EFL Teachers' Perceptions Towards the Implementation of Online Formative Assessment Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

Fitri Rahmawati Astiandani

fitri.20016@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Surabaya

Syafi'ul Anam

syafiulanam@unesa.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Surabaya

Abstract

During the pandemic era, the educational system has made several adaptations, including the ways of assessing students. One type of assessment that teachers frequently use is formative assessment. A large number of online platforms can be used as formative assessment tools at this time. Thus, this study explores the EFL teachers' perceptions of their implementation of online formative assessment, its affordances and constraints during its implementation, as well as ways to overcome constraints. A qualitative research design is employed in this study. Data was gained from six Indonesian secondary EFL teachers through an open-ended questionnaire. Findings revealed the same perceptions of both groups, namely positive. Even though teachers are from public or private schools, they experience the same affordances and constraints when implementing online formative assessment. Moreover, they also shared several ways to deal with the constraints and conveyed their suggestions to the stakeholders in the educational sector. The findings of this study will encourage educational stakeholders, especially teachers, to enhance the quality of the education system by ameliorating the assessment aspects in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: *EFL teachers, teachers' perceptions, online formative assessment, pandemic era.*

INTRODUCTION

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the educational process taking place at various levels of education in the world has changed and made several adaptations. This crisis has crucially expedited the shift from the offline to the online sphere (Burgess and Sievertsen, 2020, as cited in Abduh, 2021). All stakeholders in the education sector were forced to adapt by turning to an alternative choice, namely online education. In this case, the online sphere is not only used for the teaching and learning process but also used for assessing EFL students' progress. Several online platforms can be utilized as assessment tools such as *Plickers*, *Kahoot*, *Google Forms*, and *Quizziz*. All types of assessments can be assessed by those online platforms, including formative assessments.

Formative assessment is commonly considered as a scheduled process in which diverse activities of assessment are organized to gain students' learning report, which leads to the future adjustment of the teaching and learning process (Looney, 2011 as cited in

Chen et al., 2021). As one type of assessment for learning, formative assessment is simply defined as the various techniques (cards, diagnostic tests, group discussions, peer-to-peer sharing, set inductions) used by the teacher to examine the comprehension and knowledge of students. This kind of assessment enables teachers to recognize the students' needs, wants, and lacks (Ibragimova, 2021). Thus, the teacher could specify which skills that students are struggling with or are difficult to face in order to create better and appropriate learning.

In online education, the term 'online formative assessment' is defined as an assessment approach where the students can utilize online tools to test themselves (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Through online formative assessments, students gain feedback to make self-assessment that lead to their decision to enhance their learning. Studies on online formative assessment indicate that it has a great number of affordances. Several studies reveal that the usage of online formative assessment provides students with more comprehension towards materials (McCallum and Milner, 2020; Remmi and Hashim, 2021), promotes students' learning (Chen et al., 2021; Ibragimova, 2021), and enhances the ability to assess their progress and evaluate their learning (McCallum and Milner, 2020). Besides, more importantly, by implementing online formative assessment, students can develop their language and digital literacy skills (Ibragimova, 2021).

Some concrete proofs on the affordances of online formative assessments have been shown from the aforementioned researches. However, in Remmi and Hashim (2021) study, the findings denoted that there are five affordances of using online formative assessments those are (1) easy to use, (2) improve teaching practice, (3) improve students' performance, (4) increase the interest for the students to learn, and (5) provide convenience. Meanwhile, there are also five constraints of implementing online formative assessments: slow or no internet connection, extra time needed, lack of skills, lack of facilities, and lack of motivations (Remmi and Hashim, 2021).

Although a large number of studies on online formative assessment have been done, previous studies have predominantly concentrated on students as subjects of research. In Indonesia context, Yoestara et al. (2020) have investigated the pre-service English teachers' perception of the online assessment methods. However, these pre-service teachers' perception is only based on their knowledge, not on the classroom implementation. In this regard, limited empirical study emerges on teachers' perceptions of the use of online formative assessments. It is pivotal to grasp teachers' views on the implementation of online formative assessments to evaluate how education is going and to make further improvements as needed (Remmi and Hashim, 2021). Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap by examining Indonesian secondary EFL teachers' perceptions of their implementation of online formative assessment, its affordances and constraints during its implementation, as well as ways to overcome constraints.

The research questions of the current study are thus formulated as follows: (1) How do EFL teachers perceive the implementation of online formative assessment amid the Covid-19 pandemic?; (2) What are the affordances and constraints encountered by EFL teachers in implementing online formative assessment amid the Covid-19 pandemic?; and (3) How do EFL teachers deal with the constraints in implementing online formative assessment amid the Covid-19 pandemic?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine EFL teachers' perceptions towards their implementation of online formative assessment, its affordances and constraints, as well as ways to overcome constraints. The participants of this study were six Indonesian secondary EFL teachers (five females, one male) who had teaching experience from 2 to 32 years. One teacher graduated with a master's degree in English linguistics and the other five teachers graduated with a bachelor's degree in English education. They were selected for specific reasons. First, they implemented the online formative assessment in their teaching and learning process and second, they were from different secondary schools (Surabaya, Lamongan, and Jombang). All the participants were pseudonyms and divided into two groups. The first group consisted of three teachers who taught in public schools (junior, senior, and vocational high school) and were named T1, T2, and T3. Meantime, the second group consisted of three teachers who taught in private schools (junior, senior, and vocational high school) and were named T4, T5, and T6. The data was collected in April 2020.

A semi-structured interview through the *Google Form* platform was utilized to collect the data on teachers' perception, affordances and constraints, as well as ways to overcome constraints. The semi-structured interview that was used to explore the data in depth consisted of participants profile and eight questions related to research questions. The data collected were then scrutinized by using an interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles et al. (2014), namely (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Teachers' Perception towards the Implementation of Online Formative Assessment

The first group completely had positive perceptions towards the implementation of online formative assessment amid the Covid-19 pandemic. These can be portrayed from their excerpts as follows:

T1: Online formative assessment has a positive impact since it can train students' honesty in taking tests and speed up time in correcting test results. In addition, feedback on test results can be immediately known.

T2: It is positive. Especially in getting the students understanding during the learning process.

T3: It's very beneficial for me as an English teacher in assessing the students' competencies. It's more efficient and practical.

The second group also revealed positive perceptions towards the implementation of online formative assessment amid the Covid-19 pandemic. However, two teachers asserted neutral perception by explaining both positive and negative effects of implementing online formative assessment. Their responses are represented below:

T4: It's positive because students do the test just like learning by gaming. Most of them asked to play Quizizz more and more.

T5: Well, so far, there are both positive and negative effects. For a positive one, I can introduce to the students about many kinds of learning platform used to learn a subject. They can learn anything everywhere and anytime. For negative one, some students will forget easily to do some assignments. I as a teacher need extra time to ask them to do all of their assignments. Based on where the school and my students who mostly able to buy gadget they need, it will make the teaching and learning process become better. Then, the school principal with the parents can support them to learn without meet the teacher. For the teachers, it will be better if they use many variations of tools (platforms) in the teaching and learning process.

T6: I think using online formative assessment is efficient for the teachers because it is faster to check students' answer. However, it's hard to control students' honesty whether they have finished their assignments by themselves or others. Yes, online formative assessment has encouraged students to know any new learning media and sources.

From the data collected, it is indicated that there is two groups with slightly different perceptions towards the implementation of online formative assessment. For the first group, they entirely obtained some positive impacts of implementing online formative assessment in their teaching and learning process. The teachers expressed that online formative assessment assisted them in assessing the students' competency effectively and practically. Besides, they are also satisfied with the results that can be known directly. In this case, their recognition came from their experiences using online formative assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic. These utterances indicated that the teachers have positive perceptions towards the implementation of online formative assessment. The findings from the first group were equal to Remmi and Hashim (2021) which revealed that the teachers' perception of the usage of online formative assessment is positive.

In the second group, the teachers' perceptions were almost the same as the previous group. However, two of them revealed the positive and negative effects experienced during the implementation of online formative assessment. They stated that students sometimes forget to do their assignments when using online formative assessments, so the teacher must always remind them. In addition, the difficulty to control their honesty while doing the task is also a negative impact that is expressed. From their statements, it can be concluded that they were neutral. This is in line with Remmi and Hashim (2021), who revealed that some teachers are in a neutral position regarding the use of online formative assessment.

The findings show that four of the six teachers have positive perceptions while the other two are in neutral positions. Thus, it can be said in general that most teachers either from public schools or from private schools have positive perceptions about the usage of online formative assessment.

Affordances and Constraints on the Implementation of Online Formative Assessment

The teachers in the first group declared several affordances during the implementation of online formative assessment in their classes, as follows:

T1: (1) Feedback on test results is immediately known, (2) More effective and efficient, (3) Identification of strengths and weaknesses of students in mastering the material is immediately known.

T2: Improving the quality of the students' learning process.

T3: It improves the students' autonomous learning, creates a collaborative learning atmosphere, and develops their critical thinking.

In addition, all the teachers in the second group also expressed some affordances of the online formative assessment. However, they are more focused on the affordances which can avoid the boredom felt by students and teachers.

T4: Students are not bored. They enjoy answering the questions.

T5: The students will not be bored with the everyday assignment because of many different platforms that the teachers use. So, it will make students think 'learning is fun'.

T6: For teachers, it's easy to check students' answer, easy to do automatic scoring, and it is not boring for teachers to create questions on media online. For students, they can finish the assessment anywhere and they will get many interesting online sources.

The first group indicated two foremost affordances in utilizing online formative assessment for their classroom. The first affordance was giving immediate feedback to the students. As Osuji (2012) stated that online assessment possesses quick feedback as compared to paper tests. For the second affordance, it was improving students' autonomous learning, creating a collaborative learning atmosphere, and developing their critical thinking. This is relevant to Gilbert et al. (2011) which stated that E-assessment can enhance the students' performance such as autonomous learning and critical thinking.

On the other hand, the second group also denoted some affordances in utilizing online formative assessment such as easy and fast in scoring as well as flexible in time and place of to do assignments. This is in line with Remmi and Hashim (2021), which revealed that online formative assessment is manageable and easy to use. It is also relevant to Alruwais et al. (2018) which claimed that E-assessment can alleviate the burden on teachers to assess a large number of students. However, the second group put more emphasis on affordance which can avoid the boredom felt by students and teachers. As Remmi and Hashim (2021) stated that attracting students' interest is one of the affordances of online formative assessment.

In the first group, all teachers expressed several constraints they had, including internet connection and lack of facilities. It is stated in this excerpt, as follows:

T1: Yes. Constraints in terms of network signals, provision of credits for students, and some students do not have cellphones.

T3: Yes, sometimes technical problems inhibit the process of the online assessment.

Meanwhile, other than an internet connection and lack of facilities, the second group also declared the extra time needed to create the online formative assessment. This can be found in these excerpts below:

T4: The challenge is only the internet connection because while playing Quizizz, we must have a good internet connection.

T5: Yes, the first one is the signal either from school WiFi or students WiFi. So, they come to the online class late.

T6: Yes, of course. I try to make my online formative assessment form interesting that can attract student to finish all the questions. I try hard to modify the materials that might hard to fit into my Google form such as how to put my listening audio section in my assignment.

The first group clearly stated that internet connection and lack of facilities were the constraints in implementing online formative assessment. In addition, the second group also explained the same constraints, but they added a new point, namely extra time needed. Those three constraints are the same as those in Remmi and Hashim (2021). However, the first and second groups only mention three of five constraints that exist in Remmi and Hashim (2021). The two constraints that were not mentioned were lack of skills and lack of motivation. These constraints do not arise since students and teachers are indigenous people from urban and suburban areas so that they have sufficient skills and motivation.

How EFL Teachers Encounter the Constraints in Implementing Online Formative Assessment
The first and second groups encountered almost the same constraints. Here are some ways that EFL teachers do to overcome the constraints:

T1: Motivating students to save credit by not browsing the less useful things. For students who don't have a cellphone, they can lend a cellphone during the test.

T3: With good preparation and training before the real execution.

T4: Just getting a strong internet connection.

T6: Make sure they have a good signal and their gadget is ready enough to use.

For slow/non-existent internet connection, the teachers overcome it by looking for a place with a good signal and connection. They also advise students to do the same way in dealing with internet connection problems. Regarding the lack of facilities, the teachers advise students to be frugal in the use of credit (for those who already have cellphones), and students can borrow cellphones during the test (for those who do not have cellphones). Then, concerning the extra time needed, the teachers overcome it with good preparation and training before the actual implementation time.

In addition, all teachers also provide suggestion to stakeholders so that the implementation of education can run better even amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The excerpts are as follows:

T1: Due to the current digital era, it is necessary to provide technical guidance, socialization related to digital. If there are programs that use digital, please also consider the internet network in each different place.

T2: The need for enough material and equipment, especially good internet data and other materials, needs to be considered.

T3: For those who want to employ online formative assessment, several things to keep in mind are good preparation, the appropriateness between the aim of the assessment and the tools, and useful training for both the teacher and students before the implementation.

T5: For all stakeholders, please always support what students and schools need.

T6: Find the best tools to be used by teachers for online formative assessment. This tool should be the same in a particular grade in all schools.

The teachers suggest two paramount points related to the implementation of online formative assessments. First, teachers suggest stakeholders hold technical guidance and socialization of digital devices that will be used during the teaching and learning process to both teachers and students. Second, they suggest stakeholders provide supportive tools during the teaching and learning process, including sufficient internet data and cellphone or laptop for students who can't afford them. With the support of all educational stakeholders, the education system's quality will be improved so as to ensure the quality of the nation's future generations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, all teachers either from public schools or from private schools have positive perceptions towards the usage of online formative assessment. Their positive perceptions are supported by their statement regarding the affordances of online formative assessment, including giving immediate feedback to the students, enhancing the students' performance, providing flexibility in time and place of to do assignments, and avoiding the boredom felt by students and teachers. However, they

also expressed the three main constraints in implementing online formative assessment: slow/non-existent internet connection, lack of facilities, and extra time needed during the creation or execution of the test. Teachers overcome these constraints by looking for a place with a good signal and connection, asking students to be frugal in the use of credit (for those who already have cellphones), and asking students to borrow cellphones during the test (for those who do not have cellphones). Besides, teachers overcome the extra time needed by doing good preparation and training before the actual implementation time. They also conveyed their suggestion to stakeholders to provide technical guidance and socialization of digital devices as well as provide supporting tools such as sufficient internet data. By revealing the actual situation that occured in the classroom, especially the affordances and constraints of online formative assessment, all educational stakeholders are expected to cooperate in enhancing the quality of the education system, particulary in assessment aspects. Thus, the quality of the teaching and learning process will remain guaranteed even amid the Covid-19 pandemic. For further research, large-scale research with other research methods is highly recommended to support the development of the teaching and learning process, especially in the assessment aspect, in the current situation.

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