

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: EVIDENCES FROM INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

The advance of technology in this modern era has led teachers to make use of electronic devices in their teaching practices, including in formative assessment process. Despite several benefits it has to offer, however, it is considerably essential that students' perceptions be explored to gauge the effectiveness of such assessment technique. This study examines how students perceive digital formative assessment and what challenges they encounter when taking online English exams. Conducted in the context of Indonesian university EFL classrooms, this study adopted a mixed-method approach. EFL students (N=125) were recruited to complete an online questionnaire, adapted from Saleh Alharbi, et al (2021), regarding their perceptions of digital formative assessment, which was then analysed using IBM SPSS 12 software. The students (N=25) were invited to voluntarily participate in a focus-group discussion to explore challenges they encounter when taking online English exams, which was analysed using NVivo 12 Pro Software. Quantitative data findings gained from the questionnaire showed a different value in each variable; perceived usefulness (M=13.69), perceived self-efficacy (M=10.18), and perceived risk of cheating (M=10.55). Meanwhile, the qualitative data obtained from group discussion reported a variety of hinderances faced by students in online exams including limited internet connection, lack of digital literacy, and unavailability of electronic devices. Despite some limitations, this study provides us with some pedagogical implications including the necessity to provide students with some supports (i.e. online test trainings, internet connectivity aids, and digital tool provision) to minimize challenges they potentially encounter when participating in online English exams.

Keywords: EFL classrooms, formative assessment, students' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Formative assessment has been one of popular research topics for the past few years. In terms of its definitions, scholars used different approaches to define formative assessment. For example, Gu and Lam (2023) argued that formative assessment is the kind of evaluation process systematically carried out by teachers in interpreting their students learning process which is subsequently used to improve learning. Meanwhile, Gezer, et al (2021) defined formative assessment by comparing it with summative assessment. As such, formative assessment refers to a continual evaluation process which happens during study period, while summative assessment refers to an evaluation process which happens at final year of study period. Techniques applied in formative assessment vary from quizzes, feedback, students' portfolio, to students self- and peer assessment. On the opposite, technique in summative assessment is limited to a fixed evaluation method such as paper-and-paper tests. Furthermore, while the focus of

formative assessment is to improve students' learning, the goal of summative assessment is to generate learning judgement.

Because of its perceived benefits in improve students' learning, formative assessment has been widely acknowledged as one of powerful evaluation strategies for educational reforms. Leenknecht, et al (2021) mentioned that formative assessment plays a fundamental role in helping students' academic progress and creating innovative learning atmosphere. Nevertheless, formative assessment is found to have rarely been implemented by language teachers in their teaching practicum (Wylie & Lyon, 2015). In relation to this, Boston and Palm (2020) argued that language teachers are not able to locate the extent to which formative assessment improve students' learning. Meanwhile, Yan and Brown (2021) reported that the application of formative assessment by language teachers is found to have not been very satisfying. Furthermore, Stiggins (2017) revealed that teachers were observed to have misaligned with professional procedures when implementing formative assessment.

Despite some hindrance, as previously mentioned, many scholars (Leenknecht, et al, 2021; Wylie, 2020) have suggested that formative assessment be implemented by language teachers considering some benefits it has to offer for students' learning. In the post-COVID 19 era, many teachers were still reported to implement formative assessment digitally due to its convenience and practicality. Despite this, not many studies have explored how digital formative assessment is perceived by EFL students, especially in the context Indonesian tertiary education. It is therefore, the current study is an attempt to address this issue by investigating EFL students' self-perceived of digital formative assessment and challenges they experience when taking part in online English tests.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Research on Digital Formative Assessment

Digital formative assessment has been researched by many scholars over the past few years across the globe. In Saudi Arabia, for example, Saleh Alharbi, et al (2021) explored the perceptions of EFL students (N=354) and teachers (N=24) pertaining the use of google forms as a digital assessment in the context of public secondary schools. Their quantitative data findings revealed that the students positively reacted to three variables (perceived usefulness, perceived self-efficacy, and perceived risk of cheating) of the use of google forms as an online assessment tool. Likewise, their qualitative data findings reported that the teachers showed positive attitudes towards the use of google forms when assessing their students despite some technical issues.

Meanwhile, Rofiah and Waluyo (2020) examined EFL students' perceptions of Socrative used for vocabulary tests in Thailand. Conducted in the context of tertiary education, their study employed a non-experimental quantitative research design by using a survey and Socrative as the vocabulary test to collect the research data. Recruiting undergraduate students (N=461) as research participants, their study revealed that the students found Socrative useful ($M=3.04$, $SD=0.72$) and easy to use ($M=2.90$, $SD=0.69$) for vocabulary tests. Another finding from their study showed that the students indicated the risk of cheating when taking vocabulary tests in Socrative ($M=1.79$, $SD=1.09$). Despite this, the student' acceptance of Socrative was reported to have a positive correlation with their vocabulary learning progress.

In Taiwanese educational context, Chiang (2020) investigated college EFL students' perceptions of the application of Kahoot as a digital assessment tool. To collect research data, this study employed a questionnaire, adapted from Bicen and Koyakoyun (2019), and Kahoot as the testing tool. Involving college EFL students (N=65) as research participants, this study found that the students appeared to agree that Kahoot is a useful testing tool to help them retain their lesson topics for a longer period of time ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.69$). Another finding from this study reported that there were no different

perceptions of both sexes (female and male students) towards the application of Kahoot as an evaluation tool.

Based on the studies above, it can be assumed that digital formative assessment has been a popular research topic among scholar till today. Nevertheless, not many studies have examined how digital formative assessment is perceived by EFL students in the context Indonesian tertiary education. If there any, few of them have utilized both survey and group interview to extensively explore the effectiveness of digital formative assessment from EFL students' perspectives.

1.2. Digital Formative Assessment in Indonesia

In the context of Indonesian educational institutions, many scholars have also examined the application of digital formative assessment in EFL classrooms. In West and Central Java, for example, Luthfiyyah (2021) examined EFL teachers' attitudes towards technology-enhanced formative assessment. Adopted a qualitative research design, their study recruited three EFL teachers from three different higher educational institutions as the research participants. To collect data, their study employed in-depth individual interview sessions to explore the three teachers' perceptions. The first finding of their study showed that the teachers positively reacted to the application of formative assessment in EFL classrooms. In terms of the roles of technology, the teachers argued that digital tools were able to help them provide electronic feedback quickly, facilitate collaborative learning for students, and monitor students' classroom activities. Despite the insightful finding, their study employed only one research instrument resulting in less validity in the research data. Furthermore, it would generate more comprehensive findings if EFL students' perceptions were also investigated.

Meanwhile, Firdaus, et al (2022) explored EFL teachers' perceptions on online formative assessment in private and public secondary schools located in Semarang. A descriptive qualitative research design was adopted in their study by involving two EFL teachers from two different junior high schools to participate. To collect data, their study employed two research instruments, classroom observations and interview sessions, to intensively explore how the teachers implemented online formative assessment and what challenges they encountered during the implementation. The first finding gained from the classroom observations revealed that the two teachers made use of several formative assessment tools including Quizizz, Microsoft Teams, Kahoot, Google Forms, and Socrative. Another finding from interview data reported two major issues when using those assessment tools; a high-level risk of cheating by students and a low level of teachers' digital literacy. Although the findings are considerably insightful, their study recruited a relatively small number of research participants resulting in the finding might not necessarily represent the population being studied.

Another relevant study was conducted by Taufiqulloh, et al (2023) in Java and Sumatra. Their study focused on examining EFL students' perception on digital formative assessment. Adopted a descriptive qualitative research design, their study recruited five EFL students from five different universities as the research participants. As for the data collection method, their study employed interview sessions to investigate the students' perception on digital formative assessment and challenges they faced. The first finding showed that the students perceived some benefits from participating in digital formative assessment. However, the students were found to have encountered some relevant issues including overload of online assignments, instability of LSM (Learning Management Systems), unclear instruction and insufficient feedback from lecturers. Despite the insightful finding, their study employed interview sessions as the only research instrument which might affect to the validity of the findings.

1.3. Research Questions

Review on the literature above clearly indicates that there have not been many Indonesian scholars who examined EFL students' self-perceived of digital formative assessment and challenges they

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encounter when taking online tests. Hence, the current study is an attempt to address this gap by answering the two following research questions:

1. How do EFL students perceive digital formative assessment?
2. What challenges do EFL students encounter when taking online English exams?

The results of this study are hopefully able to provide us with insightful data regarding EFL students' attitudes towards digital formative assessment with the purpose to help them alleviate issues when taking English exams digitally.

METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts an explanatory sequential design of mixed-research approach. This research design enables researchers to gain a better understanding of the issue being studied, and to gain a more comprehensive evidence (Leavy, 2022). In the current study, EFL students' self-perceived on digital formative assessment was examined by both quantitative and qualitative instruments.

As for the research context, this study was conducted at the University of Hamzanwadi, a private higher education in West Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. An ethical consideration of informed consent had been previously prepared and sent to participants before the research process began.

It should be noted that although social distancing system had been erased due to the non-active case of COVID-19 pandemic, several lecturers in this university were still found to make use of digital tools to conduct language assessment formatively due to its practicality, including those teaching in the study program of English education. In other words, the practices of digital formative assessment have been one of popular evaluation approaches in this particular tertiary education for the past few years. Hence, this study is focusing on examining digital formative assessment from EFL students' perspectives, and exploring challenges they experience when dealing with online English examinations.

2.2. Participants

Participants in this study were EFL students enrolling at the study program of English education. A total of 150 students were randomly selected to participate in an online questionnaire which was intended to explore their self-perceived of digital formative assessment. Demographic information of the questionnaire participants is displayed in the table below:

Information Background	Category	Number of Participants
Gender	Male	69
	Female	81
Age Range	15-20 years old	52
	21-25 years old	93
	26-30 years old	5
Year of Study	Year 1	45
	Year 2	74
	Year 3	35
	Year 4	6
English Language Proficiency	Beginning	85
	Intermediate	45
	Advance	20

Table 1. Demographic of Questionnaire Participants

Furthermore, 25 out of the 150 students were also randomly selected to participate in a focus group discussion with the purpose to investigate challenges they experienced when taking part in online English exams.

2.3. Instruments

This study employed two types of instruments, online questionnaire and focus group discussion. Data gained from both of these instruments were triangulated and used to answer both of the research questions previously discussed.

In relation to the questionnaire, this study adopted an online questionnaire from Saleh Alharbi, et al (2021). It is worth noting that the Cronbach's Alpha value of the reliability coefficient was .927 which indicated internal consistency. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 10 items in total containing three different variables pertaining perceived usefulness (4 items), risk of cheating (3 items), and perceived efficacy (3 items). The total value of Cronbach's alpha for these three variables was 0.932 indicating good internal consistency. Responses to this questionnaire were based on five-point Likert scale 1 to 5 where 1= strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=agree, 4=somewhat agree, and 5=strongly disagree. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 5 open-ended questions related to students' challenges when taking online English exams

With regards the second instrument, this study carried out a focus group discussion which was thoroughly monitored and guided by the researcher to ensure the discussion process run smoothly. It should be noted that the group discussion was carried out for approximately 60 minutes and audio-recorded for further analysis. To prevent the participants from being distracted of English language barriers, they were allowed to use their native language (Bahasa Indonesia) during the discussion.

2.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data gained from the first part of questionnaire were analysed in IBM SPSS 12 software using descriptive statistic including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Meanwhile, the qualitative data gained from the second part of the questionnaire and from focus group discussion were analysed by implementing Thematic Analysis technique with an inductive approach using Coding System of Nvivo 12 Pro Software.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1. Students' Self-Perceived of Digital Formative Assessment

To answer the first research question, data were gained quantitatively from the first part of the questionnaire and qualitatively from the focus group discussion. The following three tables were quantitative findings obtained from the first part of the questionnaire regarding the students' self-perceived on three different variables.

No.	Statements	M	SD
1	Using digital assessment tools (Zoom Application, Google Classroom, E-Learning, Google Forms) is useful for English exams.	3.79	1.51
3	Online English exams via digital assessment tools have improved my English exam performances.	3.29	1.40

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6	Participating in online English exams via digital assessment tools helps me solve my problems with the school subjects.	3.40	1.43
9	The immediate online feedback of my incorrect answers helps me minimize my mistakes in subsequent English exams.	3.21	1.41
Overall Value		13.69	5.75

Table 2. Students' Self-Perceived of Usefulness of Digital Formative Assessment

Table 2 above shows students' self-perceived of usefulness when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools. The highest mean score ($M=3.79$, $SD=1.51$) is statement 1 in which the students valued the usefulness of taking online English exams via digital assessment tools. Statement 6 received the second highest mean score ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.43$) where the students perceived online English exams via digital assessment tools helped them solve their problems with the school subject. Two other statements, 3 and 9, were less valued by the students with the lowest mean scores, $M=3.29$ and $M=3.21$ respectively.

No.	Statements	M	SD
2	I remain calm when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools.	3.32	1.45
5	I feel confident when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools.	3.47	1.46
8	I can perform well when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools.	3.39	1.42
Overall Value		10.18	4.33

Table 3. Students' Perceived Self-Efficacy in Digital Formative Assessment

Table 3 above indicates students' perceived self-efficacy when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools. The highest mean score ($M=3.47$, $SD=1.46$) is statement 5 in which the students felt confident when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools. Statement 8 received the second highest mean score ($M=3.39$, $SD=1.42$) where the students were able to perform well when online English exams via digital assessment tools. The lowest mean score ($M=3.32$, $SD=1.45$) was received by statement 2 where students remained calm when online English exams via digital assessment tools.

No.	Statements	M	SD
4	I screenshot questions of English exams share them with my classmates when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools.	3.24	1.50
7	I look for the meaning of difficult words in Google Translate when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools.	3.62	1.58
10	It is easy to cheat when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools.	3.69	1.49
Overall Value		10.55	4.57

Table 4. Students' Perceived Risk of Cheating in Digital Formative Assessment

Table 4 above depicts students' perceived risk of cheating when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools. The highest mean score ($M=3.69$, $SD=1.49$) is statement 10 in which the students found it easy to cheat when taking online English exams via digital assessment tools. Statement 7 received the second highest mean score ($M=3.62$, $SD=1.58$) where the students were able to find the meaning of difficult words when online English exams via digital assessment tools. The lowest mean score ($M=3.24$, $SD=1.50$) was received by statement 4 where the students screenshot questions of English exams and shared them with their friends.

Findings displayed in the three tables above were supported by data gained from the focus group discussion. The following is discussion excerpts regarding the first variable, usefulness of digital formative assessment.

- S1 : "In my opinion, online exams are useful especially for us who live very far away from campus."*
- S12 : "Agree. Although there are some obstacles, online exams can somehow help me solve my own problem with some courses."*
- S9 : "I do like online exams through E-learning. But I don't think they can help me improve my exam performances."*
- S20 : "You're right. Online exams have no differences with face-to-face exams in terms of helping me improve my grades. It just helps me with my learning management."*

The discussion excerpts above confirmed that the students valued the usefulness of digital formative assessment despite some limitations it had. In the case of the second variable regarding the students' perceived self-efficacy, data obtained from focus group discussion similarly supported what have been found in the questionnaire.

- S7 : "Honestly speaking, I am fully confident when taking online exams via E-learning. It provides me with flexibility. I know when to submit and revise my assignments."*
- S22 : "I like that aspect, too. Online exams help me manage my time."*
- S10 : "True. But sometimes I don't feel distracted because of weak internet signal, especially in speaking online exams."*

When regards the third variable, students' perceived risk of cheating, several data gained from the focus group discussion contradicted those obtained from the questionnaire.

- S23 : "My lecturer always asks us to turn on our computer camera during online exams. So, I don't think I can cheat."*
- S2 : "I know some of my classmates who often screenshot the exam questions and share them to other students from other classes."*
- S8 : "I can simply look for the meaning of difficult words in Google Translate. But I think it is useless since the sentence context is often confusing."*

The excerpts above indicated that the students appeared to reluctantly express their ethical behaviour when cheating during online exams, which is very often to see in the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms nowadays. In other words, data showed from the focus group discussion above were the opposite of those gained from the questionnaire where the students admitted the ease and existence of cheating when taking online exams.

Findings regarding EFL students' self-perceived of digital formative examinations in the current study are concurrent with previous findings reported by scholars. In the case of perceived usefulness, for example, Alharbi and Meccawy (2020) revealed that Socrative was a considerably beneficial tool by Arabian EFL students. Meanwhile, perceived self-efficacy was reported by several studies including Fageeh (2015) who revealed that the EFL students in his study were found to have a high-level of perceived self-efficacy when dealing with online tests. In the case of risk of cheating, however, data gained from group interview session in the current study contradict that Saleh Alharbi, et al (2021) who reported that the EFL students in their study confirmed the high risk of cheating when taking online tests.

3.2. *Challenges Encountered by Students when Taking Online English Exams*

To answer the second research question regarding challenges encountered by the students when taking online English exams, data were gained qualitatively from the second part of the questionnaire and from focus group discussion.

The first challenge reported by the students in the questionnaire was related to limited internet connections as shown in the excerpts below:

"I live in a small village and that results in a very weak internet signal. It affects my participation when taking online exams."

"When taking online exams, I sometimes have no money to buy some internet quota."

"I've tried to connect with WIFI service in my campus when taking online exams. But very often, the WIFI signal is very weak."

The excerpts above were supported by students' responses in the focus group discussion. The following are discussion quotes reported by the students regarding limited internet connections.

S3 : *"Frankly speaking, the internet signal in my neighbourhood isn't very strong. I need to find a good location to have a strong internet signal. What about you guys?"*

S7 : *"Me, too. I live in a very small village. It is not easy to find a strong internet connection when taking online classes."*

S16 : *"In my case, I often run out of internet quota to take online exams. Thus, I often connect with the WIFI service in campus although the signal is weak."*

The excerpts above show that internet connection was one of major issues faced by the students. This relates to the second challenge experienced by the students. Some students seemed to have lack of digital literacy although they had sufficient internet connection when taking online English exams. In the questionnaire, the students wrote:

"I don't have a problem with internet connection. I just don't know some features of Google Meet. I think I need to read more on how to operate this application."

"I am not familiar with E-Learning. I am used to other applications such as Zoom Application and Google Meet."

Issue on digital literacy was also mentioned by the students in the focus group discussion. The following is samples of quotes from the discussion:

- S4 : *"Honestly, I don't know how to submit assignments through E- Learning. Do you guys have a problem, too?"*
- S10 : *"Yes. A friend told me how to, though."*
- S18 : *"The teacher should have told us before. I believe many students are still not familiar with E-Learning until now."*
- S22 : *"I think so, too. I myself still want to learn more features of E-Learning."*
- S25 : *"I am okay with E-Learning systems. But I don't know much about Google Classrooms. Too many features on it."*

The statements from both questionnaire and focus group discussion above indicate that the students seemed to have insufficient literacy on accessing some digital applications when taking online exams. Another challenge related to technological thing was some students admitted to have no a compatible electronic device to take online classes. In the questionnaire, the students wrote:

- "To be honest, I enjoy online classes. But some features of E-Learning or other applications are not compatible with my PC."*
- "Since I have no a PC, I always use my handphone to communicate. However, my handphone is not supported by advanced systems to conduct online classes."*

In the focus group discussion, the students also argued that they had some issues regarding the availability of electronic devices when taking online classes.

- S11 : *"I have a very outdated handphone. So, some features of it are not compatible with digital applications such as E-Learning or Google Meet. Do you guys have the same problem?"*
- S15 : *"Yes. You know what, I need to borrow my brother's handphone to participate in online classes."*
- S21 : *"Well, online classes are enjoyable, actually. But I think the university should accommodate students with digital tools for distance learning purposes."*

The excerpts from both questionnaire and focus group discussion above show that the students appeared to enjoy online classes or exams. However, the availability of ICT tool was found to have hindered the students to do so.

Findings regarding challenges faced by the students when taking online English exams in the current study corroborate previous findings reported by scholars. In the case of limited internet connections, for example, Saleh Alharbi, et al (2021) revealed that 48.20% of Arabian EFL students experienced internet connectivity issue when participating in online exams. Meanwhile, challenge on digital literacy was reported by previous studies including Hijazi and Alnatour (2021) who found that Jordanian EFL students appeared to have low level of digital literacy when taking online classes. In the case of electronic devices, one of empirical studies conducted by Rahim and Chandran (2021) revealed that unavailability of ICT tools was found to have hindered Indonesian EFL students to participate in distance learnings.

In summary, findings from the current study provides us with pedagogical implications including the urgency of relevant trainings provision to equip EFL students with digital literacy with the purpose to help them when dealing with online exams. Additionally, EFL students need to be facilitated with electronic devices to enable those who have no access to online exams due to the absence of ICT tools. Last, internet connections need to provide which is intended to accommodate EFL students with internet access when taking online exams.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-method study aims at exploring students' perceptions on digital formative assessment in the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms. Conducted in a higher education, this study revealed that digital formative assessment was considerably a valuable technique which can improve the students' self-efficacy despite some risks of cheating by the students. The second findings showed that the students encountered three major challenges when taking online English exams, including limited internet connections, lack of digital literacy, and unavailability of electronic devices.

As the findings revealed, this study provides us with pedagogical implications. As mentioned previously, relevant trainings need to organize to equip EFL students with digital literacy when taking online exams. In addition, EFL students should be facilitated with electronic devices to enable those who have no access to online exams due to the absence of ICT tools. Finally, internet connections need to provide which is intended to accommodate EFL students with internet access when taking online exams.

Despite this, the current study appears to have several limitations including the small number of participants. Future research needs to recruit more participants to generate findings which can represent the whole population being studied. Additionally, this study mainly focused on exploring the perceptions of a group of students. Future studies are suggested to examine perspectives from other stakeholders (teachers, school authorities, and alumni) to obtain more insightful data regarding digital formative assessment.

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