

# Saudi EFL Primary School Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Online Assessment During COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

Since March 2020, the world has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in sudden school closures and a rapid transition from traditional face-to-face education to a new model of online learning and assessment. The present study analyzes two cohorts—primary-school EFL teachers and students' parents—regarding the perceptions they have had and the challenges they have faced when assessing young EFL learners online during COVID-19. A specific aim of the study is to identify primary-school EFL teachers' perceptions of the online methods used in assessing young EFL learners in the Riyadh region of Saudi Arabia. The research follows a quantitative method involving a convenience-sampling method for the selection of the study's participants. A total of 34 primary-school EFL teachers and 20 parents of young learners who are studying online in primary public schools were the main participants of the study. The researcher used a survey-based method involving a five-point Likert scale to collect data from the participants. The surveys were distributed online via the social-media application WhatsApp. The statistically analyzed responses yielded two types of descriptive statistics: frequencies, and percentages. The results show that both the teachers and the parents perceived online assessments as more convenient, fun and interactive than traditional paper-based assessments. Furthermore, both the teachers and the parents associated online assessments with serious challenges, such as cheating and technical problems. And teachers held positive views of various online methods and techniques for the assessment of young EFL learners.

**Keywords:** EFL, online learning, online assessment, primary schools, young learners

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is essential for young learners in the primary stages of their education, given the high importance of English as a universal language around the globe. Nawaila, Kanbul, and Alhamroni (2020: 16) note the great importance of learning a foreign language in this globalized era, and point out that the English language ranks first in popularity among all foreign languages. The education system in a number of countries have realized the significance of learning EFL at a young age and have integrated a systematically structured English-language curriculum into their overall educational program, particularly at the primary-school level (Wolf & Butler, 2017: 3). Saudi Arabia is no exception to this trend. The Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) has paid considerable attention to EFL, and starting this academic year (2021), learning EFL has become compulsory in all K-12 levels in Saudi public and private schools. This marked step is part of a wider national efforts, known as the *National Transformation Program 2020* and *Saudi Vision 2030*, the aim of which is to enhance the quality of learning and Education overall (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2018: 40).

The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led a majority of countries, including Saudi Arabia, to enact school closures and to adopt an online learning and assessment system. Moreover, there has been a sudden transition from traditional paper-based assessment methods to online assessment systems. In Saudi Arabia, this transition of assessments took place on the Madrasati platform and on such survey websites as Google Forms and Microsoft Forms (Alharbi, Alhebshi, & Meccawy, 2021: 141). The implementation of these online assessments has introduced both EFL teachers and their learners to a new dimension of teaching and assessment. Not surprisingly, these unfamiliar circumstances have created a unique opportunity for researchers to study the use of

online assessment methods. Such research can help teachers and other stakeholders improve the overall quality of online learning and assessment during and beyond the pandemic.

Assessing young EFL learners in primary schools is crucial to ensuring that learning objectives are successfully achieved. After all, it is by means of assessment that teachers need to gauge young learners' grasp and mastery of English-language skills. However, educators and parents might question the appropriateness of using online learning and assessment for young EFL learners; specifically, critics might claim that the absence of teachers and the lack of physical interaction among young learners negatively affect the quality of learning (Alahdal & Alqasham, 2020: 360).

On the one hand, research studies have pointed out the numerous benefits that online assessments can have for teachers and learners. According to Kerr, Muller, McKinon, and McInerney (2016: 72), these benefits include immediate feedback, flexibility in terms of time and place, increased motivation to study, interactivity and the opportunity to take an assessment several times. Moreover, Olatoye (2015: 7) shows that different online assessment methods, especially formative ones play an important role in creating student-led learning, where teaching is targeted to individual students' needs. Therefore, applying online assessment strategies in classrooms may help teachers and learners to meet their learning objectives.

On the other hand, online assessments have several shortcomings, ranging from such technical issues as poor internet connections and the increased possibility of cheating on online exams (Sari, Iswahyuni, Rejeki, & Sutano, 2020: 242). From this standpoint, research in the field should devote attention to identifying the perceptions that various stakeholders have of online assessments.

In the present study, the researcher will explore these perceptions of teachers and parents with regard to the implementation and execution of online assessments at the primary-school level during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *1.2 Statement of the Problem*

The COVID-19 outbreak seems to have ushered in permanent changes to education systems worldwide. Some research has studied these changes regarding their positive and negative effects on teachers and students. Notably, the majority of these studies have been conducted in university and high school settings (Zaitun, Rochmiyati, & Pargito, 2021: 665). To fill this gap in the literature, the present study focuses on the primary-school level. The aim of the study is to shed light on the challenges that primary-school EFL teachers face when conducting online assessments. To this end, the study identifies not only the teachers' perceptions regarding the online assessment methods used in assessing primary-school students, but also the parents' perceptions of this issue. The study presents recommendations for overcoming the challenges and weaknesses of online learning and assessment experiences in the years to come.

### *1.3 Research Objectives*

The current study has three central research objectives:

- 1) Identify the perceptions that both primary-school EFL teachers and parents of young learners have of online assessments.
- 2) Identify the challenges that the teachers and parents face in implementing or dealing with online assessments.
- 3) Identify the teachers' perceptions of the online assessment methods used in assessing young EFL learners in primary public schools.

### *1.4 Research Questions*

Three research questions guide the current study:

- 1) What are the perceptions that both primary-school EFL teachers and parents of young learners have of online assessments?
- 2) What are the challenges that the teachers and parents face in implementing or dealing with online assessments?
- 3) What are the perceptions that the teachers have of online assessment methods used in assessing young EFL learners in primary public schools?

### *1.5 Significance of the Study*

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. By assessing students, teachers get a clearer image of their students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress. These indicators are valuable in making significant changes to the

teaching and assessment methods implemented by teachers. In these regards, a fertile field of research has recently opened up regarding the implications of the sudden pandemic-inspired shift to online learning and assessment. While much research has been conducted in secondary and tertiary educational settings, there is a paucity of research at the primary-school level. This gap in the literature is curious because the primary-school level is of critical importance to a population's overall grasp of a widely taught foreign language, such as English (Zaitun et al., 2021: 665). To bridge the gap, the current study uncovers valuable findings with which primary-school EFL teachers, course designers and other stakeholders can enhance the quality of online learning and assessment in the era of COVID-19 and beyond.

## 2. Literature Review

This literature review discusses key variables of online learning and assessment in the Saudi context. Once the variables are established the literature review will highlight key definitions, findings and implications as they relate to online assessments in educational settings. Lastly, the literature review will discuss the existing research pertaining to online assessments of young learners.

### 2.1 *The Shift to Online Learning and Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The global lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, have had severe consequences for all aspects of life, including education. As a result, schools witnessed emergency closures and sudden transitions from face-to-face traditional learning to distance learning. Governments had to take the important step of shutting down schools and other institutions to prevent the spread of the virus and thus to ensure public safety. Fortunately, continued innovation in technology has revolutionized communications, so nowadays, individuals can interact with each other regardless of their geographic location and time limits. Such a shift in communication can be used effectively in education, where students no longer need to attend classes physically if certain events, such as a pandemic, make face-to-face education unfeasible. Educational institutions can implement various technologies that support virtual learning and that include Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Skype. These technologies have permitted schools worldwide to shift from face-to-face teaching methods to distance learning. A hugely important component of any learning environment is assessment: that is, the measuring of students' learning outcomes. As with education in general, assessment has adapted to the constraints of distance learning during the pandemic. Online assessment methods can take several forms, such as online quizzes, tests, assignments, discussions, and projects. Though online assessments might have several advantages for educators and students, with convenience and instant grading and feedback being among the most prominent advantages, the implementations of online assessments raises important challenges for young learners, as well as educators. Among these challenges are, for example, a lack of physical interaction between instructors and students, technical issues and the distinct possibility of cheating (Chinyerei, 2021: 304; Abduh, 2020: 7).

### 2.2 *Online Learning in Saudi Arabia*

Online learning can trace its roots to a time well before the pandemic, and is thus not a new model of education. According to Hassounah, Raheel, and Alhefzi (2020: 4), electronic learning in Saudi Arabia first emerged between 1990 and 2000, and by 2002, the country had developed a nationwide e-learning platform. A fairly common practice that Saudi higher-education institutions adopt before the pandemic was blended learning, in which some classes are delivered on campus while others take place online (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010: 50). In 2017, in accordance with Saudi Vision 2030, the MOE formed the first center for e-learning called the National E-learning Centre (NELC), which was tasked with supervising electronic learning in the country (Hassounah et al., 2020: 4). Three additional aims of the NELC are to enhance trust in e-learning programs, to assume a leadership role in the transformation of digital learning, and to facilitate the digital interaction of educational institutions and the private sector (Hassounah et al., 2020: 4).

### 2.3 *The Shift to Online Learning and Assessment in the Saudi Context*

In Saudi Arabia in early 2020, the pandemic-triggered closure of institutions led to a massive shift from traditional teaching methods to government-sponsored online learning. Reacting aggressively to the emergency situation, the MOE successfully transitioned to distance learning in a timely manner. According to Oriaf and Elyas (2020: 1), institutions in Saudi Arabia would not have practiced distance learning as effectively as they did without the outbreak of the disease. Saudi universities' transition to online learning and assessment proceeded smoothly owing in large measure to the existence of Blackboard, a learning-management system (LMS) that supports virtual learning and assessment (Alshaik, Maasher, Bayazed, Saleem, Badri, & Fakieh, 2020: 16; Alahdal & Alqasham, 2020: 360). For k-12 general education, the MOE has launched several tools to facilitate online learning for students. For instance, the MOE, through its e-portal system known as IEN, established several educational TV and YouTube channels broadcasting asynchronous lessons prerecorded by qualified Saudi teachers for all

educational stages (Oraif & Elyas, 2021: 3). Furthermore, in August 2020, the MOE launched an interactive LMS called Madrasati, which is supervised by the E-Learning and Distance Education Department in the MOE (Online Learning Consortium, 2021: 51). The Madrasati platform supports both synchronous and asynchronous e-learning options for learners and has a wide variety of learning and assessment tools, ranging from assignments and enrichment projects to assessments and progress reports. Teachers and students across Saudi Arabia have been given unique usernames and passwords for logging into the Madrasati platform, which is integrated into Microsoft Teams for the support of synchronous virtual classes. During the shift to online learning, the MOE asked teachers to deliver their courses synchronously and asynchronously via the Madrasati platform. In synchronous-mode courses, teachers give their lessons live, via the Microsoft Teams application, using multiple technological tools such as interactive course books, electronic textbooks, and interactive white-boards. Moreover, students in synchronously delivered courses can participate orally in real-time discussions and type their answers in the chat box. Conversely, in asynchronous learning, teachers can post pre-made video-recorded lessons, enrichment projects, and assignments on the Madrasati platform.

Measuring students' learning progress is key to determining the effectiveness of online learning and teaching methods. Therefore, online assessments rely on various methods and techniques. The term 'online assessment' is very broad in its extension and can be applied to several distinct settings (Mayotte, 2012: 448). For EFL settings, Pinter (2006) defines 'English-language assessment' as "the process of data analysis that teachers use to get evidence about their learners' performance and progress in English" (p. 131). In Saudi Arabia, EFL teachers can create and post assessments on the Madrasati platform. Teachers can also create English tests using the surveying tools Microsoft Forms or Google Forms, which permit both the creation of multiple-choice questions and the automatic correction of assessments with instant feedback. These surveying tools also can provide statistical and analytical reports regarding students' progress and their areas of strengths and weaknesses, all of which allow teachers to adopt appropriate teaching methods and to take corrective actions that accommodate the given student. Moreover, teachers may add pictures or videos for vocabulary instruction, which is more interactive and perhaps more engaging and fun than conventional face-to-face instruction would be. While most research studies have investigated online assessment implications in secondary and higher-education settings, the current study focuses on teachers' assessing of younger EFL learners online, specifically primary-school students in Saudi Arabia.

#### *2.4 Assessing Young EFL Learners Online in the Saudi Context*

In the context of the current study, primary-school EFL students between 6 and 12 years old are referred to as young learners. In Saudi Arabia, young learners learn EFL as a compulsory subject two times a week using a series of textbooks entitled *We Can*, published by the American company McGraw Hill Education. Each book has four modules, and young learners are assessed according to the degree of their mastery of several pre-determined skills in each module. To ensure effective learning and instruction in an online environment, teachers need to use effective online assessment methods and techniques. Gaytan and McEwen (2007: 117) mentioned that, in order for online assessment to be effective, teachers should clearly explain it to their students, conduct it on a regular basis, and provide meaningful assessment-based feedback to students in a timely manner.

In the era of COVID-19, teachers assess young learners online using a host of methods and techniques. In Saudi Arabia, for example, teachers can post online assessments and quizzes on the Madrasati platform, that are automatically graded, thus furnishing the students with instant feedback (Alharbi et al., 2021: 142). Although some teachers use various tools to conduct formative online assessments, the most prevalent method is online summative assessments, in which young learners are given a final grade that determines their academic performance and proficiency in EFL. Though assessing young learners online might seem easy, teachers might need to ensure the validity, reliability, and objectivity of their assessments to obtain accurate representation of young learners' performance. Akcay, Guven, and Karahan (2021: 409) conducted a qualitative study on pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding traditional and online peer assessment of primary-school students. The findings of the study suggest that a combination of teacher assessments, peer assessments, and self-assessments enhances the validity and objectivity of online assessment among young learners.

Many educators have questioned the effectiveness of online learning and assessment for young learners who are in their foundational years. However, because primary-school teachers are forced to conduct online assessments in the era of COVID-19, educators have looked to find other effective ways to assess young EFL learners online.

#### *2.5 Assessment Methods in EFL Online Learning*

Educators responsible for online EFL courses quickly realized the significance of using effective online assessment methods to gauge EFL students' learning progress. Several studies have reported on the methods and techniques used by instructors to assess student learning online. Among those studies, Kearns (2007: 200)

reviewed syllabi of 24 online courses to identify the methods and techniques that teachers use for assessment of student learning, which contribute to the overall course grade. The study identifies five categories of online student assessments: written assignments, online discussion, fieldwork, quizzes and exams, and presentations (Kearns, 2007: 200). Moreover, Gaytan and McEwen (2007: 117) investigate effective online assessment methods that are widely adopted by instructors. These methods include projects, self and peer assessments, quizzes, and online discussions accompanied by meaningful and timely feedback.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there emerged a major argument regarding the value of online learning and assessments (Oraif & Elyas, 2021: 4). The argument has revealed the many diverse perspectives held by stakeholders regarding this matter. Alahdal and Alqasham (2020: 361) assert that online assessments provide more satisfaction to students than do face-to-face assessments. The authors argue that online assessments, because they promote instructional goals and higher-order reasoning, provide a deeper understanding than do face-to-face evaluations, which focus on quiz- and assignment-based measurements of classroom knowledge in closed contexts (Alahdal & Alqasham, 2020: 361; Alruwais, Wills, & Wald, 2018: 35). In Saudi primary schools during the pandemic, young EFL learners have had more exposure to online assessments than to face-to-face evaluations. This circumstance makes sense given that the students these days are acquiring their basic knowledge through online teaching and assessment technologies.

### *2.6 Benefits of Online Assessments*

There are several benefits to online assessments. First, online assessments lessen the administrative burden shouldered by educators. Alruwais et al. (2018: 35) state that online exams, in particular, significantly reduce the time and effort that educators usually devote to printing and distributing exams, setting up examination centers, and marking papers. In Saudi Arabia, when COVID-19 struck, many institutions, including the MOE, worried about how they should tackle this health challenge in ways that would ensure the least amount of disruption to learning programs. These same institutions simultaneously realized that online assessments are less expensive than physical exams (Chinyerei, 2021: 303; Alruwais et al., 2018: 36).

Secondly, unlike paper-based traditional assessments, online assessments have a number of benefits for students. For example, online assessments provide students with timely feedback that helps identifying their strengths and weaknesses, correcting their misconceptions instantly, thus improving their academic performance before summative assessments (Alharbi et al., 2021: 142; Alruwais et al., 2018: 35). Moreover, online assessments tend to enhance students' digital literacy by using multiple digital educational technologies in learning and assessment (Proshkova, 2020: 845). Online assessments also are more convenient and flexible in terms of time and place, offering students in remote areas the opportunity to take the exam anytime and anywhere (Chinyerei, 2021: 303; Alruwais et al., 2018: 35)

Lastly, online assessments enhance the security of all exam papers, students' details, and results. Since online assessments involve student typing their details and completing exam questions from an online platform, it becomes easier to use computers in setting questions and receiving short answers (Alruwais et al., 2018: 36). Online assessments also enhance the security of exams by eliminating the possibility of misplaced exam papers and inaccurate attendance records.

### *2.7 Challenges of Assessing Young Learners Online*

Saudi Arabia's widespread adoption of online assessments has not come without its challenges, which include academic cheating, infrastructure obstacles, and incomplete or unsubmitted assessments. Cheating is a problem that most instructors encounter daily in their profession. According to Guangul, Suhail, Khalit and Khidhir (2020: 519), cheating is rampant in remote learning and assessment because the online settings lack clear supervision of student progress. It is difficult for instructors to determine whether or not the person who completed an online assessment was indeed the student registered in the course or someone else deceptively completing the exam on the real student's behalf. Instructors cite poor learning infrastructure as an obstacle to online assessments (Guangul et al., 2020: 520). Most universities and learning centers, including those in Saudi Arabia, hurriedly embraced remote learning at the start of the pandemic, yet they had no time to thoroughly research the topic and develop the infrastructure. As a result, most schools have incomplete infrastructure. A third problem for remote learning is incomplete or unsubmitted assessments. While it is difficult to determine the main reasons for students' failure to take or submit online assessments, Alruwais et al. (2018: 36) conclude that poor technical infrastructure, internet inaccessibility, and students' unfamiliarity with the digital setting of an assessment help explain the problem. Another possibility is simply student apathy, as many students may use false excuses, such as unstable internet connectivity, to cover up their own failure to submit an assessment on time.

### 2.8 Previous Related Studies

Several studies have addressed the implications of the sudden transition to online learning and assessments. For example, Zaitun et al. (2021: 663) conducted qualitative research about primary-school teachers' use of online assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that the teachers' online assessments took the form of assignments, daily exercises (oral tests), written tests, and portfolios. The results also show that teachers faced several attitude- and skill-related obstacles to executing the online assessments.

Abduh (2020: 1) researched the perceptions of university EFL instructors regarding online assessments and related methods and challenges. A total of 26 female EFL instructors participated in this mixed-methods study. The results suggest that the participating instructors exhibited moderated attitudes toward online assessments and positive perceptions regarding the methods and techniques used to assess students online.

Khan, Vivek, Khojah, Nabi, Paul, and Minhaj (2021: 1) conducted a comprehensive analysis of 207 university students' perceptions regarding online assessments during COVID-19. Results of the study show that, in the eyes of the students, online assessments are more advantageous than traditional paper-based assessments. The participating students also recognized that the implementation of online assessments faced several challenges, chief among them being security, validity, and integrity challenges (Khan et al., 2021: 4).

To sum up, the literature review chapter looked deeply at the implications of the sudden transition to online learning and assessment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide and specifically in the Saudi context. Furthermore, it sheds light on the online assessment methods widely used by instructors, advantages and challenges of online learning and assessments in relation to existing literature.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

The current study follows a descriptive quantitative research design that aims to investigate the perceptions and challenges that both primary-school EFL teachers and parents of young learners have on online assessments during COVID-19. Creswell (1994) as cited in Sukamolson (2007) defined quantitative research design as "explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)" (P. 2). Participants of the study were chosen using a convince sampling method that include primary-school EFL teachers and parents of young learners who are studying EFL in primary public schools. The study used two questionnaires (EFL Teachers' questionnaire and Parents' questionnaire) as the main instrument since they are fast and efficient way of collecting quantitative data. Data collected was statically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26, a software known for quantitative data analysis.

### 3.2 Participants

Participants of the study were 34 female- primary public school EFL teachers in Riyadh region, and 20 parents of young EFL learners in primary public schools in Riyadh. The researcher chose the participants using a convenience sampling method which refers to "the researching subjects of the population that are easily accessible to the researcher" (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016: 2). Due to the affordability, accessibility and availability of the research sample, since the researcher is a primary-school EFL teacher in a public school, it became easier to reach the designated participants in such a short time.

### 3.3 Setting

The study is conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2021/2022 where primary public school students are studying and being assessed online via Madrasati platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3.4 Research Instruments

Two questionnaires were used for data collection: primary-school EFL teachers' questionnaire and the parents' questionnaire. The questionnaires are adapted from (Abduh, 2021) with several changes made to fit the study sample and objectives. Both questionnaires were created via Google forms using a 5-point Likert scale. Responses to questionnaire items were ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) and lastly strongly disagree (1). The questionnaires consist of closed-ended statements to gather the information needed.

#### 3.4.1 Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study on a small scale of 3 participants as an exploratory sample prior to the full-scale distribution of instruments. The exploratory participants are currently teaching EFL in primary public schools, which helped the researcher get a clearer idea about the distance learning system during COVID-19. The pilot study helped the researcher to improve the quality of the questionnaires by clarifying any ambiguous items or

eliminating irrelevant items in the questionnaires before applying them on a larger scale. According to In (2017: 661), the pilot study is significant for improving the quality of the research study. To this end, the researcher met the exploratory sample to get their feedback and comments regarding the questionnaires. Significant changes have been made accordingly, and multiple sentences were edited, clarified or deleted.

### 3.4.2 Primary-School EFL Teachers' Questionnaire

Section (1) of the questionnaire informs about teachers' demographic information regarding their academic degree and years of experience in teaching EFL. The second Section of the Teachers' questionnaire consists of three parts as follows: EFL teachers' perceptions regarding assessing young learners online, the challenges they face in assessing young learners online and lastly their perceptions about the methods and techniques used to assess young EFL learners online (see **Appendix 1**). The teachers' questionnaire was distributed online by an academic EFL supervisor using social media application *WhatsApp*.

### 3.4.3 Parents' Questionnaire

The parents' questionnaire comprises two sections: the first section informs about parents' primary information regarding their academic degrees, level of technological competence and level of English proficiency. The second section comprises two parts: parents' perceptions regarding young learners' online assessment and the challenges they might have faced regarding assessing young learners online (see **Appendix 2**). Furthermore, parents' questionnaire was translated into Arabic language to ensure parents' full understanding of the statements, hence, ensuring the accuracy of the results (see **Appendix 3**). The questionnaire then was distributed to the parents via social media application *WhatsApp* as it is used as a medium of communication between schools and parents.

## 3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

### 3.5.1 External Validity

The questionnaire has been handed to a number of concerned experts for evaluation and improvement. These experts kindly presented their views on the questionnaire in terms of its content, clarity of items' meaning and suitability to achieve the research objectives. The questionnaire then has been modified according to the experts' suggestions.

### 3.5.2 Questionnaires' Reliability

The questionnaires' internal reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha reliability test as Table 1 shows below:

Table 1. The results of Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the teachers' questionnaire

Field	No. of statements	Alpha Value
primary-school EFL teachers' perceptions towards online assessments	10	0.803
Challenges faced by primary-school EFL teachers regarding online assessments	10	0.786
Teachers' perceptions of techniques / methods used in assessing young learners online	10	0.734
Total degree	30	0.797

Table 2. The results of Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the parents' questionnaire

Field	No. of statements	Alpha Value
Parents' perceptions towards online assessments	10	0.954
Parents' perception about online assessment challenges	10	0.723
Total degree	20	0.824

The data in Table 1 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha for the entire teachers' questionnaire is (0.797), indicating that the entire questionnaire is very reliable, and Table 2, shows that the Cronbach's Alpha for the entire parents' questionnaire is (0.824), indicating that the entire questionnaire is very reliable.

## 3.6 Procedure

In this study, a survey-based approach was used to collect the data for quantitative analysis. This approach was the most effective way to meet the aims of the research as it enabled specific questions to be asked to find out the

perceptions and challenges of both primary-school EFL teachers and parents of young learners on online assessments. Questionnaires are particularly helpful because they are easy for everyone to use. However, a questionnaire was effective because of the timescale of the project and the ability to distribute the questionnaire to a large number of people simultaneously. In addition to this, a variety of closed-ended, Likert scale questions were asked and used to get the data needed from participants.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26. The Cronbach's Alpha statistic was used to test the reliability of overall collected data and each section's reliability. Basic descriptive analysis: frequencies and percentage, were used to describe the collected data. Furthermore, the collected data was presented in the form of frequencies and percentages and organized in tables and figures.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

In the research, the data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26. The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's alpha test to examine the internal consistency of the data, descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to represent the participants' demographic information, and to examine the perceptions of primary-school EFL teachers and parents towards online assessments and the challenges faced by teachers and parents regarding online assessments.

### 4.2 Demographic Information of the Participants

Participants of the study were 34 female- primary public school EFL teachers in Riyadh region, and 20 parents of young learners in primary public schools in Riyadh region. Participants were classified according to the following variables shown below in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic information of the participants

Study's sample	Variable	Variable level	Frequency	Percent	
Teachers	Teachers' academic degree	Bachelor' degree	34	100	
		1 -5 years	3	8.8	
	years of experience	5- 10 years	10	29.4	
		10 - 15 years	8	23.5	
		more than 15 years	13	38.2	
<b>Total</b>			<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>	
Young learners' parents	level of competence in technology	high school	7	35.0	
		academic degree	bachelor degree	11	55.0
		Postgraduate	2	10.0	
	proficiency in English Language	beginner	3	15	
		intermediate	9	45	
		advance	8	40	
		beginner	5	25.0	
intermediate	15	75.0			
<b>Total</b>			<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

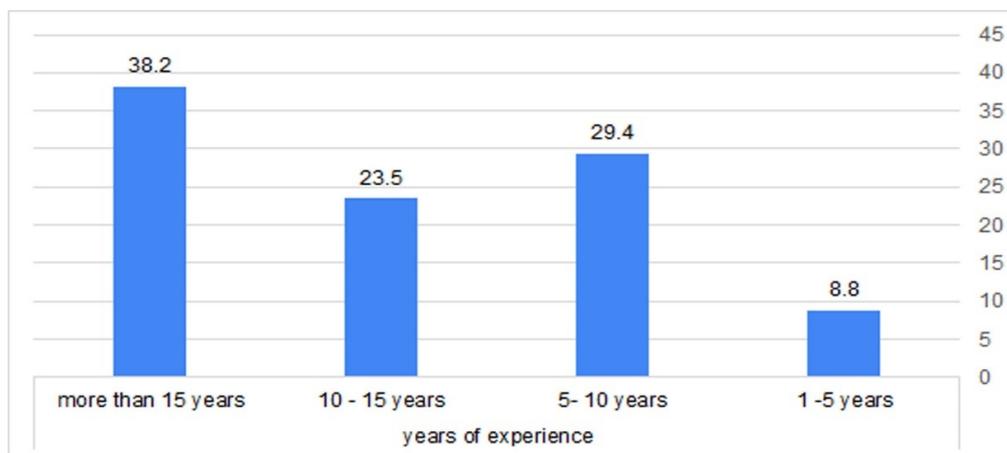


Figure 1. Teachers' years of experience

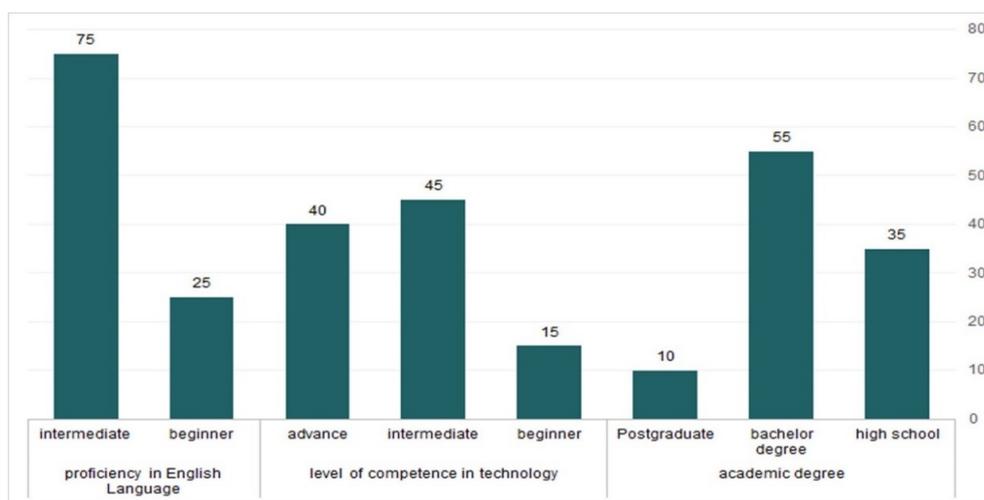


Figure 2. Demographic information of young learners' parents

From the previous Table 3, it is clear that all the teachers ( $n=34$ ) (100.0%) have bachelors' degree. Figures 1 and 2, show that the sample of teachers was distributed between different years of experience. The largest percentage of teachers with experience of over 15 years was at 38.2%, followed by those with experience of 5-10 years at 29.4%, followed by those with 10-15 years of experience at 23.5%, and finally, those with experience of 1-5 years at 8.8%. This indicates that most teachers have more than 5 years of experience in teaching EFL.

In addition, the largest percentage of parents' academic degree being 55% of them with a bachelor's degree and 35% of those with a high school diploma. Moreover, 45% of the parents have an intermediate level of competence in technology and 40% of the parents have an advance level. This indicates that parents are competent enough in dealing with technology. Finally, parents with an intermediate level of the English language proficiency comprise 75% of the sample, while 25% of the parents have a beginner proficiency level in the English language.

#### 4.3 Findings of the Research Questions

##### 4.3.1 The Primary-School EFL Teachers' Perceptions Towards Online Assessments

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the teachers' responses to the ten questionnaire items regarding teacher assessments of young online learners. The responses rested on a five-point Likert Scale indicating level of agreement and ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The sequence of analyzing data is based on the most agreed upon to the least agreed upon questionnaire items as shown in Figure 3. The researcher lumps together the agree and strongly agree responses, and the disagree and strongly disagree responses together.

Table 4. The frequencies and percentage of the primary-school EFL teachers' perceptions towards online assessments (n=34)

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- I prefer online assessments to paper- based assessments	34	3	12	4	10	5
	100%	8.8%	35.3%	11.8%	29.4%	14.7%
2- Online learning helps improving young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online	34	6	16	4	4	4
	100%	17.6%	47.1%	11.8%	11.8%	11.8%
3- Young learners can be evaluated well enough in online education	34	1	8	2	10	13
	100%	2.9%	23.5%	5.9%	29.4%	38.2%
4- Effective use of (Madrasati) platform enables young learners to be better assessed	34	2	15	7	8	2
	100%	5.9%	44.1%	20.6%	23.5%	5.9%
5- Online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment	34	5	17	5	5	2
	100%	14.7%	50.0%	14.7%	14.7%	5.9%
6- Online assessment allows young learners to achieve the learning goals successfully	34	0	9	11	10	4
	100%	0.0%	26.5%	32.4%	29.4%	11.8%
7- Different online assessment methods help exploring individual learning differences among young learners	34	3	14	8	8	1
	100%	8.8%	41.2%	23.5%	23.5%	2.9%
8- Online assessment is appropriate for all young learners	34	1	8	7	13	5
	100%	2.9%	23.5%	20.6%	38.2%	14.7%
9- Online assessment is more interactive and engaging than paper-based assessment (by using multimedia such as videos or recordings)	34	7	22	0	4	1
	100%	20.6%	64.7%	0.0%	11.8%	2.9%
10- Online assessment is more fun than paper-based assessment	34	12	15	4	3	0
	100%	35.3%	44.1%	11.8%	8.8%	0.0%

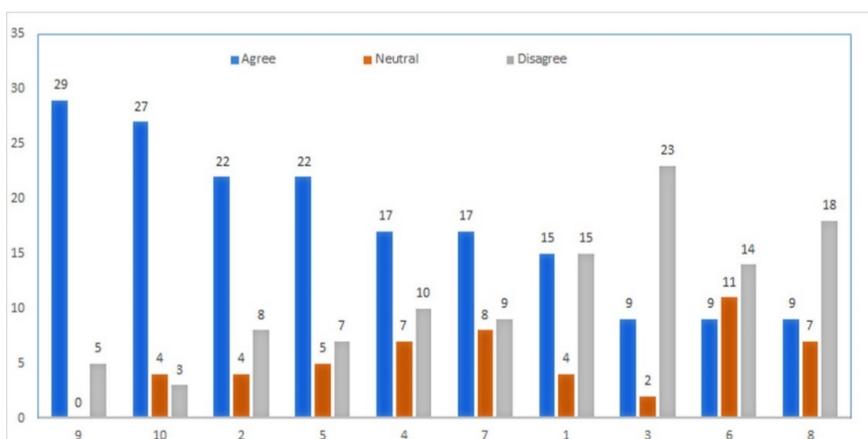


Figure 3. Frequencies of the participants in relation with their agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items (n=34)

The results show that the majority of teachers agreed that online assessment is more interactive, engaging and more fun than paper-based assessment. In addition, more than half of the teachers (64.7%) agreed that online assessment is more convenient than paper-based assessment because grades are received faster in the former than the latter. In addition, more than half of them agreed that online learning helps improve young learners' ability to

carry out online activities. These results show that there was a generally positive trend among teachers toward the diverse benefits of online assessment such as enjoyment, interactivity, improvement of technological competencies, and convenience in receiving grades, particularly in contrast to paper-based assessment. While half of the teachers agreed that online assessment methods help explore individual learning differences among young learners. Also, half of them agreed that effective teachers' and students' use of the Madrasati platform helps teachers assess young learners.

Conversely, more than half of the teachers did not agree that online assessment is appropriate for all young learners. More than half of them also did not agree that teachers can adequately evaluate young learners in online education. While, less than half of the teachers did not prefer online assessment to paper-based assessment, and did not agree that online assessment allows young learners to achieve their learning goals successfully.

Therefore, it can be concluded that most teachers agreed that online assessment is more interactive, fun, convenient in receiving the grades, and it also helped young learners to develop their technological competencies. Meanwhile, only half of the teachers agreed that effective use of (Madrasati) helps teachers assess young learners, and that different online assessment methods help exploring individual learning differences among young learners. However, more than half of the teachers did not agree that teachers can adequately evaluate young learners in online education. They also did not agree that online assessment is appropriate for all young learners. In addition, less than half of the teachers did not prefer online assessment and did not agree that online assessment helps achieving the learning goals successfully.

#### 4.3.2 Parents' Perceptions Towards Young Learners' Online Assessments

Table 5 below presents the descriptive statistics for the parents' responses to the ten questionnaire items regarding parents' perceptions of young learners' online assessment.

Table 5. The frequencies and percentage of parents' perceptions towards online assessments (n=20)

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- I prefer online assessments to paper-based assessments	20 100%	1 5.0%	5 25.0%	5 25.0%	4 20.0%	5 25.0%
2- Online learning helps improving young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online	20 100%	1 5.0%	8 40.0%	4 20.0%	2 10.0%	5 25.0%
3- Young learners can be evaluated well enough in online education	20 100%	1 5.0%	5 25.0%	3 15.0%	4 20.0%	7 35.0%
4- Effective use of (Madrasati) platform enables young learners to be better assessed	20 100%	1 5.0%	5 25.0%	2 10.0%	6 30.0%	6 30.0%
5- Online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment	20 100%	3 15.0%	11 55.0%	1 5.0%	4 20.0%	1 5.0%
6- Online assessment allows young learners to achieve the learning goals successfully	20 100%	1 5.0%	5 25.0%	2 10.0%	4 20.0%	8 40.0%
7- Different online assessment methods help exploring individual learning differences among young learners	20 100%	2 10.0%	5 25.0%	1 5.0%	7 35.0%	5 25.0%
8- Online assessment is appropriate for all young learners	20 100%	0 0.0%	6 30.0%	4 20.0%	4 20.0%	6 30.0%
9- Online assessment is more interactive and engaging than paper-based assessment (by using multimedia such as videos or recordings)	20 100%	3 15.0%	11 55.0%	0 0.0%	2 10.0%	4 20.0%
10- Online assessment is more fun than paper-based assessment	20 100%	4 20.0%	10 50.0%	1 5.0%	2 10.0%	3 15.0%

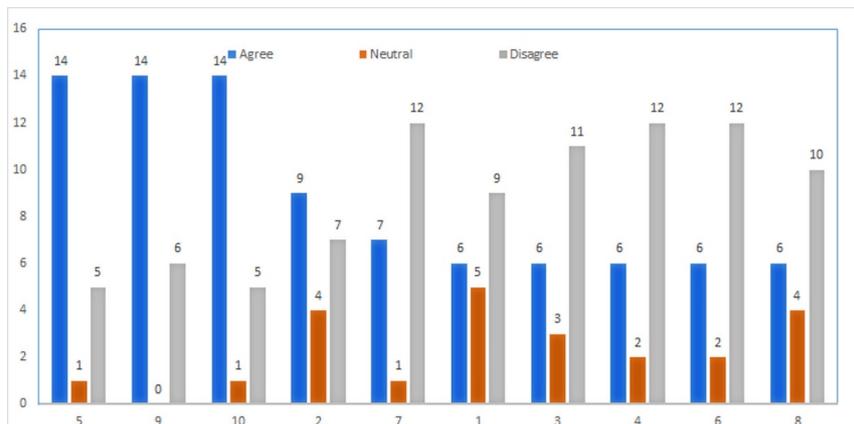


Figure 4. Frequencies of the participants in relation with their agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items (n=20)

Results show that most parents (70%) agreed that online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than on paper-based assessment. Most parents also agreed that online assessment is more interactive, engaging and fun particularly in contrasts with paper-based assessment.

Conversely, 60% of the parents did not agree that different online assessment methods help exploring individual learning differences among young learners. More than half of them also disagreed that effective use of (Madrasati) platform enables young learners to be better assessed and that online assessment allows young learners to achieve the learning goals successfully. Furthermore, more than half of the parents did not agree that young learners can be evaluated well enough in online education. Half of the parents also did not agree that online assessment is appropriate for all young learners. Moreover, less than half of the parents agreed that online learning helps improving young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online. Less than half of the parents also did not prefer online assessment to paper-based assessment.

In conclusion, the results indicate that most parents agreed that online assessment is more convenient in receiving grades, more interactive, and more fun compared to paper-based assessment. However, most parents did not agree that online assessment is adequate in evaluating young learners and in exploring their individual differences. They also disagreed that online assessment is appropriate for all young learners, and that it allows them to achieve the learning goals successfully. While, less than half of the parents agreed that online assessment improves young learners' technological capabilities, less than half of them also did not prefer online assessment.

#### 4.3.3 Comparison between the Level of Agreement of Teachers' Perceptions vs. Parents' Perceptions Towards Online Assessments (OA)

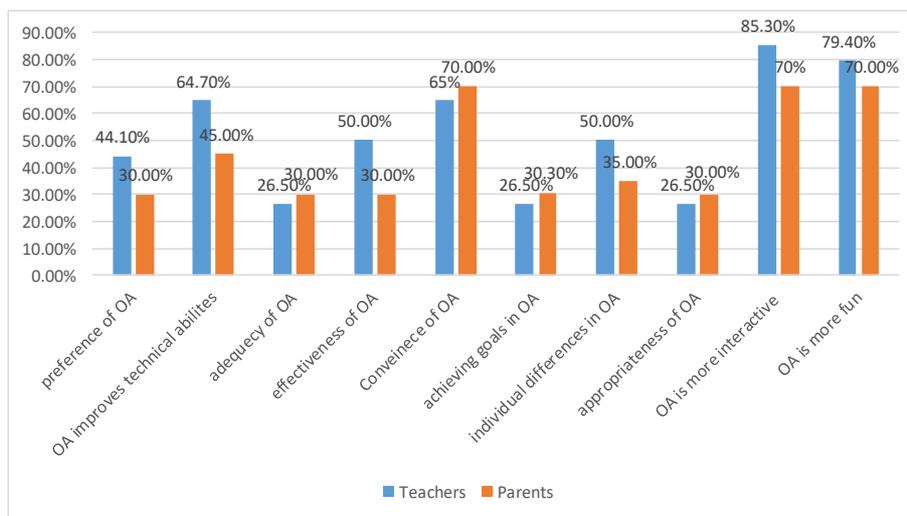


Figure 5. Comparison between the level of agreement of teachers' perceptions vs. parents' perceptions towards Online Assessments (OA)

The Figure 5 above shows a comparison between the level of agreement of teachers' perceptions vs. parents' perceptions towards online assessment. Findings show that most teachers and parents agreed that online assessment is more interactive, fun, and convenient in receiving the grades, compared to paper-based assessment. However, most of the teachers and parents did not agree that online assessment is adequate in evaluating young learners. Most of them also did not agree that online assessment is appropriate for all young learners, and that it allows them to achieve the learning goals successfully. Nevertheless, there is a difference between teachers' and parents' responses to several items by more than 10%. More teachers than parents preferred online assessment and thought it improves young learners' technological competencies. While half of the teachers agreed that effective use of Madrasati platform enables young learners to be better assessed, and to explore their individual differences, parents' level of agreement ranged between 30 to 35% only.

#### 4.3.4 The Challenges Faced by Primary-School EFL Teachers Regarding Online Assessment

Table 6 below shows the descriptive statistics of the primary-school EFL teachers' perceptions towards online assessment challenges.

Table 6. The frequencies and percentage for the challenges faced by primary-school EFL teachers regarding online assessments (n=34)

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Online assessments are often associated with technical problems	34 100%	7 20.6%	19 55.9%	5 14.7%	3 8.8%	0 0.0%
2- Lack of physical interaction could present a limiting factor in assessing young learners online	34 100%	9 26.5%	16 47.1%	7 20.6%	2 5.9%	0 0.0%
3- Online summative assessments are associated with anxiety	34 100%	1 2.9%	11 32.4%	10 29.4%	10 29.4%	2 5.9%
4- Young learners do not submit assignments on time due to their poor technical capabilities	34 100%	5 14.7%	20 58.8%	6 17.6%	3 8.8%	0 0.0%
5- It is difficult to conduct peer or team assessment online	34 100%	5 14.7%	15 44.1%	5 14.7%	8 23.5%	1 2.9%
6- There is a higher risk of young learners cheating in online assessments	34 100%	14 41.2%	11 32.4%	5 14.7%	4 11.8%	0 0.0%
7- There are difficulties in assessing young learners online in listening & speaking skills	34 100%	4 11.8%	18 52.9%	2 5.9%	6 17.6%	4 11.8%
8- Synchronous activities are difficult to be assessed in groups of large number of young learners	34 100%	6 17.6%	17 50.0%	9 26.5%	0 0.0%	2 5.9%
9- Many young learners copy each other's assignments in online learning	34 100%	7 20.6%	16 47.1%	6 17.6%	3 8.8%	2 5.9%
10- Parents/ private tutors might help young learners in taking English online assessment which affects the assessment's reliability	34 100%	19 55.9%	12 35.3%	2 5.9%	0 0.0%	1 2.9%

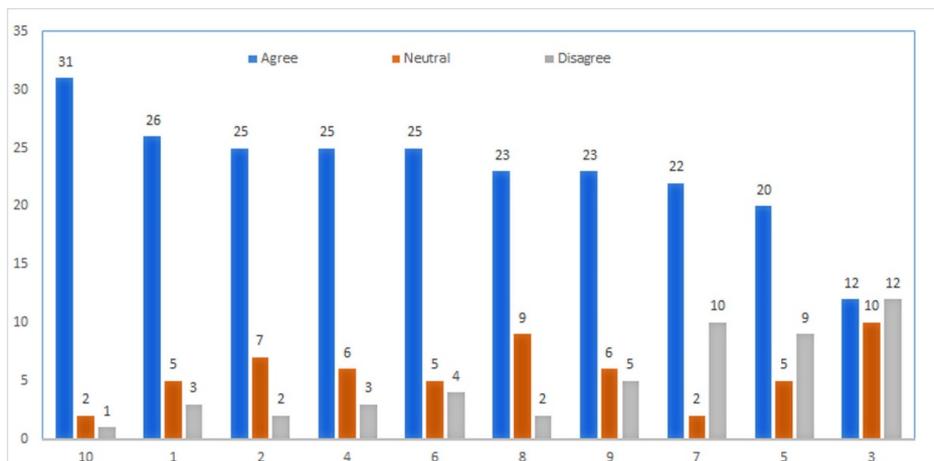


Figure 6. Frequencies of the participants in relation with their agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items (n=34)

The results from data analysis show that primary-school EFL teachers faced several challenges in assessing young learners online. The challenges were identified through ten items. Most teachers (91.2%) agreed that online assessments are associated with lack of reliability, due to parents’ or private tutors’ help in taking the assessment. It is also found that most teachers agreed that online assessments are often associated with technical problems, risk of cheating, lack of physical interaction, and poor technical capabilities of young learners.

Moreover, more than half of the teachers agreed that synchronous activities, copying assignments, assessing listening and speaking skills, and conducting online peer or team assessments were among the challenges of online assessments. Remarkably, the least agreed upon challenge among teachers is that online summative assessments are associated with anxiety, in which only 12 of the teachers agreed with it, and the same number of teachers disagreed with it. This indicates that there is a disparity in teachers’ perceptions towards online assessment anxiety.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the main challenges faced by teachers were lack of reliability of online assessment, technical problems, risk of cheating, lack of physical interaction, and poor technical capabilities of young learners. Moreover, more than half of the teachers agreed that conducting online synchronous activities and peer/ team assessments were among the online assessment challenges. More than half of them also agreed with the challenges of copying assignments, and assessing listening and speaking skills online. However, the least agreed upon challenge is that summative online assessments are associated with anxiety.

#### 4.3.5 The Challenges Faced by Parents Regarding Online Assessment

Table 7 below shows the descriptive statistics of the parents’ perceptions towards online assessment challenges.

Table 7. The frequencies and percentage the challenges faced by parents regarding online assessment (n=20)

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Online assessments are often associated with technical problems	20	7	11	2	0	0
	100%	35.0%	55.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2- Lack of physical interaction could present a limiting factor in assessing young learners online	20	7	13	0	0	0
	100%	35.0%	65.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
3- Online summative assessments are associated with anxiety	20	1	11	3	5	0
	100%	5.0%	55.0%	15.0%	25.0%	0.0%
4- Young learners do not submit assignments on time due to their poor technical capabilities	20	4	15	1	0	0
	100%	20.0%	75.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%
5- It is difficult to conduct peer or team assessment online	20	2	11	4	2	1
	100%	10.0%	55.0%	20.0%	10.0%	5.0%
6- There is a higher risk of young learners cheating	20	5	11	2	1	1

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
in online assessments	100%	25.0%	55.0%	10.0%	5.0%	5.0%
7- There are difficulties in assessing young learners online in listening & speaking skills	20	5	11	1	2	1
8- Synchronous activities are difficult to be assessed in groups of large number of young learners	20	7	10	2	1	0
9- Many young learners copy each other's assignments in online learning	20	1	9	2	8	0
10- Parents/ private tutors might help young learners in taking English online assessment which affects the assessment's reliability	20	6	9	3	2	0

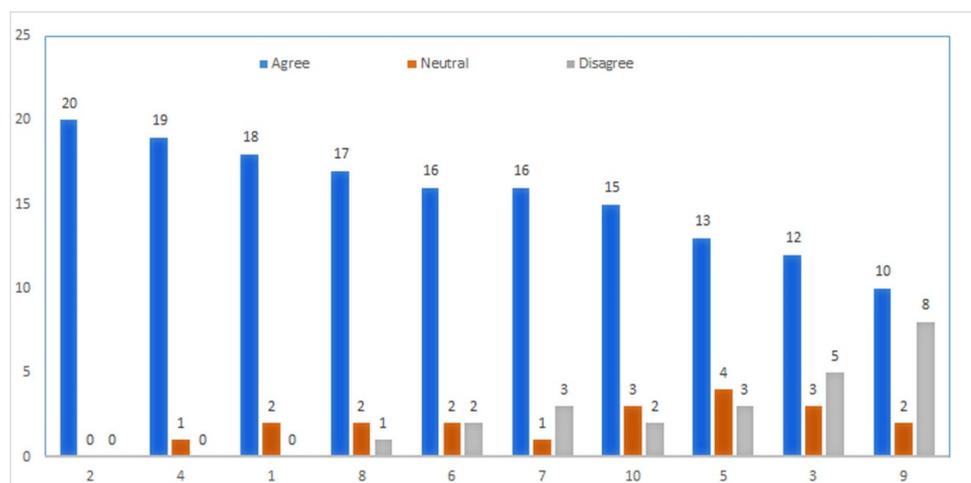


Figure 7. Frequencies of the participants in relation with their agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items (n=20)

The results from data analysis show that the parents faced several challenges in the online assessment. The challenges were identified through ten items. Table 7 and Figure 6 show that all the parents (100%) agreed that lack of physical interaction could present a limiting factor in assessing young learners online. Also, all of the parents except one perceived that young learners do not submit assignments on time due to their poor technical capabilities. Moreover, most of the parents agreed that technical problems, synchronous activities of large groups, and the risk of cheating were among the main challenges of online assessment. Most of the parents also agreed with the challenges of assessing listening and speaking skills online, and with the lack of reliability of online assessments, due to parents' or private tutors' help in taking the assessment.

Furthermore, only a little bit more than half of the parents agreed that it is difficult to conduct peer or team assessment online, and that online summative assessments are associated with anxiety. However, the least agreed upon challenge among parents is that many young learners copy each other's assignments in online learning, in which only half of the parents agreed with.

In conclusion, the results suggest that the top challenges faced by parents were lack of physical interaction, poor technical capabilities of young learners, technical problems, and synchronous activities of large groups. Moreover, most parents agreed that the risk of cheating, assessment of listening and speaking skills, lack of reliability in online assessments, peer/ team assessments, and summative assessment anxiety are among the online assessment challenges. However, the least agreed upon challenge is that many young learners copy each other's assignments in online learning.

4.3.6 Comparison between the Level of Agreement of Teachers’ Challenges vs. Parents’ Challenges of Online Assessments (OA)

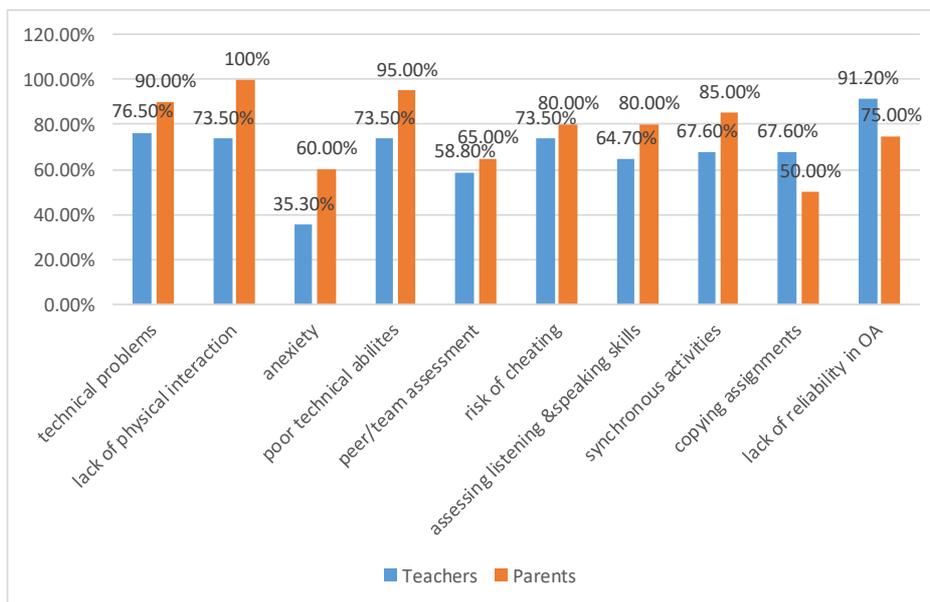


Figure 8. Comparison between the level of agreement of teachers’ challenges vs. parents’ challenges of Online Assessments (OA)

The Figure 8 above shows a comparison of the level of agreement of teachers’ challenges vs. parents’ challenges of online assessment. The results show that most of the teachers and parents agreed that online assessments are associated with technical problems, lack of physical interaction, and poor technical capabilities of young learners. Moreover, most of the teachers and parents agreed that online assessments are associated with cheating, and that it is difficult to assess a large group of young learners especially in listening and speaking activities. However, almost half or a little bit more than half of the teachers and parents agreed that many young learners copy each other’s assignments in online learning, and that it is difficult to conduct peer or team assessment online. While there is a difference between teachers’ and parents’ responses by more than 25%, where more parents than teachers agreed that online summative assessments are associated with anxiety.

4.3.7 Primary-School EFL Teachers’ Perceptions of the Methods Used in Assessing Young Learners Online

Table 8 below shows the descriptive statistics of the primary-school EFL teachers’ perceptions of the methods used in assessing young learners online. Their perceptions were identified through ten items.

Table 8. The frequencies and percentage of primary-school EFL teachers’ perceptions of the methods used in assessing young learners online (n=34)

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1- Peer and team assessments can help motivate best efforts as well as help young learners learn from each other	34	3	20	6	4	1
	100%	8.8%	58.8%	17.6%	11.8%	2.9%
2- Self-Assessment (young learners' participation in assessing their own learning process and achievement) is an effective assessment method	34	3	18	7	4	2
	100%	8.8%	52.9%	20.6%	11.8%	5.9%
3- Formative assessment with timely and appropriate feedback throughout a course is an effective assessment technique	34	5	17	11	1	0
	100%	14.7%	50.0%	32.4%	2.9%	0.0%
4- Diagnostic assessments are useful techniques for determining young learners' individual strengths, weaknesses prior to instruction.	34	7	16	7	3	1
	100%	20.6%	47.1%	20.6%	8.8%	2.9%
5- Summative assessment is an effective	34	2	18	10	3	1

items	n	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
assessment technique	100%	5.9%	52.9%	29.4%	8.8%	2.9%
6- E-portfolios support young learners' learning process	34	3	15	12	2	2
	100%	8.8%	44.1%	35.3%	5.9%	5.9%
7- Online discussions are an effective assessment technique.	34	8	17	5	4	0
	100%	23.5%	50.0%	14.7%	11.8%	0.0%
8- Instant feedback helps young learners to overcome their difficulties	34	8	19	5	2	0
	100%	23.5%	55.9%	14.7%	5.9%	0.0%
9- Applications such as: kahoot!, plickers and quizlet can be effective in assessing young EFL learners online	34	7	24	3	0	0
	100%	20.6%	70.6%	8.8%	0.0%	0.0%
10- Attendance records should be considered in assessment.	34	4	24	5	1	0
	100%	11.8%	70.6%	14.7%	2.9%	0.0%

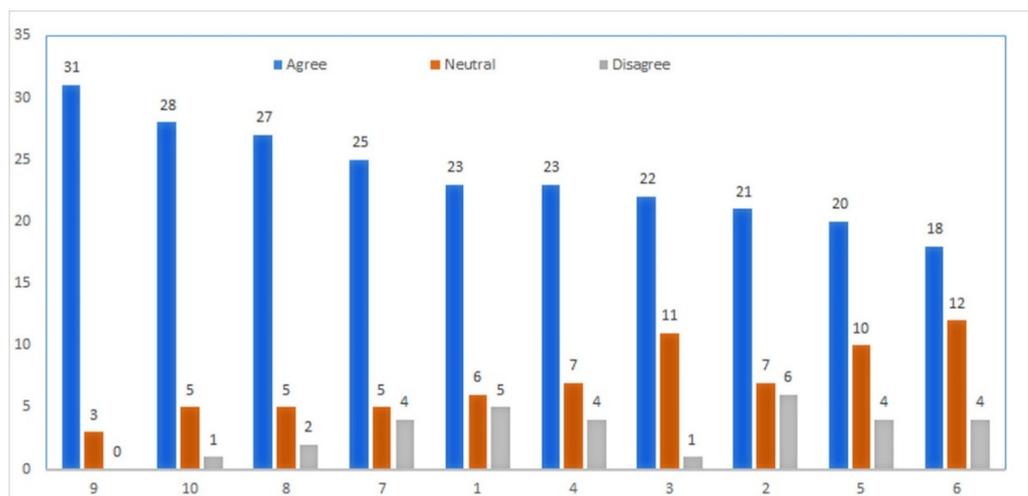


Figure 9. Frequencies of the participants in relation with their agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items (n=34)

The findings show that teachers held positive views of various online methods and techniques for the assessment of young EFL learners. Table 8 and Figure 9 show that most teachers (91.2%) agreed that applications such as: kahoot!, plickers and quizlet can be effective in assessing young EFL learners online. Moreover, most teachers agreed that instant feedback helps young learners to overcome their difficulties, and that attendance records should be considered in online assessment. These findings indicate that EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards gamifying young learners' online assessment by integrating formative assessment applications such as: kahoot!, plickers and quizlet, along with providing instant feedback to enhance learners' performance and to overcome their challenges.

Furthermore, more than half of the teachers agreed that online discussions, peer and team assessments, diagnostic assessments and formative assessments are all effective in assessing young learners online. More than half of the teachers also agreed that self-assessment, and summative assessment are effective online assessment methods. However, the least agreed upon online assessment method is the E-portfolio, in which only 52.9% of the teachers agreed with it.

Therefore, it can be concluded that most teachers agreed with the numerous online methods for the assessment of young EFL learners. Most teachers agreed that application such as kahoot!, plickers, and quizlet can be effective in online assessment. Moreover, most teachers perceived attendance record, instant feedback, online discussions and peer/ team assessment to be effective in assessing young learners online. Furthermore, most teachers thought that diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, self-assessment, and summative assessment are all effective online assessment methods. However, the least agreed upon online assessment method is the E-portfolio.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 *The Primary-School EFL Teachers' Perceptions Towards Young Learners' Online Assessments*

Based on teachers' perceptions towards online assessment, it has been found that online assessment is more fun and more interactive compared to paper-based assessment. This result is consistent with the study of (Louwrens & Hartnett, 2015: 27) that revealed students are more emotionally engaged and more elicited through the facilitation and design of the online activities. In addition to this, the studies of (Alahdal & Alqasham, 2020: 361; Alruwais et al., 2018: 35) also confirmed that online assessments provide a deeper understanding than do face-to-face evaluations, due to higher-order reasoning and promotion of instructional goals. In addition, it has been found that, online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment. This finding is in line with the study of (Alharbi et al., 2021: 142) that was conducted on the Madrasati platform, which revealed that posting automatically graded online assessments and quizzes, helps students get instant feedback which is more convenient than the traditional paper-based assessments. Moreover, based on findings of (Chinyerei, 2021: 303; Alruwais et al., 2018: 35), the online assessments are more flexible and convenient also in terms of place and time, allowing students located in the remote areas the opportunity to appear in the exam from anywhere and anytime. In addition, it has been found that online learning helps improve young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online. The same has been confirmed by (Proshkova, 2020: 845) as online assessments increase students' digital literacy by using and adopting different digital educational technologies in online learning and in online assessment. The study of (Patmanthara & Hidayat, 2018: 1) also identifies the same that online assessment improves students' skills in the usage of technology.

### 5.2 *Parents' Perceptions Towards Young Learners' Online Assessments*

Regarding parents' perceptions towards online assessment, it has also been found that online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment and online assessment is more interactive and engaging, and online assessment is more fun than paper-based assessment. In addition to this, the studies of (Alahdal & Alqasham, 2020: 361; Alruwais, Wills, & Wald, 2018: 35) also confirmed that online assessments provide a deeper understanding and promote instructional goals. While it has been found that, online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment. Also, it has been found that few parents preferred online assessments and agreed that online assessments are appropriate for all young learners compared to paper-based assessments. While parents also agreed that online learning helps improve young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online. The same findings have been confirmed through the study of (Patmanthara & Hidayat, 2018: 1) which identified that online assessment improves students' digital literacy skills.

### 5.3 *The Challenges Faced by Primary-School EFL Teachers Regarding Online Assessment*

Based on the challenges faced by teachers regarding online assessment, it has been found that most teachers agreed with the items, which indicates that they faced numerous challenges regarding online assessments. It has been found that lack of reliability of online assessments, technical problems, lack of physical interaction, poor technical capabilities, cheating of young learners, synchronous activities, and students copying each other's assignments are the main challenges faced by teachers. These findings are consistent with the findings of (Guangul et al., 2020: 519), that confirmed cheating is extensive in online learning and assessment due to a lack of clear supervision of student progress. It has also been found that the absence of teachers and the lack of physical interaction among young learners could present a limiting factor, which is consistent with the study of (Alahdal & Alqasham, 2020: 360) that confirmed such limitations. Furthermore, in the study of (Remmi & Hashim, 2021: 298), it has been also found that poor technical capabilities and technical problems are the main challenges in the online assessment of students. The findings of (Khan et al., 2021: 4) also showed that online assessments are associated with several challenges, such as security, validity and integrity challenges. Furthermore, the study of (Öz, 2014: 47) found that technical capabilities and technical problems can have a significant impact on the students' attitudes concerning online-based assessment.

### 5.4 *The Challenges Faced by Parents Regarding Online Assessment*

Based on challenges faced by parents regarding online assessments of young learners, it has been found that lack of physical interaction, and poor technical capabilities of young learners are the top challenges faced by parents in online assessment. Furthermore, it has been also found that online assessments are often associated with technical problems, and synchronous activities are difficult to assess in groups of a large number of young learners. In the study of (Remmi & Hashim, 2021: 298) it has been also found that poor technical capabilities and technical

problems are the main challenges in the online assessment of students. The findings of the study conducted by Öz (2014: 47) also found that technical capabilities and technical problems have a significant impact on the students' attitudes concerning online-based assessment. It has been also found that parents faced the challenges of private tutors help to young learners in taking English online assessments and a higher risk of cheating in online assessments which affects the assessment's reliability of younger learners. Similarly, the study of (Guangul et al., 2020: 519), found out that cheating is extensive in online learning and students' assessment due to a lack of clear supervision on student study progress in online nature. In addition to this, parents also faced the challenges of assessing young learners online in listening and speaking skills, and peer or team assessment online.

#### *5.5 Primary-School EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Methods Used in Assessing Young Learners Online*

Regarding teachers' perceptions of techniques and methods used in assessing young learners online, it has been found that different applications such as kahoot!, plickers and quizlet can be effective in assessing young EFL learners online, and instant feedback helps young learners to overcome their difficulties. These findings are consistent with the study of Olatoye (2015: 31), that points out that gamifying students' learning and assessment has a great impact on students' performance and outcomes.

In addition to this, it has been found that, online discussions, formative assessment with timely and appropriate feedback throughout a course, diagnostic assessments, summative assessment, self-assessment and E-portfolios are all effective assessment methods that can be used in assessing young learners online. Furthermore, it has been also found that peer and team assessments motivate best efforts, as well as help young learners, learn from each other. The findings of (Abduh, 2020: 1) also showed that instructors exhibited such as moderate attitudes and positive perceptions concerning the methods and techniques used to assess students online. Moreover, the results indicated that teachers were agreeing about all the methods used in assessing young learners online, this finding is supported by the study of (Akçay et al., 2021: 409) which showed that teachers' usage of a combination of peer and self-online assessments, enhances the validity and objectivity of online assessments among young learners.

## **6. Conclusion**

### *6.1 Conclusion*

The research study presents online assessment in primary public schools in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic, from the EFL teachers' and parents' perceptions. The study is carried out to answer the following three questions: the perceptions of teachers and parents towards online assessment, the challenges that both teachers and parents face in implementing or dealing with online assessments, and the perceptions that the teachers have of online assessment methods used in assessing young EFL learners in primary public schools. The findings show that based on teachers' perceptions towards online assessment, online assessment is more fun and more interactive compared to paper-based assessment. While online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment. Also, online learning helps improve young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online.

Regarding parents' perceptions towards online assessment, Similarly, it has been found that online assessment is more fun, interactive and convenient than paper-based assessment. Also, few parents preferred online assessments and agreed that online assessments are appropriate for all young learners compared to paper-based assessments. Furthermore, parents agreed that online learning helps improve young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online.

Based on the challenges faced by teachers regarding online assessment, it has been found that teachers faced serious challenges during the online learning experience. The main challenges face by teachers were lack of reliability in online assessments, cheating of young learners, lack of physical interaction, technical problems, poor technical capabilities of young learners, synchronous activities, and students copying each other's assignments.

Based on the challenges faced by parents regarding online assessments of young learners, it has been found that lack of physical interaction and poor technical capabilities of young learners are the top challenges faced by parents in online assessment. In addition, technical problems, cheating, and the difficulty of assessing large numbers of learners synchronously were among the challenges faced by parents. Moreover, parents faced the challenge of difficulties in assessing young learners online in listening and speaking skills, and peer or team assessment online.

Regarding teachers' perceptions of techniques and methods used in assessing young learners online, it has been found that different applications such as kahoot!, plickers and quizlet can be effective in assessing young EFL learners online and instant feedback helps young learners to overcome their difficulties. In addition to this,

attendance records, online discussions, formative assessment with timely and appropriate feedback throughout a course, diagnostic assessments, summative assessment, and self-assessment are effective assessment methods in online assessment. Furthermore, it has been found that peer and team assessments, and E-portfolios support young learners' learning process.

### 6.2 Limitations of the Study

The current study has a number of limitations. First, the sample size of the study is relatively small. Therefore, the results might not be rigorously generalizable to wider populations. Second, the study's research design rested on responses to closed-ended statements. A mixed-methods approach, involving not only quantitative data but also qualitative data such as the kind that come from semi-structured interviews, could yield a more in-depth analysis of the topics. Last, the convenience-sampling method implemented in the current study can present limitations; namely, the potential bias of the sampling technique might prevent a rigorous generalization of the results to the target population.

### 6.3 Recommendations

The findings of the study point to a number of recommendations, which are discussed here. First, it has been found that online assessment is more enjoyable and more convenient than paper-based assessment because students receive their grades faster in the online context than in the paper-based one. From this finding, we can reasonably conclude that the continued use of online assessments, perhaps alongside traditional physical assessments, will present several advantages. Moreover, this study has found that online assessments are associated with cheating, as students might surreptitiously receive help from parents or private tutors in online contexts, thus diminishing the accuracy of online assessments. To avoid online cheating, educators can adopt several effective procedures. For example, educators can diversify online assessment methods so that they include online presentations and E-portfolios, which are relatively difficult to cheat on. Another instance of cheating that this study uncovered is the tendency of many young learners to copy each other's assignments in online forums. A proper response to this damaging conduct would be for educators to assign a unique set of tasks to each student.

This study found that online assessments are associated with technical problems, some of which can be traced to students' poor technical abilities. Thus, educators should strive to overcome technical problems not only by properly training teachers and by providing them with top-quality technology and assistance, but also by improving students' technical abilities, perhaps through online training courses. Findings also show that online education can lead to a lack of physical interaction, which in turn can limit or distort the accuracy of assessment tools. Thus, educators should take steps to promote student-student and student-teacher interaction by, for example, encouraging young learners to turn on their web cameras during online classes and online assessments. Another step in this regard would be to allow young learners to attend school on certain days of the week, all while taking precautionary measures such as mask-wearing and physical distancing. This mixed approach to the young learners' education might reduce their sense of isolation and consequently improve their overall engagement and their academic performance.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Teachers' questionnaire

Please specify your agreement to the following statements, as SD= strongly disagree D= disagree N= neutral A= agree SA= strongly agree

Section 1: Teachers' perceptions of online assessment					
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1- I prefer online assessments to paper- based assessments					
2- Online learning helps improving young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online					
3- Young learners can be evaluated well enough in online education					
4- Effective use of (Madrasi) platform enables young learners to be better assessed					
5- Online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment					
6- Online assessment allows young learners to achieve the learning goals successfully					
7- Different online assessment methods help exploring individual learning differences among young learners					
8- Online assessment is appropriate for all young learners					
9- Online assessment is more interactive and engaging than paper-based assessment (by using multimedia such as videos or recordings)					
10- Online assessment is more fun than paper-based assessment					
Section 2: Challenges faced by teachers in online assessments					
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1- Online assessments are often associated with technical problems					
2- Lack of physical interaction could present a limiting factor in assessing young learners online					
3- Online summative assessments are associated with anxiety					
4- Young learners do not submit assignments on time due to their poor technical capabilities					
5- It is difficult to conduct peer or team assessment online					
6- There is a higher risk of young learners cheating in online assessments					
7- There are difficulties in assessing young learners online in listening & speaking skills					
8- Synchronous activities are difficult to be assessed in groups of large number of young learners					
9- Many young learners copy each other's assignments in online learning					
10- Parents/ private tutors might help young learners in taking English online assessment which affects the assessment's reliability					
Section 3: Teachers' perceptions of the methods used in online assessments					
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1- Peer and team assessments can help motivate best efforts as well as help young learners learn from each other					

2- Self-Assessment (young learners' participation in assessing their own learning process and achievement) is an effective assessment method					
3- Formative assessment with timely and appropriate feedback throughout a course is an effective assessment technique					
4- Diagnostic assessments are useful techniques for determining young learners' individual strengths, weaknesses prior to instruction.					
5- Summative assessment is an effective assessment technique					
6- E-portfolios support young learners' learning process					
7- Online discussions are an effective assessment technique					
8- Instant feedback helps young learners to overcome their difficulties					
9- Applications such as: kahoot!, plickers and quizlet can be effective in assessing young EFL learners online					
10- Attendance records should be considered in assessment.					

**Appendix 2: Parents' questionnaire**

Please specify your agreement to the following statements, as SD= strongly disagree D= disagree N= neutral A= agree SA= strongly agree

Section 1: Parents' perceptions of online assessment					
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1- I prefer online assessments to paper- based assessments					
2- Online learning helps improving young learners' technological competencies using various techniques such as: answering questions, submitting assignments and assessments online					
3- Young learners can be evaluated well enough in online education					
4- Effective use of (Madrasati) platform enables young learners to be better assessed					
5- Online assessment is more convenient because grades are received faster than paper-based assessment					
6- Online assessment allows young learners to achieve the learning goals successfully					
7- Different online assessment methods help exploring individual learning differences among young learners					
8- Online assessment is appropriate for all young learners					
9- Online assessment is more interactive and engaging than paper-based assessment (by using multimedia such as videos or recordings)					
10- Online assessment is more fun than paper-based assessment					
Section 2: Challenges faced by parents in online assessments					
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1- Online assessments are often associated with technical problems					
2- Lack of physical interaction could present a limiting factor in assessing young learners online					
3- Online summative assessments are associated with anxiety					
4- Young learners do not submit assignments on time due to their poor technical capabilities					

5- It is difficult to conduct peer or team assessment online					
6- There is a higher risk of young learners cheating in online assessments					
7- There are difficulties in assessing young learners online in listening & speaking skills					
8- Synchronous activities are difficult to be assessed in groups of large number of young learners					
9- Many young learners copy each other's assignments in online learning					
10- Parents/ private tutors might help young learners in taking English online assessment which affects the assessment's reliability					

### Appendix 3: parents' questionnaire (translated into Arabic)

ماهي درجة موافقتك للعبارات التالية:

1- تصورات أولياء الأمور حول الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) للمرحلة الابتدائية في المدارس الحكومية					
موافق بشدة	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق بشدة	
					1- أفضل الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) أكثر من الاختبارات الورقية
					2- تطور التعلم الالكتروني (عبر الانترنت) مهارات المتعلمين الصغار التقنية عن طريق استخدامهم لبعض التقنيات مثل حل الواجبات وتسليم الاختبارات الكترونياً عبر الانترنت
					3- يمكن تقييم المتعلمين الصغار الكترونياً (عبر الانترنت) بشكل جيد بمافيه الكفاية
					4- يتيح الاستخدام الفعال لمنصة (مدرستي) تقييم المتعلمين الصغار بشكل أفضل
					5- تُعتبر الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) أكثر ملاءمة وراحة لأنه يتم تلقي الدرجات بشكل أسرع من الاختبارات الورقية
					6- تُساهم الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) بتحقيق أهداف التعلم بنجاح للمتعلمين الصغار
					7- تُساعد الأنواع المختلفة من الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) في استكشاف الفروق الفردية في التعلم بين المتعلمين الصغار
					8- تُعتبر الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) مناسبة لجميع المتعلمين الصغار
					9- الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) أكثر تفاعلية وجاذبية من الاختبارات الورقية حيث يمكن استخدام الوسائط المتعددة كالصور والفيديوهات ومقاطع الصوت
					10- الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) أكثر متعة من الاختبارات الورقية
2- التحديات والصعوبات التي يواجهها أولياء الأمور حول الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) للمرحلة الابتدائية					
موافق بشدة	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق بشدة	
					1- غالباً ما يصاحب الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) بعض المشكلات التقنية
					2- يمكن أن يمثل نقص نقص التفاعل الجسدي عاملاً مُقيداً في تقييم المتعلمين الصغار الكترونياً (عبر الانترنت)
					3- تُسبب الاختبارات النهائية الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) القلق
					4- لا يُسلم المتعلمون الصغار الواجبات في الوقت المحدد بسبب ضعف قدراتهم التقنية
					5- من الصعب إجراء الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت) للأقران أو للمجموعات
					6- ترتفع نسبة الغش لدى المتعلمين الصغار في الاختبارات الالكترونية (عبر الانترنت)
					7- صعوبة التقييم الكترونياً (عبر الانترنت) لمهارات الاستماع والتحدث للمتعلمين الصغار

					8- يصعب تقييم الأنشطة الكترونياً (عبر الانترنت) مع عدد كبير من المتعلمين الصغار
					9- يقوم العديد من المتعلمين الصغار بنسخ الواجبات من بعضهم البعض في التعليم عن بُعد
					10- قد يُساعد أولياء الأمور/ المدرسين الخصوصيين صغار المتعلمين في حل اختبار اللغة الانجليزية (عبر الانترنت) مما يقلل من مصداقية نتائج الاختبار

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