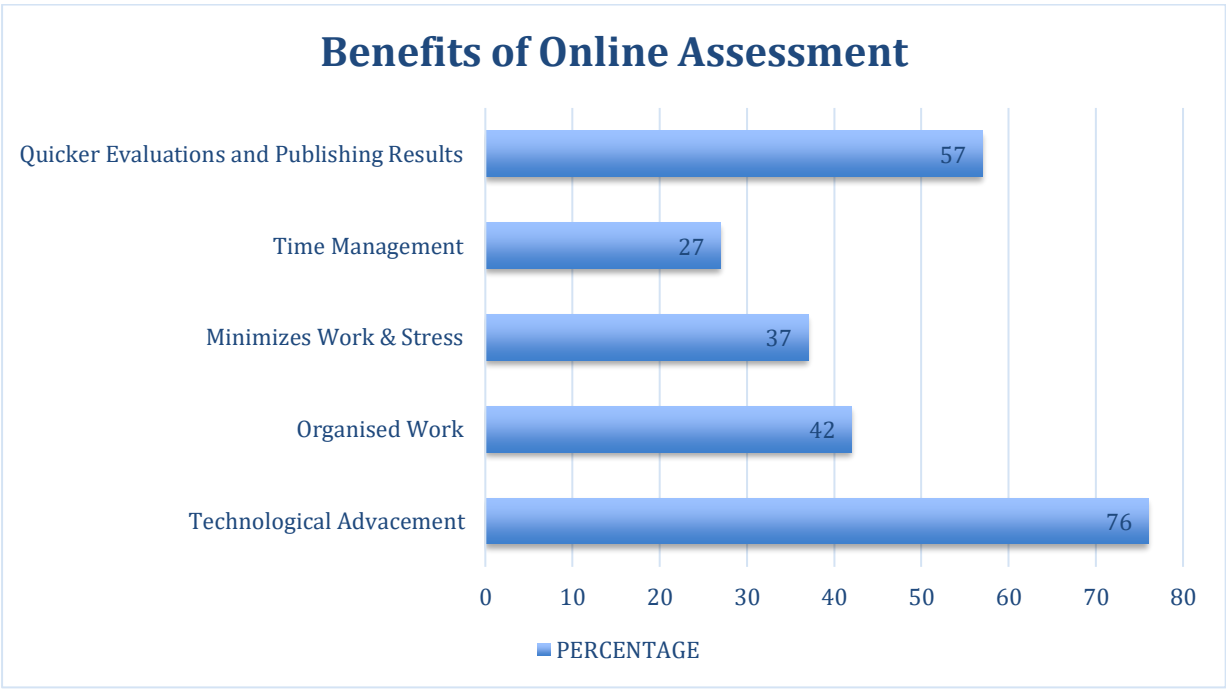
**Difficulties faced by students during the online assessment.**

On summarizing the response data, it was found that 82% of the students either have non-availability of resources like appropriate devices and connectivity issues due to an unstable internet connection. In addition, both students and parents are not very well acquainted with technology and diagnosing technical issues.

**Benefits of online assessments.**

By analysing their responses, the following benefits can be inferred:

- 1. Online assessment saves time. With just a click, one can connect with multiple students, and the scores get calculated automatically. These features together help students in time management and make the sessions go flawlessly.
- 2. Online learning is more organized systematic and, makes the teacher's job less hectic, and helps with their stress.
- 3. It also paves the way for the technical advancement in students, which is a necessity of the future. However, those who see no benefits feel that our education system is not ripe enough or requires further technological advancement. According to them, it still needs some time to evolve ultimately.

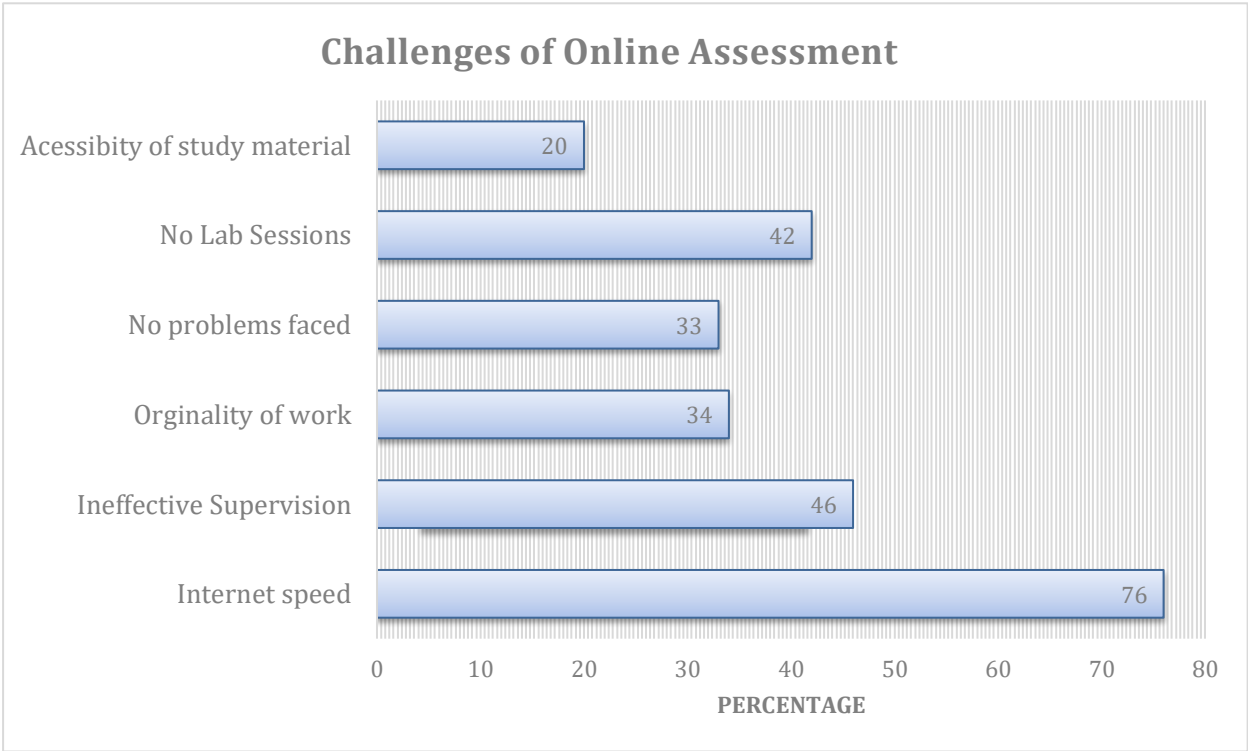




**Challenges faced by teachers during an online assessment**

From the data above, we found that the respondents faced various difficulties during online assessments. Some of which are listed below:

- It was difficult for teachers to cater to the needs of students individually and provide feedback to every child in the class.
- Effective supervision was a big challenge for the teachers. They felt that the webcam was not adequate to supervise all the students ideally.
- They also felt that the students were free to adopt new methods and strategies to score well during the online assessments due to their physical absence.
- Finally, the teachers found it challenging to manage and organize an exceeding number of files and data.
- Internet connectivity is also a significant issue in the online teaching-learning process.



**By analysing the responses above, we can summarize the limitations of the online assessment.**

1. One of the more significant limitations that stood out has been the physical absence of the students in the online teaching and learning method. Teachers felt that even with the many benefits of online teaching and assessment, it could not justify the potency of the offline mode. They maintained that face-to-face interaction with a student is the most crucial factor in education. Teachers said that when they cannot cater to the needs of each student, they cannot be sure of the level of understanding that the student has reached on any given topic and the progress they have made. They strongly feel that adequate supervision can only be done in a more personal setting.
2. Students are not attentive, focused and are mostly doing some other work, affecting their progress. Often, they are found cheating and using unfair means during examinations.
3. Online education is not affordable and accessible to every student. Many students come from socially backward and economically weak backgrounds, and they cannot spend much on technology.

## Conclusion

The study aims to understand how the teachers have adapted and adjusted themselves to the online learning method, specifically in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. By surveying the teachers of secondary schools in Vadodara city, it was established that the move to an online mode of learning saw a mixed reception from the teacher's frame of reference. The use of technology has reduced the workload and saves a lot of time and money. With technology's aid, assessments are evaluated right away; multiple candidates can take it simultaneously and from the location and device of their choosing. In the end, students can view their results and receive immediate feedback on any chosen topic. While technology did provide these benefits in online learning, it also introduced some limitations that both students and teachers felt. The traditional in-person teaching methods have stood the test of time, and their value cannot be understated. The socio-emotional behaviours exhibited by students like need, interest, potential and understanding are difficult to observe and analyse through online platforms. The teachers also had a significant learning curve regarding the efficient use of technology on online platforms like Google Meet, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. There is also something to be said about the effects of socio-economic factors when adapting to online learning. In rural areas, the transition to online mode was challenging as the teachers had to familiarize themselves with technology and had to design a framework that could facilitate online instruction and assessment for their students. The traditional face-to-face learning method has the teacher as the main driver of the learning process, while the online method of instruction has a learner-centric approach. This means the onus falls upon the student to take the initiative and be motivated to follow the teacher. Although there are substantial benefits of online learning, there is still a fair amount of scope left for improving the tools and pedagogy around it. A situation like this calls for focused efforts from the government and educational institutions to train their teachers and formulate a well-defined curriculum that facilitates this medium of instruction. Online learning is a need of the current times. It is also a step towards the future that will ensure a continuum of the educational process in such global situations of crisis.

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