

## Moving from Face to Face to Virtual Assessment: Pakistani University Students' Perceptions regarding Assessment in a Time of Covid -19

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### Abstract

*Assessment is an important part of the higher education system. Due to the pandemic Covid-19, Pakistan's education system has shifted to online assessments. The current study aims to explore Pakistani university students' perceptions regarding online assessment as it can help in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the online testing. In this qualitative study, the social constructionist epistemology approach is employed to understand students' preferences and apprehensions regarding online assessments. A focused group discussion questionnaire was used to gather qualitative data. For this study, there were 40 students selected through non-random convenience sampling procedures from the department of English, University of Central Punjab, Lahore. Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis was carried out through Atlas.ti software. The findings highlight that students were reluctant to prefer online assessment over actual classroom testing as they believed that classroom assessments were more effective. Students faced many issues in online assessments. The major issue was the unstable internet connection in Pakistani settings. They preferred close-ended test items for online assessments, as they required less time, less detail, and no typing. They viewed online assessment to be an unfair means of judgment, as it is highly prone to cheating. Another issue was the unreliability of technology and the incompetency of teachers regarding the use of/handling technology. The findings of the current study may help the policymakers to decipher the preferences and apprehensions stated by the students so that online assessments could be successfully integrated into higher education.*

### Introduction

Assessment is seen as one of the indispensable educational practices to both teaching and learning. It involves a lot of instruments and procedures which are utilized in classrooms and help instructors to precisely characterize their learners' needs and abilities. In short, it is expected as a pedagogical activity to assemble data about students in order to appropriately distinguish their strengths and shortcomings (Ali et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020). Assessments offer an open door for educators to pinpoint their objectives and to know the degree to which their objectives are accomplished. Basically, it renders the process of education increasingly viable and dependable as instructors can change their guidance and connect it to the assessment results and students' needs. As assessment is a basic segment of classroom instruction that is intended to recognize students' shortcomings and needs in any learning subject. Harding et al. (2020) argue that educators can accordingly settle on the correct decision and give constructive criticism to their students. More significantly, classroom assessments should involve successful techniques and instruments that vary in accordance with the teaching subjects and grades (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). It needs to identify with the previously offered courses as classroom assessment should plan to expand and upgrade students' aptitudes and capacities. As a matter of fact, Goundar (2020) suggests that assessment aims to uncover what students have learned so far and what else do they still need to learn.

Recently there has been a shift from the traditional assessments to online assessments. As mentioned by many research (Aizawa et al., 2020; Baturay & Daloglu, 2010; Moradimokhles & Hwang, 2020) findings that online assessments are effective in terms of flexibility of time, location and it is also effective in terms of feedback because teachers can give online feedback at any time to the students. Randomization of exam questions and the possibility of repeating the test several times add to the advantages of online assessments (Betlej & Spivey, 2013; McMillan, 2014). On the other hand, the unavailability of networks and technological issues increase the stress of teachers and students. The inability of students to explain their answers due to rigid technological settings is another factor of stress for both teachers and students. Another problem as mentioned by Betlej (2013) is the reduction of personalizing engagement with online assessments. However, Spivey and McMillan (2014) opine that the advantages provided by electronic tests are more convenient than traditional testing

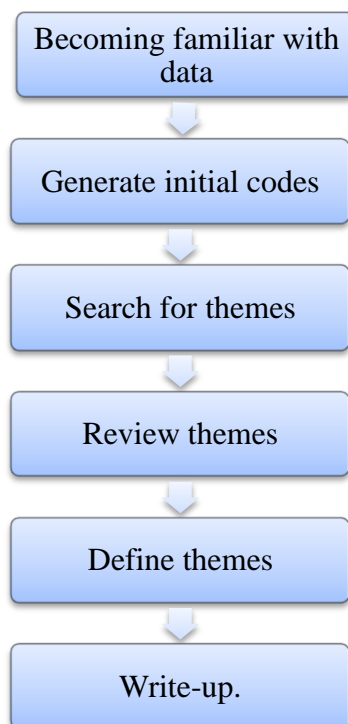
approaches. They advocate the usage of electronic gadgets and believe that online assessments will not negatively impact the grades of students (Spivey & McMillan, 2014).

Although classroom assessments for students were a traditional assessment method the havoc that has been created due to the pandemic of covid-19 has forced Pakistan's education ministry to move from classroom assessment to online assessment. Students from all over Pakistan showed resistance to this new format, but this study is based on the postgraduate English language students who had been taking online classes (through Microsoft Teams) and were appearing through online assessments. This study aims to explore the English language postgraduate students' perspectives, specifically focusing to investigate the preferences and apprehensions regarding online assessment. The current study also attempts to identify student's preferences regarding test items, apprehensions regarding the test items, and the role of technological accessibility and competency of teachers and students in handling technology. Hence, this research emerges as a worthwhile problem due to the pandemic situation, students are being taught and assessed using online means even in third world countries like Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, etc. So to know the perspective of students regarding online assessment can be helpful for educational institutions. When students' concerns are discovered, academicians can shape up and make an informed decision regarding online teaching methodology and assessment. Such data can facilitate the change from classroom assessment to online assessments. Given the sociocultural likeness of Pakistan with its neighboring nations and inadequate research in this specific domain in the locale, the discoveries from this study could likewise be reached out to instructive establishments outside of Pakistan. Consequently, the current research proposed the following research questions:

1. What test items do students prefer for online assessments?
2. What are students' apprehensions regarding the test items chosen for the online assessment?
3. How do technological accessibility and competency of teachers and students play a role in online assessments?

### **Research Methodology**

The current research followed qualitative design methodology since the qualitative research method aims to seek a greater understanding of experiences (Gridley et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the qualitative research method was appropriate for this study as it is based on the exploration of Pakistani ESL learners' perspectives regarding online assessment. For data collection, a focus group discussion (FGD) questionnaire was designed online to elicit responses from the focus group discussion participants. The questionnaire was composed using *Teams Forms* and was distributed through Microsoft Teams. The initial questions of the FGD questionnaire were designed to collect demographic information, and the later questions were designed to elicit the views of postgraduate English students regarding online assessments. The sample for the current study was selected through a *non-random convenience sampling procedure*. The only criteria for selecting these participants was that the individual must be taking online classes and have appeared in the online examination. There were both male and female respondents who participated in the current study ranged from 22-30 years age. The data were collected by arranging multiple meetings on the *Microsoft Teams*. The day and time for focus group discussion were decided according to the convenience of the participants. The data of the current study were analyzed by following six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 89) framework for thematic analysis.



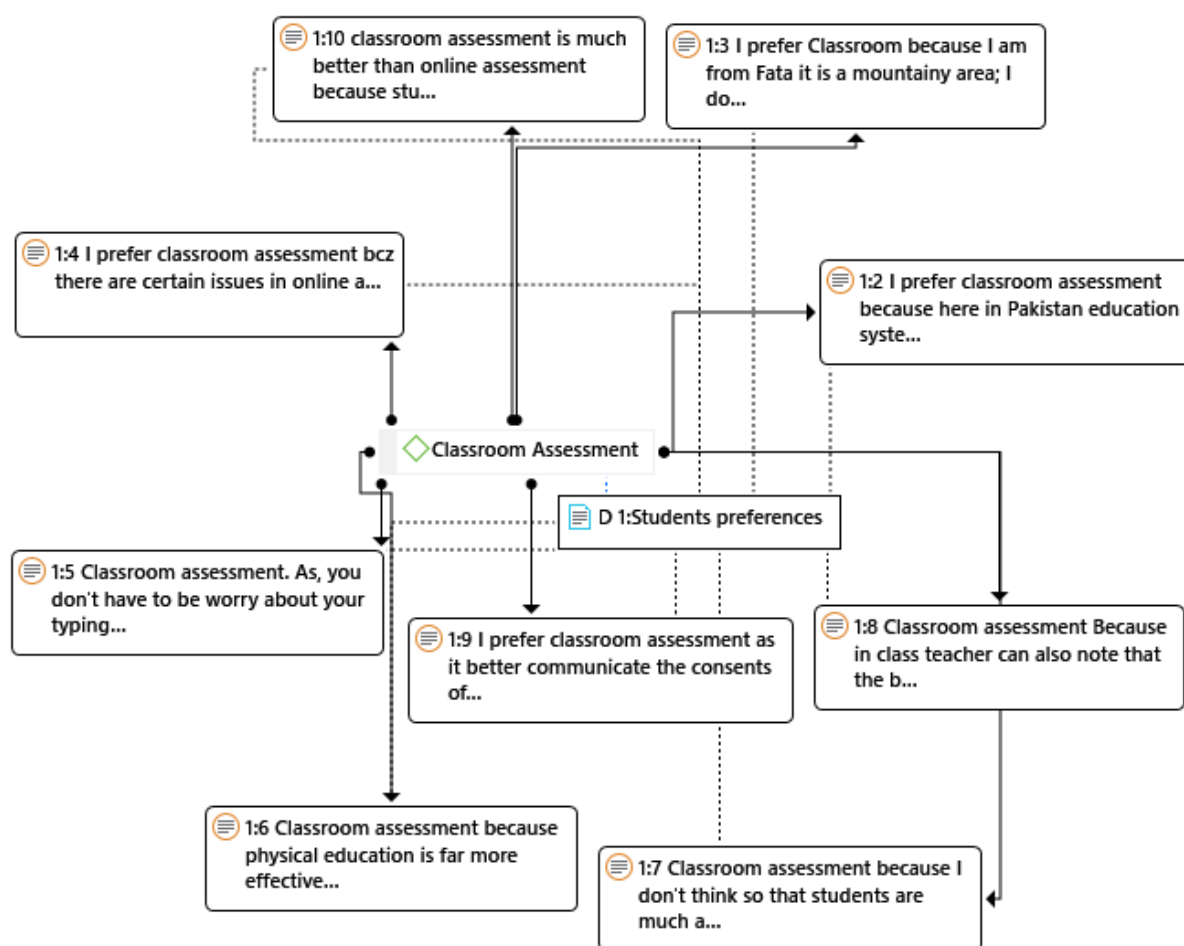
The vital phase of this research was to be acquainted with the information. Since we collected data ourselves and we engaged in the information collection process with the respondents. We had already gained prior knowledge and understanding of the results. We immersed ourselves in the details and began to listen repeatedly to the recorded data. This made it easier for us to recognize, organize and clarify nascent trends at semantic and hidden levels within the data. We started to jot down notes in this first step. After that, we started transcribing the focus group discussion results. Although it appeared rather boring and time-consuming, the transcription actually revealed the basis for this data analysis. The verbatim summary of all focus group conversations was transcribed by us. Further, before analysis, we created one *Microsoft Word* document per question (for each focus group discussion). Then we shifted Word document data (one by one) into Atlas.ti software. *ATLAS.ti 8 The Next Level* and Mac have a brand new function for promoting qualitative analyses of data: automated focus group coding. In addition, *ATLAS.ti* automatically recognizes and codes each expression of speech in focus group transcription, enabling the researcher to quickly and easily recollect all of the respondent's comments and to draw comparisons. *ATLAS.ti* can also connect several codes automatically at a time, then one can enjoy the benefits of preparing one's focus group data in any way one wants to prepare it. Moreover, the data of the current study are scrutinized through social constructivist epistemology as it helped to understand students' preferences and issues regarding online assessments.

### Results and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the analysis of the current study was conducted through thematic analysis by following Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 89) framework for thematic analysis. *Atlas.ti software* for qualitative analysis was utilized.

#### 1. Students' preference regarding assessment

The results reveal that five major themes are dominant in the current study. The first theme identified in the current study was *students' preference regarding assessment*.



**Figure 2:** Thematic map and quotations related students' preferences in *Atlas.ti*

The students' responses provide enough evidence to claim that they preferred physical classroom assessment over online classroom assessment. They believe, they face a lot of problems in online assessments, on many occasions they lost internet connection as well as electricity problems and therefore, prefer classroom assessments over online assessments. One of the reasons for preferring the classroom assessment is that Pakistan is a third world country, having fewer resources and technologically backward, and shifting to online technology is an extremely Herculean task. Many backward areas of Pakistan, especially located in the proximity of the Afghanistan border, do not provide favorable conditions for an online assessment system. Some of the respondents' responses are reported below:

"I prefer classroom assessment because here in the Pakistani education system, it works better than any other options" (FG1, participant2).

"I prefer classroom because I am from Fata it is a mountainous area; I do have connectivity issues, sometimes my phone gets hanged or restarts and then I have to write the whole thing which I had written again and there is no extra time given for examination" (FG2, participant1).

Another reason for preferring classroom assessment is based on students' belief that classroom assessments are more reliable as there are no technical issues involved in that setting. They do not need to worry about internet connection, app failure, or other technological issues:

"I prefer classroom assessment bcz there are certain issues in online assessment like: internet connectivity, background noise from certain people, lack of training for both teachers and students, technical difficulties to operate systems and lack of practice etc." (FG2, participant9).

"Classroom assessment I'd prefer. As, you don't have to be worry about your typing speed, internet, app bugs, lack of knowledge about technology etc." (FG1, participant3).

Students believed that physical presence is a very important factor for assessment and, therefore classroom assessments are more favorable. In a classroom setting, student-teacher interaction is also possible and students are more active in a classroom. In students' words:

"Classroom assessment because physical education is far more effective than the virtual study.

Moreover, teacher-student interaction is quite good in classroom assessment." (FG5, participant 2).

"Classroom assessment because I don't think so that students are much active in online assessments as compared to class assessments" (FG3, participant 4).

One more reason for this preference was that the students felt that classroom assessments provided good feedback and they are also fairer than online assessments. Teachers in classroom assessment can observe their students and can guide and judge them, which students believed is not possible in online assessments. Some students stated:

“Classroom assessment because in class teacher can also note that the behavior and attitude and facial expressions in the classroom. And students do every educational activity in front of the teacher.” (FG3, participant 1).

“I prefer classroom assessment as it better communicate the consents of students as well as teachers” (FG1, participant 4).

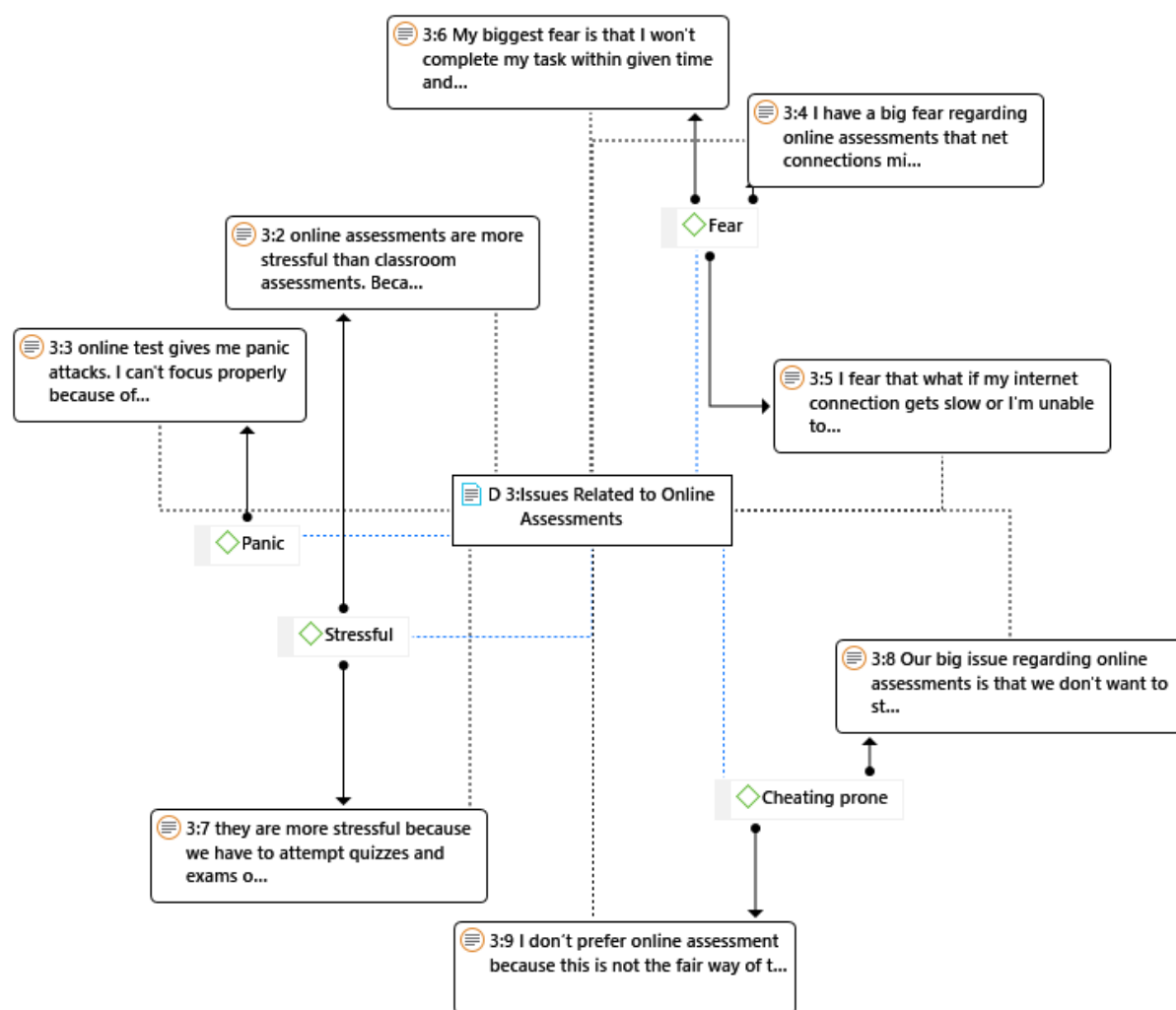
Due to the presence of a teacher in a classroom assessment, students believe that there are low chances of cheating, whereas in online assessment there are very high chances of dishonesty. Students believed that classroom assessments are therefore a fair mean of testing the abilities and learning of students:

“Classroom assessment is much better than online assessment because students are fully attentive, and low chances to cheat.” (FG2, participant 3).

“I would go for a classroom assessment because that is when one gets to know how much they learnt, how hard they worked for their paper. An online assessment includes a lot of cheating and internet issues as well.” (FG4, participant 5).

## *2. Issues related to online assessments*

The second major theme that emerged from the data was related to issues faced by students while attempting their online assessment papers. Most students were concerned about their mental health as they believed online assessments is very stressful. Students were not comfortable in online assessments and therefore, they could not focus and perform well in online assessments. They were in constant fear of losing their work as the online examination approach is unreliable. Anytime, the online paper can disappear, and when it happens, one becomes worried because of the fear of losing marks in the examination. They expressed many doubts regarding online assessment which causes them to suffer a lot of pain and agony. They claimed that our health is at a compromise when we are facing the pandemic as well as online exams. Let's see the semantic linkage identified through the Atlas.ti software.



**Figure 3:** Thematic map and quotations regarding issues in online assessment in *Atlas.ti*

Let's have a look at the responses of the participants:

"Online test gives me panic attacks. I can't focus properly because of one basic fear what if something went wrong while submitting the test." (FG5, participant 3).

"Online assessments are more stressful than classroom assessments. Because in online assessment, student is always in stressful conditions. He/she suffers from anxiety because he/she is in fear of losing work." (FG1, participant 3).

Another issue faced by students during online assessment was that they were always unsure about their work submission because of the unreliable internet connection. They were afraid that their work might get lost instead of being submitted and they would lose all marks. Students believed in themselves but not on the computers:

"I have a big fear regarding online assessments that net connections might get slow and the assessment just get disappear and I have to start the assessment again from the beginning." (FG5, participant 4).

"I fear that what if my internet connection gets slow or I'm unable to submit it within the time or I might close the online assessment by mistake and then unable to access it again." (FG1, participant 4).

Time management remained the biggest issue in online assessments. Students have never used an online assessment system before, therefore they lack time management skills in online assessments. Students believed that their typing speed is slower than their writing speed and therefore they are unable to perform certain tasks within time in online assessments:

"My biggest fear is that I won't complete my task within given time and it does happen to me as I am not skilled in technology and typing I got stuck." (FG5, participant 4).

"They are more stressful because we have to attempt quizzes and exams online while managing the time and typing on the keyboard at the same time." (FG4, participant 5).

Hardworking students believed online assessment as an unfair means of testing, as online assessments are very prone to cheating, and although it is a knowable factor yet no action has been taken against it. They believed that the answers were shared among students, therefore it was not a good way to assess students:

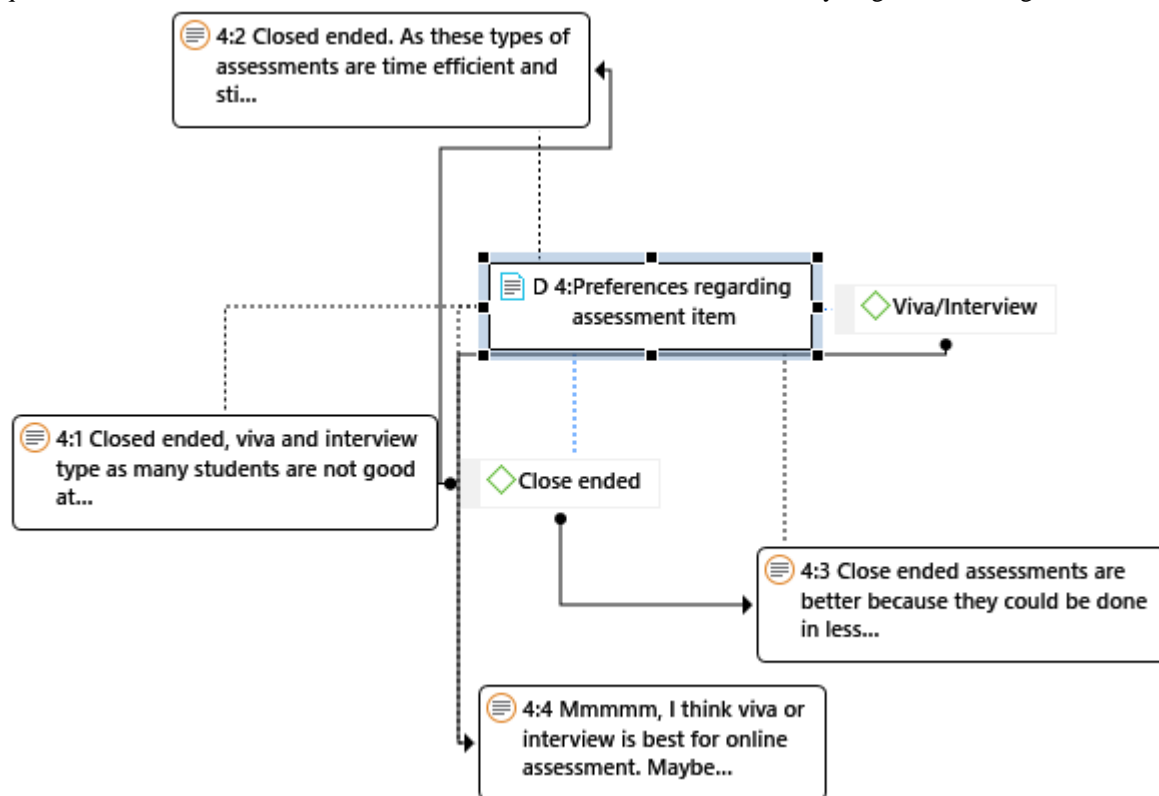
“Our big issue regarding online assessments is that we don't want to stay behind cheaters because they cheat in a very skillful manner and get good marks.” (FG1, participant 1). Unfortunately, our teachers are aware about this concept but they don't do anything for that and they give them full grades.” (FG3, participant 4).

The students thought that as an online mean of assessment is prone to cheating thereby it diminishes the difference between hardworking students and negligent students:

“I don't prefer online assessment because this is not the fairest way of taking grades. Students do cheat on their quizzes or exams due to which the difference diminishes between a hardworking student and a nil student. In fact, this thing is very intolerable for those students who give their quizzes honest, but cheaters snatch them right from them by doing cheating.” (FG2, participant 5).

### 3. Preferences regarding assessment items

Students did not prefer online assessment over classroom assessment, but due to the pandemic situation, the option of classroom assessment has been crossed out. Now, as students have to be assessed through online means, so for online assessment, they preferred closed-ended and viva/interview type items over open-ended questions. The Atlas.ti data illustrate certain themes found in the current study as given in the figure.



**Figure4:** Thematic map and quotations regarding students' preferences for test items in *Atlas.ti*

The findings illustrate that students opined to include close ended and viva type items in the exam paper. Look at the following response:

“Closed ended, viva and interview type as many students are not good at typing or sometime your laptop begins issue which take your excess amount of time and writing a long question within a short period of time gets hard.” (FG3, participant 4).

“I prefer close ended and interviews types items for assessment.” (FG5, participant 5).

Students preferred closed-ended items for online assessments keeping in mind several reasons. They believed that close-ended items consumed less time than open-ended and, so they were doable in a given time. Close-ended items do not require details or explanations like open-ended items and therefore, students with connectivity issues could also perform well in these:

“Closed ended. As these types of assessments are time efficient and still can generate good how know of the student's knowledge.” (FG4, participant 4).

“Close ended assessments are better because they could be done in less time and a person with slow internet can also attempt these in required time.” (FG1, participant 4).

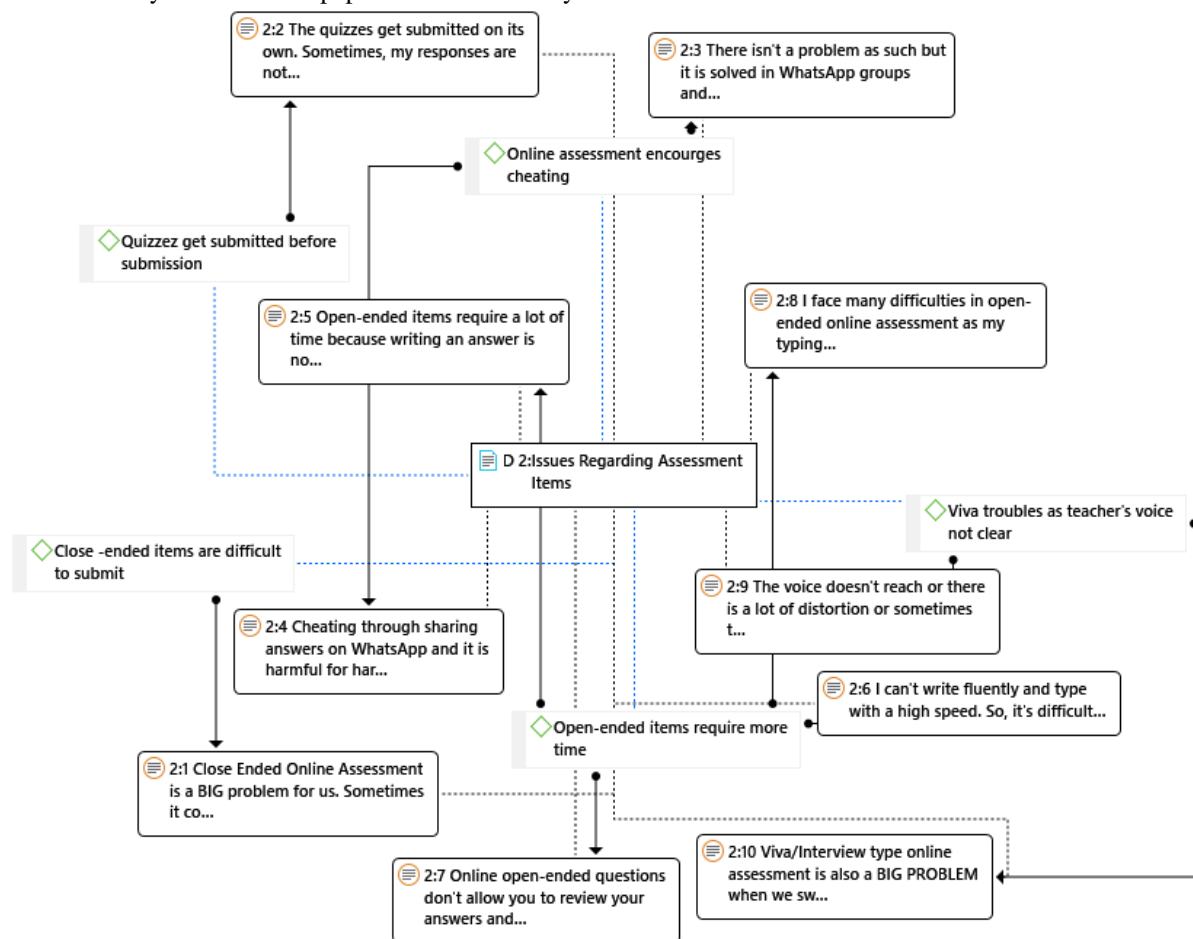
Students preferred viva/interview type items for different reasons. Students who preferred viva/interview-type items perceived them as an efficient means to assess the capabilities and learning of students and it will therefore motivate and strengthen students to learn even in this pandemic situation. They also believed that this test item would also lessen the chances of cheating in online assessments and will be fairer in nature:

“Mmmmm, I think a viva or interview is best for online assessment. Maybe it's a right way to judge the capability of hardworking students or cheaters. Secondly, we hope this thing may save us from leading down any more.”(FG4, participant 2).

“Viva and interview. Because first it will enhance our speaking skill moreover, it left the small room for cheating.”(FG1, participant 4).

#### 4. Issues regarding assessment items

During online assessments, students came across many test items, and these test items created a lot of problems for the students. Although many students preferred closed-ended test items, in close test items, they faced many issues, like the most common issues were regarding the submission of these items, at several occasions, Teams App stopped working. In some cases, students failed to submit the paper and in other cases, they unknowingly or accidentally submitted the paper due to which they lost a lot of marks.



**Figure5:** Thematic map and quotations regarding issues related to assessment items in *Atlas.ti*  
Students stated that:

“Close-ended online assessment is a big problem for us. Sometimes it couldn't submit. And then student faces the consequences.” (FG4, participant 3).

“The quizzes get submitted on its own. Sometimes, my responses are not accepted by the app. The internet creates much difficulty in other assessment tasks like viva, presentations etc.”(FG1, participant 2).

Another issue regarding closed items was highlighted by the students was cheating during the online examinations. They believed that it was an unfair means to assess the students through close-ended items as most of the students have WhatsApp groups and they were sharing answers with each other. They claimed that closed-ended questions were the most prone to cheating. Eventually, they asserted that the answers to questions were shared through different messaging platforms, let's have a look at the following responses:

“There isn't a problem as such, but answers are solved in WhatsApp groups and it is entirely done by cheating.”(FG3, participant 4).

“Cheating through sharing answers on WhatsApp and it is harmful for hardworking students.” (FG5, participant 1).

Open-ended items were also very problematic. The biggest issue with them was that the students were not able to attempt them in the given time. Students were not used to typing and therefore their typing speed was very



slow and by the time students complete the given paper, the submission time had passed. Some students informed:

“Open-ended items require a lot of time because writing an answer is not enough a lot more is needed e.g. Uploading it on teams or sending it by email. Set time is given and after that time page closes and students are left in an unguided situation.” (FG3, participant 4).

“I can't write fluently and type with a high speed. So, it's difficult to attempt the task within the required time.” (FG4, participant 3).

Another issue with online open-ended test items was that they did not have many options; students cannot review their answers, they cannot add headings, they cannot undo anything. As they cannot review the answers, so they are not sure if they have written enough for obtaining good marks:

“Online open-ended questions, don't allow you to review your answers and there is not any option to undo or enter any heading.” (FG3, participant 1).

“I face many difficulties in open-ended online assessment as my typing speed is not very fast and many times the answer I write gets disappeared and there is only a line in which the answer get typed, so I don't get to know that almost how much I have written.” (FG1, participant 5).

In online viva or interview type assessment, students faced a lot of issues due to poor connectivity or unreliability of gadgets. Students faced microphone issues due to which they could not respond to their teachers. Sometimes they were not able to understand their teachers due to the distortion in the teacher's voice caused by internet connection:

“The voice doesn't reach or there is a lot of distortion or sometimes the Mic itself does not work.” (FG3, participant 4).

“Due to internet issues sometimes it's difficult to understand what the teacher is asking about.” (FG1, participant 4).

Another major problem with the online viva and interview type test item was that it lacked practicality. Students believed that online viva was not possible as there were many students in one class and all students could not attend the class sitting idle as one of them was being interviewed. One student stated this as:

“Viva/Interview type online assessment is also a big problem when we switch our audio call to video call then we are unable to listen and video quality is also not good. Rest it would take more time. Let suppose in a class there are 40 students. And how much time you will take for each student. And all the students cannot attend the class at the same time when the others are giving their viva. So, it's totally failure of online assessment.” (FG3, participant 4).

##### *5. Preferences and apprehensions regarding technology*

In order to participate in an online assessment, one requires some type of gadgets. The participants in this research showed variation in choosing the gadget for attempting the online assessment. Students preferred laptop and mobile according to the need of the assessment:

“I think mobile or laptop both can be used for online assessments because they both play the same role in regard of benefits.” (FG1, participant 2).

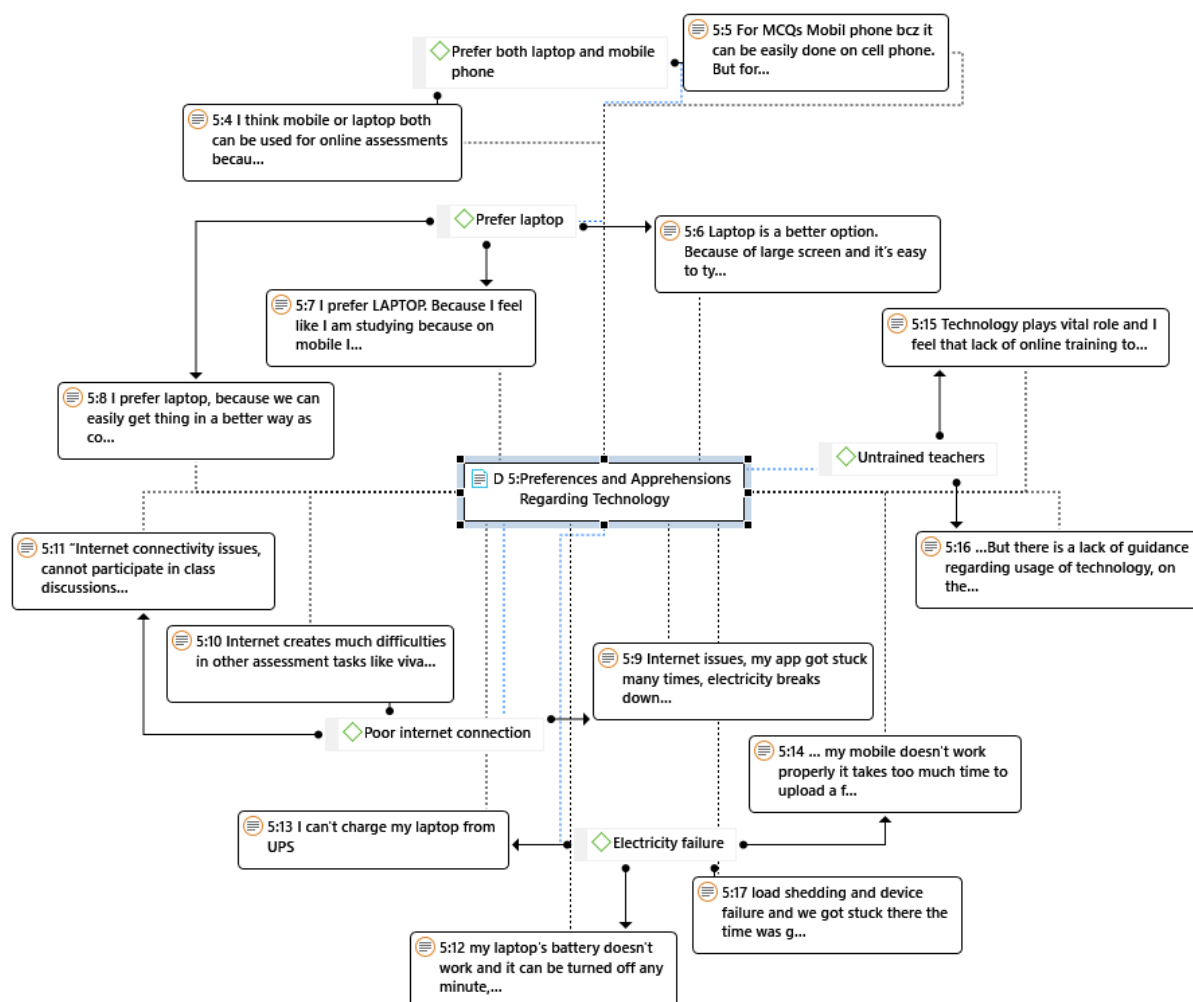
“For MCQs Mobil phone bcz it can be easily done on cell phone. But for open ended questions laptop or desktop is more suitable because we can easily type and express our ideas.” (FG3, participant 4).

Most Students preferred laptop over mobile phones, they believed that it was a better option, as it has a big screen and big keyboard. Some students felt distracted using the mobile phone, as mobile phones have social apps which cause hindrance and distraction while they are attempting the assessment. Some students explained this in the following words:

“Laptop is a better option. Because of the large screen and it's easy to type on it”

“I prefer a laptop. Because I feel like I am studying because on mobile I get distracted by some random social apps.” (FG3, participant 4).

“I prefer laptops, because we can easily get things in a better way as compare to mobile or any other thing.” (FG5, participant 4).



**Figure 6:** Thematic map and quotations regarding issues in using technology in *Atlas.ti*

Students faced many apprehensions in online assessments due to the unreliability of technology. The major issue with technology is a poor connection to the internet. The most common complaint of students was that their poor internet connection caused them to lose many marks. Due to problems with internet connection apps get stuck, participation and interaction get interrupted, and many students had to rewrite their paper due to sudden loss of internet connection. Several students stated this issue:

“Internet issues, my app got stuck many times, electricity breaks down and you can’t write above limited data and after 1 minute of submission time it will be disappeared.

“Internet creates much difficulty in other assessment tasks like viva, presentations etc.”(FG4, participant 4).

“Internet connectivity issues,cannot participate in class discussions due to mic problem.”(FG3, participant 3).

The technological gadget also showed unreliability. Pakistan is not a developed country and therefore it has a power cut down issues, due to which students have problems using their gadgets. The gadgets need constant power and due to load shedding students don’t get to charge their gadgets, besides that many gadgets face a lot of technical issues while operating papers and therefore they believe that humans are more reliable than the computers:

“... My laptop's battery doesn't work and it can be turned off any minute, if the light is out.”(FG3, participant 4).

“... I can't charge my laptop from UPS.”(FG1, participant 4).

“... My mobile doesn't work properly, it takes too much time to upload a file and laptop is also not predictable and trustworthy.”(FG1, participant 1).

Students also believe that they face many problems in online assessments because they and even their teachers are not competent enough in using technology for assessments. This online assessment system is a new thing for students as well as the teachers, therefore they don’t have any experience or training regarding the usage of

online means of assessments, due to which students and teachers both get stuck and go blank when any technical problem occurs. Students stated this problem in the following lines:

“Technology plays a vital role and I feel that lack of online training to both students and teachers results on passive learning.”(FG2, participant 4).

“... But there is a lack of guidance regarding usage of technology, on the part of both.”(FG2, participant 4).

One student shared:

“Once it was my presentation and I asked my group members to share their screen as I am not skilled in technology but at the same time my members couldn't share their screen because of load shedding and device failure and we got stuck there the time was getting up and I was link blank minded whatever I prepared for my presentation I forgot because of stress we didn't get what to do at that time. Another worse situation was my quiz. We were supposed to do 10 open ended items within one hour and twenty minutes, but as I am not skilled in typing the time was up and I got stuck there after given time the app was not accepting. So, anything can happen during online assessments and that can affect my grades.”(FG5, participant 1).

Lack of skills in technology of both the students and the teachers has caused many problems in online assessments.

## Discussion

The resistance showed by the students regarding online assessments can be interpreted in the light of the Theory of *reasoned action* as described by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). The Theory of *reasoned action* states that behavior is related to attitudes, so when people's beliefs alter, their actions alter too; whereas subjective social norms and individual perceptions influence attitudes. The *technology acceptance model* highlights perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as predictors of willingness to use technology systems (Otieno et al., 2016; Ting et al., 2020). The current study showed that the students showed resistance to the online assessment. They believed that online assessment was a cumbersome change as they were not prepared and they distrusted the technology with this aspect of their education. For students, the norm and traditional way of assessment i.e. Classroom assessment was more preferable than the online assessments. They believed that classroom assessments were more effective, allowed proper feedback, and were fairer than online assessments. The importance of constructive and timely feedback has been highlighted in the literature as an essential part of learning (Ambrose et al., 2010; Lim, 2020). Our participants had similar problems regarding online assessments as seen in the studies of Betlej (2013) and Kuriakose and Luwes (2016). They believed that online assessments were more stressful and not good for mental health, as students feared that their answers would vanish and would not be submitted on time, their typing speed is not fast, and therefore, they would not be able to complete the test item in time, their incomplete answers would be submitted automatically or they might get internet connection problems during online assessments. For assessing learners through technology, Crawford et al (2020) argue that all resources (smooth internet, computers, and electricity) required for online assessment must be provided to the teachers and students otherwise these practices will end in vain.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, Covid-19 has caused Pakistani universities to move from classroom assessment to online assessment, and students willingly or unwillingly had to adopt this method of assessment. The majority of our participants in the current study preferred closed-ended and interview/viva type questions for online assessments. Although, it is believed that MCQs were more appropriate for students who had a surface approach to learning. The ability to recognize answers does not necessarily translate into learning that is useful beyond the classroom (Halpern & Hake, 2003; Masoumi & Sadeghi, 2020). Our participants believed that close-ended assessments are easier and less time taking, so students with a poor internet connection or other technical issues could also perform well in these test items, as it is less daunting for such students to select an answer rather than typing it. Some experts (Bai, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Coombe et al., 2020; Masoumi & Sadeghi, 2020) in the field have also suggested to include close-ended items in tests as such items have their own importance as these can measure all levels of student ability from memory to synthesis. As far as viva and interview type assessments were concerned, participants believed that no cheating is possible in such test items as researchers (Ghanbari & Barati, 2020; Nikmard & Zenouzagh, 2020) believe that viva and interview is a valid and novel method of assessing learning outcomes such as application of deep learning, application of theory to practice, and problem-solving skills. These test items enable dialectic communication between the examiner and student and provide invaluable experience for career interviews.

This study also portrays different issues faced by students with different online assessment items. In closed-ended assessments, the participants worried about cheating, automatic responses, and unintentional submission. Whereas in open-ended assessments, they were worried about their typing speed, the set time limit, and the deficiency of options. In the viva/interview type assessment, they feared listening/understanding issues caused by a poor internet connection. To solve these issues, students should be ensured that they could go back and forth to check their answers, the provision of time and consideration regarding internet issues would be useful.

As Robertson (2017) suggests that expansions to software should be made regularly to resolve problems related to online assessments and options to adopt hybrid items for assessments should be considered (Coombe et al., 2020; Towndrow & Vallance, 2004).

This study also showed the preferences and apprehensions of students regarding technology. The participants preferred the use of laptops or mobile according to the need of the assessment items. They considered internet connectivity and system compatibility unreliable. They also believed that they and their teachers were not competent enough to use the technology for online assessments. Therefore, students and their teachers need training regarding technology, and their needs and concerns should be addressed (Li, 2019; Zhang, 2020). It is imperative that students feel confident in the technological infrastructure and in their abilities to cope with the adjustment (Gewertz, 2013). For an online assessment system, not only students, but teachers also need to become confident and competent as well.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that graduate students of English at the University of Central Punjab Lahore, Pakistan did not willingly accept the online assessment system. They faced many issues with this new assessment system. They believe that this system is flawed as in Pakistan there are no stable internet connections along with powerful electricity. The technology used in these assessments is not reliable and creates more stress. The current assessment system (through *Microsoft Teams*) is prone to cheating and thereby it is not fair for hardworking students, as it diminishes the difference between an average and a good student and therefore, the byproduct of this online assessment system would be inauthentic and unproductive. The last issue that was evident in this study was that the teachers as well as students were incompetent in the use of technology, and operating online assessments competently. To improve the online assessment system, it is vital to consider the perspective of students regarding the online system. Students' apprehension and issues should be solved. Better facilities for internet connection and technological gadgets should be provided to students. The operating system used for the online system should be updated, to overcome the possibilities of cheating, and deal with the issues faced by students regarding the submission of papers. Moreover, students as well as teachers should be given training regarding all the transition from classroom assessments to online assessments.

### Abbreviations

FGD – Focus group discussion  
 MCQ – Multiple choice questions  
 UPS – Uninterrupted power supply

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