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Exploring Teachers' Perceptions toward Online Assessment:

Perspectives and Challenges

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Abstract	Article info
The present research paper attempts at investigating online assessment at the department of English, Batna2 university during Covid-19. Focus was on teachers' perceptions of online assessment and the challenges that make its implementation a hard task. To this end, the descriptive approach was adopted, and a questionnaire has been addressed to the teachers of English at the department of English, Batna2 University. The obtained results have shown some optimistic views hold by some teachers toward online assessment and many negative attitudes shown by many others. These are mainly attributed to the difficulties of effectively implementing online assessment. Thus, it is concluded that unless the basic requirements of online assessment are met, continuing with it would be difficult.	Received 14 December 2021 Accepted 26 January 2022 Keywords: ✓ Online assessment: ✓ Teachers' perceptions: ✓ Online Assessment Challenges:



1. Introduction

Assessment of learning has always presented teachers with difficulties. So, while traditional assessment has always been considered reliable and valid, it has gone under radical changes to meet the requirements of contemporary society (Chaudharv& Dev. 2013). Assessing students at a distance, the alternative to traditional assessment, proved to be more complex and challenging. Distance or online assessment has been confronted with difficulties resulting from the constraints of online and demands environments, such as the physical distance between teacher and learner and the necessary technological means to communicate and provide a continuous and on time feedback on assessments (Kearns, 2012). Not having the required technical infrastructure, technological tools and experienced teaching stuff may create difficulties to continue safely with it 2021). Therefore, (Senel. assessing students online proves to be challenging and different questions related to remote assessment continue to intrigue educators teachers. How to assess and the assimilation of a certain content of a course? How to follow students' progress in that course? And how to provide an effective feedback that ensures а summative and formative assessments of learners? All these questions and others are the most important concerns of the educational community today; and answers

to these inquiries would remove a lot of ambiguities and ease the task of assessment at a distance.

Although different strategies and practices are adopted in online assessment, designing a valid and reliable test proved to be hard (Senel, 2021). Challenges and difficulties differ from one teaching environment to another and from one country to another. Algerian universities are trying hard to cope with the shift made toward distance. remote online or assessment and serious attempts are being made towards establishing an effective methodology based on clear objectives. However, it seems that these steady steps are realized with much difficulty and a lot of obstacles are blocking the way. In Batna2 University, the situation is not different. Different inquiries turned around the effectiveness of online assessment and the best practices that can be adopted for a successful implementation and realization of the teaching goals. Many teachers are also feeling ill at ease regarding their incapacity to cope properly with the challenges they are faced with when assessing learners remotely. Such a situation was behind the questions which we attempt to answer in the present research paper:

 a- What are the perceptions of teachers of English at the department of English, Batna2 university towards online assessment?

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- b- What are the challenges they are facing while making the shift to this new mode of assessment?
- c- And what are the possible remedial strategies that can make of online assessment a successful experience to both teachers and learners?

Answers to these questions would confirm the hypothesis set as follows: providing the needed requirements of online assessment would alter any negative perceptions towards it and make the possibility of implementing it a successful experience to all.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Assessment: Definition, Types, and Approaches

One effective way to define assessment is by contrasting it with another concept which is usually taken as synonymous to it. Assessment and testing are most of the time used interchangeably by most teachers thinking that both aim at the evaluation of learning and learners. However. approaching the two concepts reveals that they are different. So, while testing has a standard form and students are provided with clear instructions about test administration and grading, assessment evaluating centers around students' knowledge and abilities in multiple ways and in different contexts (Dikli, 2003). Different tools are used in testing like multiple choice tests, true/ false tests, short

answer, and essays. However, testing has been largely criticized as being inauthentic inefficient to provide accurate and information about students' progress, as it measures only what a student can do at a particular time (Dikli, 2003). Moreover, traditional assessment tools focus on measuring lower cognitive capacities of learners like memorization and recall, while high order thinking skills are ignored (Dikli, 2003). Exams are also similar to tests in that they are also used in assessment and are taken at the same time by all students under a formal supervision and graded by exam boards (Vitello & Williamson, 2017).

There are types of assessment; and it is the objective from assessment that determines the kind to adopt. If the attempt is to check understanding, then it is formative assessment. but if it is assessment of material, it is summative. Also, when the assessment is given to the whole class at the same time, like multiple choice tests, it is synchronous. However, if it is a long-term project to be graded according to a predetermined rubric, then it is asynchronous (Hooker, 2020). Thus, it is the kind of feedback the teacher is looking for which decides about the kind of assessment to administer.

Checking understanding by obtaining immediate feedback is possible with synchronous formative assessment. Using this kind of assessment allows students to ajuste théier learning after discovering their



mistakes in the immediate feedback provided to them. Using test items that require selection (multiple choice, truefalse) are adequate to get immediate 2021). feedback (Senel, Thus. in assessment for learning feedback can be very effective, if it is of quality and is positively received and used by learners in the improvement of their learning (Jones, 2005).

Teachers can also find asynchronous assessment an alternative to synchronous assessment as it has many advantages such as time flexibility. Students are given more time to make research to construct their understanding and are less dependent on the internet. Thus, frustration to give immediate feedback which demands a good quality of internet connectivity is not asynchronous posed in assessment. Students are also given the opportunity to demonstrate understanding more than knowledge, something that allows teachers to look at learning in terms of a process and not a product (Hooker, 2020). Thus, assessment practices are not the same and are subordinated to the desired objectives and the available means.

In traditional school settings, assessment has always been the means to measure students' learning. Today things are conceived differently, and assessment has become only one face to the currency. Gathering information about student learning can be achieved in a variety of ways (Dikli, 2003). Focusing on student's

progress and high order thinking skills at different times and in different contexts is the focus of most alternative assessments (Dikli, 2003). Shifting the emphasis from assessment of learning to assessment for learning has become the focus of alternative approaches to assessment. Assessment for learning is used to improve instruction and learning. . It provides a certain feedback that helps in deciding about the next steps in the teaching learning process (Sardareh & Saad. 2013). Feedback is used in the improvement of performance (Yambi, 2018). Portfolios, journals, and projects are examples of the tools used in alternative assessments. Although such tools prove to be difficult to evaluate and score, yet their flexibility and authenticity can make of them useful tools to be used in online assessment. (Dikli, 2003).

2.2 Methods for Assessment at a Distance

According to Kearns (2012) the types of assessments used by instructors in an online course have been reported in very few studies. Yet, two important studies were conducted. In the first study different online courses have been examined to identify the different methods employed by instructors. It was found that discussions, papers, written assignments, projects, quizzes, tests, and group works to be the mostly adopted assessment methods in online instruction. In another study, a number of instructors were questioned about the most effective assessment





methods that can be used in an online environment and their lists included projects, portfolios, self-assessment, timed tests, and asynchronous discussion. In addition to the list of methods they have provided, they have also come with different recommendations regarding online assessment. The regular administration of a variety of assignments followed by a timely meaningful feedback, in addition to the examination of the written records of student's discussion postings and e-mails are essential practices that keep teachers informed about student's understanding and progress.

Moreover, three criteria determine the strategy to adopt in online assessment: the media used, resources and the available time (Dikli, 2003). Thus, some of the suggested assessment strategies that can be employed in distance education take the form of individual works developed individually and sent by regular mail or by email, assessment based on contributions for group discussions, tests (automatically handled by computer program), term papers (analyzed by professor or assistants) and oral or written tests conducted in the presence of the instructor (sometimes through video conference) or with a remote assistant (Dikli, 2003).

Other assessment strategies have been also advocated. These included distributed and online assessments. In the first, distance learners use a specific software that can be mailed or downloaded from internet; while, in the second, the computer browser is directed to the given web page without any installment (Dikli, 2003). The rapid technological improvements allowed also for large-scale tests which are computer-based, and learners can be provided with immediate feedback. So, whatever is the strategy to be adopted in online assessment, several factors must be considered prior implementation as they may present serious challenges (Dikli, 2003).

Fairness is the first concern that instructors should care about. Learners receiving online tests should not be rewarded or punished because of their location. In other words, learners can submit their assignments at different settimes (Dikli, 2003). Singularity also matters in distant assessment and to ensure it, learners are required to respond to test items at the time, no matter where they are. Also, the effectiveness of assessment at a distance can be increased if learners are encouraged to develop their study skills by providing them with directions to learning in key subject areas and allowing them to assess their own progress by relating their learning to their works and experiences (Dikli, 2003). However, the fact that assessment at a distance present learner with plenty of opportunities to cheat, forced educators to think of different ways to deter dishonesty and plagiarism in online assessment. Designing assessments that involve higher order thinking skills, assigning unique questions and tasks, using



different online tools to detect plagiarism, and warning students of the penalties for cheating are few examples of the possible strategies that have been adopted and which proved to be very effective (Malaya, 2020).

Another factor to consider before implementing online assessment is the role of interaction between instructor and learner. Computer technology helped in making this kind of interaction possible (Dikli, 2003). However, instructors must make sure that learners have familiarity with the necessary tools for the specific assessment strategies to be used, such as online chats, web-based quizzes, digital drop box for assignments...etc. (Dikli, 2003).

3. Research Method and Tools

In the present study, the problem under investigation requires exploring teachers' perceptions and views regarding online assessment. The nature of the needed data necessitates the adoption of a descriptive approach in which attitudes, opinions, and behaviors experiences. are best explored using qualitative research; while statistical analysis and interpretation of the results are made possible using quantitative research (Dawson, 2007). In fact, it is the nature of the problem under investigation which determines the research method to adopt (Rugg & Petre, 2007). The main data gathering tool to explore and describe quantitively and qualitatively the

perceptions of teachers towards online assessment is the questionnaire. Questionnaires if used consistently and accurately are expected to yield valid and reliable results (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015).

The questionnaire has been administered to the population of teachers of English at the department of English, Batna2 University. It is composed of thirteen items varying between closed and open-ended questions which are further divided into three sections. Section one seeks important background information about our informants: their gender, age, and teaching experience. Section two aims at gaining insight about teachers' understanding of assessment. the difficulties met while preparing tests, the changes observed in assessment during Covid-19 and how these changes are perceived by teachers. Section three deals with teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the shift made towards online assessment and the possibilities to cope with it in our universities.

3.1 Population and Sample

In this study, the researcher carried out investigation on the population of teachers of English at the department of English, Batna2 University. Discovering their perceptions and attitudes toward online assessment would help in deciding about the possible and most appropriate strategies that can be adopted for a successful implementation of online assessment.



There is no purposive selection of the sample as all teachers at the department, regardless their status, teaching experience and the courses they teach, are concerned with the issue. The process of selecting people or elements to be included in a research study is known as sampling (Remler & Ryzin, 2015). And as the objective is to generalize the findings of the research on a larger population, random sampling is adopted as the most suitable sampling techniques. A random sample is more generalizable than other samples and allows for choosing participants from a population randomly (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015). Therefore, the researcher mailed the questionnaires to the population of teachers of English at the department of English, Batna2 university who are making seventy (70) full-time teachers, as contact has become limited, due to the current health crisis. However, only forty- seven teachers responded positively to the questionnaire; the remaining population did not, or simply forwarded promises, which have not been fulfilled till the moment of writing this paper.

3.2 Analysis and Discussion of the Results

Analysis and discussion of the results obtained from the questionnaire reveal important facts about the perceptions of teachers of English at the department of English, Batna2 university toward online assessment and the possibilities of implementing it in Algerian universities in general and our university, Batna2, in particular.

In section one, analysis of the results obtained from questions: one, two and three show that 40 teachers from the total number of informants are female teachers, while only seven are representing the male gender. The average age of 63% of the total population ranges between 30 and 40; and the teaching experience of 59% is not less than ten years. These findings are illustrated in tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1. Teachers' Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	40	85.10%
Male	7	14.89%
Table 2. Teachers' Age		
Age(years)	Number	Percentage
20-30	10	21.27%
30-40	30	63.82%
	7	14.89%

Teaching Experience(years)	Number	Percentage
5-10	10	21.27%
10-20	28	59.57%
Over 20	9	14.89%



In section two, the fourth item attempts at knowing the respondents' views about the difficulty or ease of assessment and the results as shown in table four (4) clearly demonstrate an agreement among 80% of the inquired population about the difficulty lying in the assessment of learners and learning. Only nine teachers deny the existence of such a difficulty.

Table 4. Teachers' Views about theDifficulty/ Ease of Assessment

Answers	Number	Percentage
Difficult	38	80.85%
Easy	9	19.15%

The fifth item required from the respondents who acknowledged the difficulty of assessment to identify some factors which make of it a complex task for them .The followings are some suggested factors. First, the difficulty to be fair and equal with all students. Second, the complexity of designing a valid test; a test capable of revealing important information about the tested attribute and which takes into consideration the students' level and the nature of the course.

Considering it difficult or easy is linked the teachers' to diverse understandings of assessment. Therefore, they are further asked in the sixth question to provide us with their individual understanding and definitions of So. for teachers assessment. some

assessment is a kind of learning that enables teachers obtain a clearer image about the realization of the course objectives and the students' analytical skills. Such a view is clearly expressed by one teacher as follows: "Assessment is the use of various methods and tools with the ultimate goal of measuring and evaluating students' acquisition of certain skills and learning progress". Assessment is also regarded by other participants as a systematic process that allows the teacher to examine the progress made by students and helps in identifying the problems they might have at a certain point in the course progress. Assessment is also defined in terms of testing and evaluating the skills and knowledge the learner has acquired from a certain course. Another important aspect of assessment that lies at the heart of the concept's meaning is provided by one of the informants who says about it the following: "Assessment is not necessarily about students' products or performance, but rather about evaluating one's teaching to be able to arrive at a clearer image about the effectiveness of what was given in class".

After we have been provided with significant definitions of assessment, the desire to know whether our informants are really able to practically implement their theoretical knowledge when it comes to designing a test or not; and to specify the kind of difficulties confronting them while designing tests are behind the two next



inquiries. Answers to questions seven and eight are illustrated in table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' Views aboutDesigning Tests

Answers	Number	Percentage
Difficult	28	59.57%
Easy	19	40.43%

The obtained results clearly show that there is not a big difference between those who believe that designing a test is not an easy task (59.57%) and those who deny this fact. Thus, contrary to what was expected, there is not an overwhelming majority agreeing with the view that designing tests is such a complex job and a significant percentage of respondents (40%) deny the existence of such complexity. Although designing tests is a difficult task to many teachers, many others deny the existence of any difficulty or complexity. Such a view be attributed either their can to unwillingness to answer the second part of the question which requires from them to identify the kind of difficulties facing them when designing tests or to a true conviction about the nature of tests.

And as the situation radically changed in 2019 with the rapid spread of corona virus, the researcher wants to know its consequences on assessment of learners and learning. Therefore, answers to questions nine, ten and eleven reveal important facts about online assessment: For instance, assessment of learning is

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becoming a challenging task for both teachers and students when it is done online or at a distance. Also, the pandemic is making of online assessment unavoidable and a necessary measure. Furthermore, the new mode of assessment, which in addition to be no easy task, is not as reliable as traditional assessment.

These views are explored in depth in the third section of the questionnaire, where the most intriguing issues related to online assessment are raised. For example, the twelfth addresses the capacity of Algerian universities to handle the transition made towards online assessment. The obtained results show an agreement among our informants on the fact that our universities are not fully ready to take the challenge and make the transition towards online assessment. Bellow are a few direct statements followed by a table illustrating such a view.

"What we are doing now has nothing to do with online assessment. It is just the traditional one sent via email boxes." "Unfortunately, Algerian universities are handling this shift in an improper way...in fact designing an online test is a much more complex task"." Students are caring about grades, nothing more! They cheat when passing online tests".



Table 6. Algerian Universities and theTransition to Online Assessment

Answers	Number	Percentage
Ready	11	23.40%
Not Ready	36	76.60%

negative perceptions Despite the expressed by most respondents, the attempt to find out any positiveness that recognizes the efforts made by the Algerian educational institutions to cope with this new mode of assessment despite the undeniable difficulties is behind the last inquiry. Answers to the thirteenth question distinguish two major views.

Table 7. Efforts to Cope with OnlineAssessment

Answers	Number	Percentage
Yes	30	63.83%
No	17	36.17%

The first view is expressed by the majority represented by 63% and it shows optimism among teachers regarding the efforts made by the different Algerian educational institutions to cope properly with online assessment. An example of such an attitude is the following statement to one teacher who says in clear terms: *"Everything has a beginning. Algerian universities are trying their best to catch up*

with the rail of developed universities in this kind of teaching and assessing learners. Up to now, it seems that we are on the right track".

The second view is expressed by a small percentage of teachers (36%) who do not acknowledge any efforts made by the different institutions to cope with online assessment. Expressions of such a belief are echoed in the following statements: "I think they are struggling to do so" "They actually failed to cope with it because the shift towards online assessment has been sudden and completely new to both teachers and students and no proper training was conducted before implementing it in Algerian educational institutions." "It is an uncomfortable and a confusing experience."

The attempt to discuss and interpret the above findings revealed important facts about our informants, their perceptions and attitudes toward online assessment; the different challenges they are confronting while making the shift to online assessment and their future perspectives about this new mode of assessment.

Answers to questions one, two and three from "section one" suggest important facts about the chosen population in the present research paper. For instance, having more female teachers dominating the teaching scene shows the tendency among the female gender to study and teach languages. A profession in which

they have exceled to a large degree. This is not to exclude the role played by male teachers, but simply to account for the significance of the existing fact. Second, having also our students monitored by a generation of young teachers is an indicator of working with a young teaching stuff capable of showing more adaptability and flexibility in the use of technology in the domain of teaching. Add to this, is the fact that a teaching experience of not less than five years is a good sign of a professional readiness that our informants are equipped with and which plays an important role in coping properly with the changes that accompanied Covid-19.

In section two, the obtained results indicate an agreement hold by most informants regarding the importance of assessment in the teaching learning process. Their beliefs are a reflection to a mature conception of the difference between assessment of learning and assessment for learning. This later is, in fact, the focus of alternative approaches to assessment (Sardareh & Saad, 2013). These alternative approaches to assessment provide a certain feedback that helps in deciding about the next steps in the teaching learning process (Sardareh & Saad, 2013). Furthermore, the different definitions given by the respondents to assessment stress the idea that in addition to be a form of learning, assessment is a continuous process that does not target the evaluation of a specific skill, but many skills, some of which transcend the boundaries of traditional assessments such as analysis and critical thinking. Add to this is the belief that assessment allows for the evaluation of not only learning but teaching as well . These constructive views about assessment reflect the academic competency of the population making the present study and suggest that it deserves to have the priority in counseling and decision making .

Moreover, recognizing the immense role of assessment in the teaching learning process is behind the concerns that teachers have about the complexity of designing tests. For example, the fifth question allowed us to discover some factors which make of assessment an important, but a complex task as well. For example, the difficulty to be fair and equal with all students, as some types of assessment oblige teachers to be sometimes subjective is one important factor. There is also the complexity of designing a valid test; a test capable of revealing important information about the tested attribute and takes consideration which into the students' level and the nature of the course. Designing a test turns also to be such a hard task when the objective is to design a test that is sufficiently accessible to all students, that covers all aspects of the curriculum and which is expected to measure what it intends to measure, among which learners' overall understanding is a primary objective from such testing.

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the situation completely And as changed during Covid-19, there was a consensus among the participants that online assessment has become unavoidable and necessary in our universities. These views are detected in their answers to the questions in the third section of the questionnaire. For example, in question twelve important facts about online assessment in our universities are unveiled. For instance, the lack of the necessary training that both teachers and students should have in the new technologies; in addition to the weak internet connectivity made it difficult for both teachers and students, especially those living in remote places, to have access to online tests thus, online assessment is seen a complex task. This fact cannot be ignored or sidelined, as it proves to be a crucial element in the process. Senel(2021) in this regard claimed that not having the required technical infrastructure, technological tools and experienced teaching stuff may create difficulties to continue safely with online assessment. Add to this is the fact that online assessment is making it hard for teachers to test what they really want to test. Thus, according to many, what is being measured is a student's ability to answer a question quickly only, but not understanding. Furthermore, it is strongly believed that online assessment does not fit in with some courses like writing and most of the time the works submitted online are not individual as cheating becomes easy and not always verifiable (google

searched). So, whatever is the strategy to be adopted in online assessment, several factors must be considered prior implementation as they may present serious challenges (Dikli, 2003).

These challenges which confront our universities in their attempt to handle the task effectively are attributed to many factors which are not limited to Algerian context only. Kearns (2021) for instance, claimed that online assessment is confronted with serious challenges resulting from the constraints and demands of online environments, such as the physical distance between teacher and learner and the necessary technological means to communicate and provide a continuous and on time feedback on assessments.

Consequently, any observed flaws in the implementation of online assessment are considered by many teachers a natural outcome to all beginnings and the possibility to effectively cope with it in the near future not an impossible task. So, one can conclude that although we are not fully prepared to make the transition to online assessment, the mission is not impossible, as the efforts to cope properly with it are continuously being made by the whole educational community.

4. CONCLUSION

The rapid and continuing spread of corona virus forced all nations to adapt their lives to the new setting which set new rules for a safe life. Distance has become a basic rule, as it is the only guarantee to safety and protection. Thus, all should live and behave with the other at a distance. This rule has been applied to different domains of life and no exception has been made.

Online education has become the alternative to traditional instruction in most countries in the world. Algeria is among the first nations to make the transition to online teaching and assessment higher in education. Teachers are adapting not only their teaching strategies, but their assessment practices as well to online environments. Thus, some tests and exams are taken in person and in class in some courses, and online in others. The new assessment strategies are perceived differently by teachers and students. So, while some regard them positively and support the new assessment practices, others are partially or totally against it.

Searching for the reasons leading to such perceptions and attitudes and trying to find out the possibilities of a successful implementation of online assessment in our universities form the basic goals from this research Research findings paper. demonstrated that the demands and constrains of online environments, such as the physical distance between teacher and learner and the scarcity in the technical tools are behind the above-described situation. However. such negative perceptions which resulted in a negative

behavior should not be encouraged, as no one has the alternative to online teaching or online assessment, and no one can predict the end to this pandemic. Hence, teachers are invited to try to cope wisely with the new situation to ensure continuity and help the transition to online in making environments a safe experience. Also, politicians and decision- makers should be aware of the true conditions in our universities, so that any gaps between theory and practice are properly bridged. Learners, as well, are urged to develop a more mature and responsible behavior when receiving instruction and knowledge at a distance. Finally, a successful transition to online environments requires the provision of the necessary technical and human resources in addition to a positive attitude hold by the whole educational community.

In the end, one can conclude that the sense of fear, non-trust and the desire to go back to old assessment methods did not emerge from the complexity of online assessment itself, but from the novelty of the experience on one hand, and the substantial lack in the needed technical and human resources on the other hand. Hence, if the ultimate goal is a successful implementation of online assessment, teachers should be provided with the substantial requirements online of assessment, because what they lack is not the capacity to do things, but the means to have them done.

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6. Appendices

Teachers' Questionnaire

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions toward Online Assessment: Perspectives and Challenges

Dear Colleagues:

Distant and hybrid learning forced many teachers to revise their evaluation methods and try to find better strategies for assessment. The present survey aims at knowing teachers' views and opinions regarding online assessment. The obtained data will help in highlighting the challenges and perspectives regarding the new assessment strategies. Answers to this survey will be kept anonymous and will be used only for research purposes.

Section One : Background Information

1.Gender :

a. Male

b. Female

2. Age.....

3. Teaching Experience :

a.1 to 5 years

b. 5 to 10 years

c. 10 to 20 years

d. More than 20

Section Two: Covid-19 and Assessment

4. According to you, is assessment the easiest part in the teaching task ?

a. Yes

b. No

5.If your answer is "b", can you give a reason or two that make/s of assessment a difficult task for you ?

6.In few words, can you please give your own definition of assessment ?

.....

7. Do you find difficulties when you prepare a test

- a. Yes
- **b**. No

8. If your answer is "a", would you please specify the kind of difficulties?

9.From your teaching experience, have you observed any change/s in the act of assessment these last years?

a. Yes

b. No

10.Is/Are the change/s positive or negative?

a.Positive

b. Negative

11. Whatever is your answer, can you describe in few words the kind of the observed change/s?

.....

Section Three : Online Assessment in Algerian Universities :

12.Do you think that Algerian universities are ready to realize the shift towards online assessment ? Explain

13. Have the Algerian educational institutions relatively coped with this new mode of

assessment ? Explain

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Thank you for your collaboration.



