EXAMINING FIRST YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS ONLINE SPEAKING ASSESSMENT AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Noorsaiyidah Suradi[1], Linda Khoo Mei Sui[2], Anidah Robani[3,] Cheong Kar Mee[4]

[1,2,4] Centre for Language Learning, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Malacca, Malaysia.
[3] Institute of Technology Management and Entrepreneurship, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Malacca, Malaysia.
Email: noorsaiyidah@utem.edu.my

Abstract

This study explores First Year Engineering students' perceptions towards online speaking assessment amidst COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure that the education process remained uninterrupted during the pandemic, schools and higher learning institutions were forced to shift to full time remote teaching and learning which has indirectly impacted assessment and evaluation of all courses. This study aims to examine first year engineering students' views on their experience having online speaking assessment amidst covid-19 pandemic. Investigating students' perceptions as the end user towards online assessment is highly crucial to determine the effectiveness of teaching and learning. A quantitative method of study was conducted with questionnaire derived from Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was adopted to collect responses from 163 undergraduate Diploma engineering students doing their first semester in Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Malaysia. The key findings indicated that the students were well receptive of online speaking assessment and were fully ready to have online speaking assessment in the future. The study also discovered that students' perceived self-efficacy towards online speaking assessment was low and there was significant difference in perceptions between students from rural and students from urban area on online speaking assessment. This study is important to higher learning institutions to serve as a guide in making planning related to implementation of online speaking assessment during the pandemic. This research is also significant for its contribution towards language teaching practices in higher learning institution and will be helpful for the educators to identify ways to enhance students' online assessment experience for an effective teaching and learning.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, higher learning institutions, assessment and evaluation, online speaking assessment, perception, engineering students.

Introduction

On January 30, 2020, COVID-19 was declared as a global public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) and it was then declared as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 [1]. The term 'pandemic' has been defined as "an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people" [2]. Due to the pandemic, schools, colleges and universities around the world were all closed abruptly in order to control the rapid spread of the virus. The rapid spread of coronavirus has caused unprecedented disruptions to almost all sectors including travel, business, economy and also education sectors at various levels. Schools and higher learning institutions were shut down to curb the spread of the virus. Students and instructors in higher learning institutions were severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic's unforeseen shifts [3]. The pandemic has resulted in largest online movement in the history

of education and has forced many organizations around the globe to adopt the emerging online communication platform technologies in order to ensure daily businesses can be done during this uncertain period. While at higher learning institutions, to ensure the education process remains uninterrupted, instructors were instructed to use a number of different online communication platforms for learning purposes [4]. Many reputable universities in the world have implemented fully online teaching and learning as a means of ensuring education continuity [5]. The University of Cambridge has become the first university in the United Kingdom to conduct online teaching and learning for the whole academic year 2020/2021 [6]. Since there was no clue when the uncertain circumstances would be over, most educational institutions across the globe have since decided to take the same move. This phenomenon led to the emergence of a new normal in teaching and learning in order to achieve their set learning objectives.

In Malaysia, like many other countries in the world, the government had enforced the Movement Control Order (MCO) to flatten the curve of the spread of Covid-19. The Ministry of Higher Education announced that all public and private universities in Malaysia were to conduct teaching and learning activities online until the end of December 2020 [7]. All students were instructed to vacant the campus and the staffs including instructors in the universities were asked to work from home. Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), a public university in Malaysia, began online learning on 18th March, 2020. The outbreak left no choice to instructors but to convert the curriculum for an online environment. Instructors had to think of the best way to deliver course content online while at the same time engage learners in entirely online classes. The pandemic caused the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning could not be carried out as planned and classroom activities including assessments were switched to online mode without any deliberate preparation. The sudden shift has created lots of challenges to both students and instructors.

Many studies concerning online learning during Covid-19 outbreak focused on teachers or instructors' views on online learning, their practices in conducting online learning, challenges they faced in conducting the e-learning and how they coped with those challenges. There were very few researches done to examine students' perspectives on the online assessments during Covid-19 outbreak especially on speaking assessment. Motivated by the aforementioned gaps, this study employs a quantitative approach to explore students' acceptance towards online speaking assessment. Using a survey questionnaire derived from Technology Acceptance Model(TAM), this study aims to collect students' feedback on online speaking assessment during COVID-19 pandemic in a higher learning institution in Malaysia where English is the second language of the country. This study also seeks to determine whether there are significant differences between responses received from students with different demographic background namely gender and hometown regarding their perceptions on online speaking assessment.

Related work

Transition to online mode of teaching and learning

Online learning and assessment has become a new educational paradigm, gaining popularity especially at higher learning in Malaysia [8]. Shift 7 of the Education Blueprint 2013-2025 aims to leverage on ICT to upgrade learning across the country [9]. Online learning is defined as teaching and learning approach where is more flexible, innovative and student 'centered using different devices synchronously or asynchronously [10]. Students can be more independent and be anywhere they want to have their classes [11].

The global outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has speed up the process of transition from face-to-face education to fully online with the people in education sectors including students and instructors did not completely prepare for such an abrupt change. Furthermore, it was seen as the emergency shift to fully online mode to replace the instructions rather a supplement to it. This has called into question the relevance of prior studies on online learning. [12].In response to Covid-19 pandemic, many studies were conducted in many aspects related to the crisis. A study by Hartshorn and McMurry [13] investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on a group of ESL learners and TESOL practitioners in a university in USA revealed that both parties were more stress after the

pandemic. Due to that, the practitioners did not see teaching and learning as their top priorities anymore and online mode of learning posed more challenges to students.

In Iran context, a study by Khatoony and Nezhadmehr [14] on the challenges faced by Iranian teachers to integrate the technology for e-learning during the pandemic indicated that despite effectively using online applications and platforms, teachers encountered numerous obstacles, including inadequate resources and funding, learners' demotivation and lack of enthusiasm towards online classes, and lack of support for language institutions. Todd [15] studied on 52 English language teachers at a well-known Thai university to find out how they felt about the shift from traditional classroom to online mode. The findings revealed that despite being confronted with a slew of major issues at first, the teachers eventually found ways to deal with them. In addition, the teachers expressed some difficulties they faced in choosing appropriate stimulating activities and assessing the tasks given to students. In order to understand the roles of educational technologies in the shift from face-to-face mode to online learning, a study by Turnbull et al. [16] recognized five issues connected to online teaching and learning activities during the COVID-19 in higher learning institutions that need to be addressed namely integration of learning tools for synchronous/asynchronous learning, technology accessibility, staff and student online competency, academic dishonesty, and privacy and confidentiality.

The findings of the study by Adnan and Anwar [17] on the perceptions of students at higher learning institutions in Pakistan indicated that it was difficult to achieve course learning objectives due to poor internet facilities and access in undeveloped countries like Pakistan. The students highlighted issues like lack of face-to-face interaction with the instructor, delayed response and absence of traditional classroom socialization as the drawbacks of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Online assessment

Assessment can be defined as a method used to improve the quality of education, enhance life-long learning skills and promote performance in various educational contexts [18]. It helps instructors to observe the quality of the curriculum as well as teaching and learning process and also determine whether the learning outcomes achieved complement to the desired educational programmes.

Instructors are using assessment as a tool to evaluate their students' knowledge, which is why it is so vital in pedagogy [19] and it also becomes the catalyst and motivation for students to perform better in their learning [20]. An awareness of assessment methods, is crucial to create successful learning environments. This involves a grasp of the possibilities for assessing student learning and enhancing teaching effectiveness via the use of a number of technological tools. From the viewpoint of students, effective assessment procedures may demonstrate what is necessary to learn and how they should approach it to engage them in goal-oriented and self-regulating cognitions and behaviours [21].

Online assessments have been an option in higher learning institutions to evaluate students' performance since many years back that developed along with the emergence of online platform technologies for teaching and learning. However, many studies conducted have found impediments to online assessments. The sudden shift to fully online mode due to Covid-19 outbreak has caused multifaceted impacts to physical traditional classroom-based assessments. It is important to address aspects related to online assessments including how instructors carried out online assessments, their views on online assessments, challenges they faced with online assessments and how they cope with those challenges. Understanding online assessment from the perspective of students should also be given equal attention as well for a successful teaching and learning.

There were many studies conducted concerning online assessment amidst Covid-19 pandemic. Forrester [22] in his study on challenges and solutions related to transition to online speaking assessment from traditional in classroom mode at the context of university in Hong Kong discovered that the students had mixed feelings towards one-to-one online group discussion with some preferred face-to-face group discussion assessment. The study proposed to consider a body of administrative, pedagogical and integrity concerns besides getting feedbacks from teachers and students in regards to online assessments.

Abduh [23] who examined teachers' perspectives towards online assessments in Saudi Arabia during the Covid-19 lockdown revealed that teachers faced serious challenges to in conducting online assessment and expressed moderate feelings towards online assessment.

Yulianto and Mujtahin [24] conducted a survey and online interview to explore the ELT teachers' perceptions and online assessment practices during COVID-19 where it was found that the teachers had negative views on online assessment particularly in regards to the internet accessibility, assessment validity, and the poor students' enthusiasm.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model(TAM) serves as a framework to explain and determine users' adoption of a particular information system, based on the principle of reasoned action. From the perspective of TAM, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are assumed to be related to the acceptance of a computer or technology system. Perceived usefulness is a belief that a user anticipates that work efficiency can be enhanced by a particular application. system; whereas perceived ease of use is a belief that a user expects to not put much effort into making use of a particular system. TAM assumed that: a) the actual use of the computer system is determined by a users' behavioral intention to use; b) users' behavioral intention to use is determined by attitude toward using, and perceived usefulness; c) users' attitude toward using is determined by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use; and d) perceived ease of use affects perceived usefulness, which also mediates the effect of perceived ease of use on attitude toward using.

Fig. 1: TAM extended model by Davis et al. (1989)
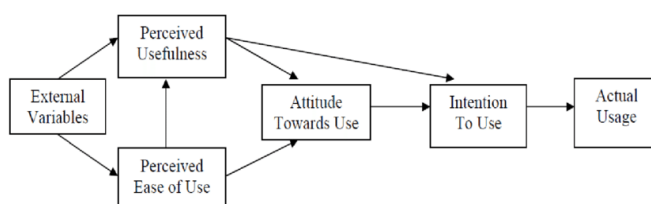
TAM as shown in Fig. 1 was selected as a proposed model as it helps to understand students' acceptance on the implementation of online speaking assessment in UTeM during the pandemic.

Methodology

The research was carried out at Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM). The study employed a non-experimental quantitative research design. A medium sample size of 163 Diploma engineering students enrolled in Foundation English subject participated in this study. They are all first year students doing their first semester in UTeM. An online questionnaire using Google Form was sent out via instant messenger, shared among instructors to be distributed to the participants a week after they have completed their online speaking assessment. The questionnaire was based on the first modified version of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989). 18 questions adapted from Chang et al. [25] was used. The reliability and validity of the questionnaires have been proven by an expert.

The students were given one week to respond to the questionnaires. There were 18 questions classified into 4 different parts. The response options were from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to gauge the respondents' acceptance towards online speaking assessment. The data obtained through online survey were analyzed by frequency of common students' responses and were stated in percentages.

Prior to the pandemic, almost all language activities were conducted face to face, with online activities serve as a supplementary to language learning. The speaking assessment was conducted in a group discussion consisted of

four members each group and an impromptu issue was assigned to the group to be discussed virtually at Webex Online Meeting platform. Prior to the assessment, students were given practices with the same settings and a briefing was given on how to respond to the task and the criteria that will be assessed were informed to the students. Their responses during the discussion were evaluated based on three criteria which are task fulfillment, language and communicative abilities. During the assessment, 5 minutes were given to them to prepare for the discussion and 10 minutes for each group to discuss on the assigned task. The results of the assessment were not released immediately after the assessment and instructors did not give any comment or feedback regarding their performance to avoid responses received from the survey affected of influenced by that. When the survey was conducted, students also did not know yet the results of their speaking assessment.

TABLE I. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

		(n)	(%)
Gender	Male	107	65.6
	Female	56	34.4
Hometown	Rural area or countryside	69	43.4
	Urban or town area	90	56.6

Table I shows the 163 respondents are made up of 107 (65.6 %) male and 56 (34.4 %) females. In terms of geographical location, 69 (43.4%) were from rural area or countryside while 90 (56.6%) were from urban or town area. They were all having the assessment remotely from their hometowns.

Table II depicts the latent variables and measured items. There are four latent variables in this study based on TAM model namely Perceived ease of use (EU), Perceived usefulness (PU), Attitude towards using (AU) and Continuance to use (CU).

TABLE II. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS FOR LATENT VARIABLES AND MEASURED ITEMS

Latent variables	Operational definitions	Measured Items
(EU) Perceived ease of use	Perceived ease of use refers to a level of easiness that one feels when having online speaking assessment.	(EU1) I can do online speaking test anywhere at my convenience.
		(EU2) The online speaking test is easy for me.
(PU)	Perceived usefulness is a feeling that one	(PU1) Online speaking test gives me space to

Perceived usefulness	holds towards the online speaking assessment.	prepare myself well for the test.
		(PU2) I feel confident to speak during online speaking test.
		(PU3) I feel comfortable to speak during online speaking test.
		(PU4) I feel that I performed well in online speaking test.
		(PU5) Online speaking test enables me to perform as what I expected.
		(PU6) I can easily focus in online speaking test.
		(PU7) I can control my nervousness well in online speaking test.
		(PU8) I can speak fluently in online speaking test.
		(PU9) I can deliver my idea effectively in online speaking test.
(AU) Attitude towards using	Attitude towards using is an attitude that one feels positively towards	(AU1) Online speaking test is a good idea.
		(AU2)

	the online speaking assessment.	Online speaking test is a wise idea.
		(AU3) Online speaking test is a pleasant idea.
		(AU4) Online speaking test is a positive idea.
		(AU5) Online speaking test is a wonderful experience.
(CU) Continuance to use (Behavioral intentions)	Continuance intention to use refers to one's willingness to continue to have speaking assessment online in the future.	(CU1) I have no problem if speaking test is to be conducted online in the upcoming semester. (CU2) I am ready if speaking test is to be conducted online in the future.

Results and discussion

A. Students' perceived ease of use (EU)

Table III shows respondents' distribution based on perceived ease of use (EU).

TABLE III. STUDENTS' PERCEIVED EASE OF USE (EU)

Students 'perceived ease of use (EU)						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree.	Strongly agree	Mean	Sd

E U 1	6 (3.7%)	17 (10.4%)	44 (27.0%)	67 (41.1%)	27 (16.1%)	3.57	1.01
E U 2	3 (1.8%)	22 (13.5%)	90 (55.2%)	37 (22.7%)	7 (4.3%)	3.14	0.77

As for EU1, 6 (3.7%) participants strongly disagree, 17 (10.4%) participants disagree and 44 (27.0%) neutral. While a total of 67 (41.1%) participants agree and 27 (16.1%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 33 (14.1%) participants disagree and 93 (57.2%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.57; SD = 1.01.

While for EU2, 3 (1.8%) participants strongly disagree, 22 (13.5%) participants disagree and 90 (55.2%) neutral. While a total of 37 (22.7%) participants agree and 7 (4.3%) participants strongly agree. For this item, the findings show that 25 (15.3%) participants disagree and 44 (27%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.14; SD = 0.77.

Based on the table, the results indicated that most of the students agreed that the freedom to have their speaking assessment wherever they want has brought a sense of comfort to them. The results also revealed that majority of them were neutral towards the statement of "The online speaking test is easy for me". This could be due to the constraints that the students faced during the assessment which made them neither disagree nor agree that the assessment was easy. As reported by Lim [26], based on the interview conducted with some Malaysian students in a public university revealed that the biggest challenge of Malaysian university students for online learning was some of the students have poor internet access at their hometowns. There were difficulties faced by both students and lecturers to have online learning and assessment. Speaking test in an online environment could be challenging to students as it requires a stable internet connection for uninterrupted discussion. What makes things worst was different spots in Malaysia may have different internet strengths. Lagging internet speed can affect audio and video quality which may cause students to miss out on parts of the discussion during the assessment and lead to failure to respond well to the task given. At certain time, it is to the extent that some of them may need to move from one spot to another in order to get stable internet connection. The difficulties that the students faced either intermittently or continuously throughout the assessment time may affect their focus and made them felt demotivated towards the assessment. This could have influenced how they perceived the online assessment.

In addition, majority of them did not see the speaking assessment as easy. In Malaysia, English is the second language after Malay language. Many Malaysian students are not really used to communicate in English which becomes the reason why some of them might be struggling at speaking the language. They tend to over think about how to pronounce each word correctly and how to construct sentences perfectly and even hesitate to speak because they were afraid at making mistakes and negative perceptions from their peers and lecturer. Moreover, they claimed it was not easy because they did not want to appear too confident with their performance in the speaking assessment.

B. Students' perceived usefulness (PU)

Table IV shows the distribution of respondents based on perceived usefulness (PU).

TABLE IV. STUDENTS' PERCEIVED USEFULNESS (PU)

Perceived usefulness (PU)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree.	Strongly agree	Mean	Sd
PU1	1 (0.6%)	10 (6.1%)	48 (29.4%)	81 (49.7%)	19 (11.7%)	3.67	0.79
PU2	2 (1.2%)	16 (9.8%)	59 (36.2%)	72 (44.2%)	12 (7.4%)	3.74	0.82
PU3	1 (0.6%)	15 (9.2%)	55 (33.7%)	76 (46.6%)	12 (7.4%)	3.52	0.79
PU4	5 (3.1%)	22 (13.5%)	82 (50.3%)	46 (28.2%)	6 (3.7%)	3.16	0.82
PU5	3 (1.8%)	22 (13.5%)	84 (51.5%)	44 (27.0%)	8 (4.9%)	3.19	0.80
PU6	2 (1.2%)	18 (11.0%)	58 (35.6%)	74 (45.4%)	9 (5.5%)	3.43	0.81
PU7	6 (3.7%)	25 (15.3%)	49 (30.1%)	61 (37.4%)	19 (11.7%)	3.38	1.00
PU8	4 (2.5%)	17 (10.4%)	88 (54.0%)	43 (26.4%)	9 (5.5%)	3.22	0.80
PU9	4 (2.5%)	13 (8.0%)	85 (52.1%)	51 (31.3%)	8 (4.9%)	3.28	0.78

PU1, 1 (0.6%) participants strongly disagree, 10 (6.1%) participants disagree and 48 (29.4%) neutral. While a total of 81 (49.7%) participants agree and 19 (11.7%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 11 (6.7%) participants disagree and 100 (61.4%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.67; SD = 0.79.

For PU2, 2 (1.2%) participants strongly disagree, 16 (9.8%) participants disagree and 59 (36.2%) neutral. While a total of 72 (44.2%) participants agree and 12 (7.4%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 18 (11%) participants disagree and 84 (51.6%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.74; SD = 0.82.

For PU3, 1 (0.6%) participants strongly disagree, 15 (9.2%) participants disagree and 55 (33.7%) neutral. While 76 (46.6%) participants agree and 12 (7.4%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 16 (9.8%) participants disagree and 88 (54%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.52; SD = 0.79.

For PU4, 5 (3.1%) participants strongly disagree, 22 (13.5%) participants disagree and 82 (50.3%) neutral. While 46 (28.2%) participants agree and 6 (3.7%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 27 (16.6%) participants disagree and 52 (31.9%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.16; SD = 0.82.

For PU5, 3 (1.8%) participants strongly disagree, 22 (13.5%) participants disagree and 84 (51.5%) neutral. While 44 (27.0%) participants agree and 8 (4.9%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 25 (15.3%) participants disagree and 52 (31.9%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.19; SD = 0.80

For PU6, 2 (1.2%) participants strongly disagree, 18 (11.0%) participants disagree and 58 (35.6%) neutral. While 74 (45.4%) participants agree and 9 (5.5%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 20 (12.2%) participants disagree and 83 (50.9%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.43; SD = 0.81.

For PU7, 6 (3.7%) participants strongly disagree, 25 (15.3%) participants disagree and 49 (30.1%) neutral. While 61 (37.4%) participants agree and 19 (11.7%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 31 (19%) participants disagree and 80 (49.1%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.38; SD = 1.00.

For PU8, 4 (2.5%) participants strongly disagree, 17 (10.4%) participants disagree and 88 (54.0%) neutral. While a total of 43 (26.4%) participants agree and 9 (5.5%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 21 (12.9%) participants disagree and 52 (31.9%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.22; SD = 0.80.

As for PU9, 4 (2.5%) participants strongly disagree, 13 (8.0%) participants disagree and 85 (52.1%) neutral. While 51 (31.3%) participants agree and 8 (4.9%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 17 (10.5%) participants disagree and 59 (36.2%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.28; SD = 0.78.

Based on the results, it can be observed that majority of the students claimed that the online speaking assessment allows them to adequately plan for the test and they were positive towards their ability to respond to the task. They also confirmed that they were at ease to speak during the assessment and were able to maintain a high level of concentration as well as keep their nervousness under control during the online test. As students were given practices prior to the test and were briefed on the assessment matters before they sit for the test, these have indirectly helped them to understand the content, reduce their test fear which resulted in their capability to control their nervousness. Moreover, the situation in which they are staying apart during the test make them feel more relax. According to Bakar [27], online discussion may create a non-threatening situation for shy and withdrawn students, reducing their nervousness and fears of being humiliated as they were speaking face to face. Online class is believed to be able to boost learner' self-confidence as each learner was apart from each other and the feeling of being in the center of attention is decreasing [28].

However, it can be seen from the results that majority of the students were hesitant towards their performance in the online speaking assessment. As the results of the speaking assessment were not revealed immediately after the test and no feedback were given by the lecturers after they completed their assessment, the students were unsure about their performance. They neither disagree nor agree towards the statements that asked how they feel about their performance in the test. Most of them were uncertain whether they did well in the test and were able to perform as anticipated or not. They were also unsure whether they were able to communicate fluently nor could have easily communicated their ideas in the test.

The findings indicated that majority of them were not confident about their performance in the online speaking assessment. The results revealed that the students were having low self- efficacy in their speaking ability. Perceived self-efficacy, which refers to "a judgment of one's ability to organize and execute given types of performances" [29]. Idrus and Sivapalan [30] discovered that pre-university students had a high degree of self-efficacy in their speaking abilities, but there should be a substantial difference when compared to final year students. The result of this study was also consistent with the finding of a research by Idrus and Salleh [31] on self-efficacy level of the pre-university engineering and technology students of a private university in Malaysia were significantly lower than the final year students in terms of ability and activity perception. This could be due to the Diploma engineering students participated in this study were just completed their studies in high schools. Formal learning time for English subject in high schools were limited and those especially from rural area were not exposed to using the language outside school time since English is not their mother tongue.

Having low self-efficacy in speaking ability also relates to the anxiety towards their performance in a particular task. Speaking has been identified as the most anxiety-inducing skill in language learning as well as the most visible cause of anxiety in language classrooms [32]. This holds true especially for second language learners. Horwitz et al. [33] who pioneered the term foreign language anxiety as a specific syndrome have stem three other form of anxieties: 1) communication apprehension 2) fear of negative evaluation 3) test anxiety. Both the psychological and physiological effects of test anxiety on academic performance are wide-ranging and have been

found to lower motivation and impair cognitive performance as well as inhibit academic performance [34]. Studies on cognitive anxiety and exam performance showed that an increase in anxiety can have either a positive or a negative effect on students' academic performance; a small increase in anxiety could increase performance, whereas a large increase in anxiety could lower the students' performance levels drastically [35].

C. Students' attitude towards using (AU)

TABLE V. STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS USING (AU)

Attitude towards using (AU)							
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree.	Strongly agree	Mean	Sd
AU1	2 (1.2%)	10 (6.1%)	50 (30.7%)	79 (48.5%)	20 (12.3%)	3.65	0.82
AU2	3 (1.8%)	11 (6.7%)	60 (36.8%)	68 (41.7%)	17 (10.4%)	3.53	0.84
AU3	2 (1.2%)	9 (5.5%)	58 (35.6%)	79 (48.5%)	12 (7.4%)	3.56	0.76
AU4	2 (1.2%)	5 (3.1%)	38 (23.3%)	98 (60.1%)	17 (10.4%)	3.76	0.72
AU5	3 (1.8%)	6 (3.7%)	28 (17.2%)	93 (57.1%)	30 (18.4%)	3.88	0.81

Table V shows the distribution of respondents based on AU. For the AU1, 2 (1.2%) participants strongly disagree, 10 (6.1%) participants disagree and 50 (30.7%) neutral. While a total of 79 (48.5%) participants agree and 20 (12.3%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 12 (7.3%) participants disagree and 99 (60.8%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.65; SD = 0.82.

For AU2, 3 (1.8%) participants strongly disagree, 11 (6.7%) participants disagree and 60 (36.8%) neutral. While 68 (41.7%) participants agree and 17 (10.4%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 14 (8.5%) participants disagreed and 85 (52.1%) participants agreed with the value of m = 3.53; SD = 0.84.

For AU3, 2 (1.2%) participants strongly disagree, 9 (5.5%) participants disagree and 58 (35.6%) neutral. While a total of 79 (48.5%) participants agree and 12 (7.4%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 11 (6.7%) participants disagree and 91 (55.9%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.56; SD = 0.76.

For AU4, 2 (1.2%) participants strongly disagree, 5 (3.1%) participants disagree and 38 (23.3%) neutral. While a total of 98 (60.1%) participants agree and 17 (10.4%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 7 (4.3%) participants disagree and 115 (70.5%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.76; SD = 0.72.

For AU5, a total of 3 (1.8%) participants strongly disagree, 6 (3.7%) participants disagree and a total of 28 (17.2%) participants are neutral. While a total of 93 (57.1%) participants agree and 30 (18.4%) participants strongly agree.

For this statement, the findings show that 9 (5.5%) participants disagree and 123 (75.5%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.88; SD = 0.81.

The results of the survey reported that majority of the students accepted online speaking assessment positively. The results of the research by Struyven et al. [36] indicated that students' views of evaluation have a direct impact on their attitudes to learning and studying. On the other hand, students' attitudes to learning have an impact on their perceptions of evaluation and assessment. Understanding a student's learning in an instructional setting requires taking into consideration the student's construction of reality. The student's experience of reality adds significant meaning. This hypothesis also holds true for a student's perception of evaluation and assessment. Students' study habits are not solely dictated by the type of test or measurement used. Students' views of assessment approaches are important.

D. Students' continuance to use (LV4)

TABLE VI. STUDENTS' CONTINUANCE TO USE (LV4)

Continuance to use (LV4)						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Sd
CU1	3 (1.8%)	12 (7.4%)	46 (28.2%)	83 (50.9%)	16 (9.8%)	3.60	0.84
CU2	3 (1.8%)	14 (8.6%)	47 (28.8%)	78 (47.9%)	19 (11.7%)	3.59	0.87

Table VI shows the distribution of respondents based on items continuance to use. For CU1, a total of 3 (1.8%) participants strongly disagree, 12 (7.4%) participants disagree and a total of 46 (28.2%) neutral. While a total of 83 (50.9%) participants agree and 16 (9.8%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 15 (9.2%) participants disagree and 99 (60.7%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.60; SD = 0.84.

For CU2, a total of 3 (1.8%) participants strongly disagree, 14 (8.6%) participants disagree and a total of 47 (28.8%) neutral. While 78 (47.9%) participants agree and 19 (11.7%) participants strongly agree. For this statement, the findings show that 17 (10.4%) participants disagree and 97 (59.6%) participants agree with the value of m = 3.59; SD = 0.87.

The findings showed that the majority of students had no objections and they were ready to have the speaking assessment online in the upcoming semester. This results are in line with a research by Ho [37] where it was observed that users' attitude toward the e-learning platform positively affects continuance intention of utilising the same platform. Because attitude is an evaluation of experience related to the system, it is anticipated that people with a favourable attitude about an information system will most likely continue to utilise it. Lee [38] also explored the variables impacting continuance purpose in e-learning programmes. In his research, it is also observed that attitude is an indicator of continuance intention. Positive attitude toward e-learning system allows people to have a greater intention toward using it, and they are more inclined to choose to utilise it.

TABLE VII. VARIABLES MEANS DISTRIBUTIONS

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude towards using (AU)	3.6739	.67417
Continuance to use (CU)	3.6000	.81996
Perceived usefulness (PU)	3.3638	.62673
Perceived ease of use (EU)	3.3585	.75501

Table VII shows the mean distribution of the variables. Findings show that attitude towards using has the highest mean score value of m = 3.67; SD = 0.67 followed by continuance to use m = 3.60; SD = 0.82, perceived usefulness m = 3.36; SD = 0.63 and the lowest is perceived ease of use m = 3.35; SD = 0.76. Students' attitude towards using scored the highest as they were exposed to practices and were provided with briefing on the assessment matters prior to the test. The score for perceived usefulness is the lowest since it is believed that the students had low self-efficacy in their speaking ability that caused them felt unsure about their performance in the speaking assessment. The findings of this study supported the a the research finding of Aljohani et. al [39] that indicated students' positive perception of the online exam availability, accessibility, instruction, and mode of delivery.

EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS

Table 8: Group statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived ease of use(EU)	Male	104	3.3942	.76853
	Female	55	3.2909	.73087
Perceived usefulness (PU)	Male	104	3.4241	.65630
	Female	53	3.2453	.55099
Attitude towards using (AU)	Male	103	3.6854	.69486
	Female	54	3.6519	.63861
Continuance to use (CU)	Male	105	3.6762	.78134
	Female	55	3.4545	.87809

Table 9: T- test Between Groups

	Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)

Perceived ease of use (EU)	Equal variances assumed	.241	.624	.820	157	.413
	Equal variances not assumed			.833	115.002	.407
Perceived usefulness (PU)	Equal variances assumed	1.474	.227	1.701	155	.091
	Equal variances not assumed			1.800	122.143	.074
Attitude towards using (AU)	Equal variances assumed	.168	.683	.296	155	.768
	Equal variances not assumed			.304	115.992	.762
Continuance to use (CU)	Equal variances assumed	.397	.530	1.632	158	.105
	Equal variances not assumed			1.574	99.218	.119

The tables above show the group statistics and the t- test between genders based on the four latent variables. For (EU), the results of the study were not significant (t = .820, df = 157, p> 0.05 = .413). There was no significant difference between the male group (m = 3.39; SD = 0.76) and the female group (m = 3.29; SD = 0.73) for perceived ease of use.

While for (PU), the results of the study were insignificant (t = 1.701, df = 155, p> 0.05 = .091). No significant difference between the male group (m = 3.42; SD = 0.65) and the female group (m = 3.24; SD = 0.55) was found for perceived usefulness.

There was also no significant difference between the male group (m = 3.68; SD = 0.69) and the female group (m = 3.65; SD = 0.63) for attitude towards using(AU).

For (CU), the study result was insignificant (t = 1.632, df = 158, p> 0.05 = .105). The researchers concluded that there was no significant difference between the male group (m = 3.67; SD = 0.78) and the female group (m = 3.45; SD = 0.87) for continuance to use.

Based on the findings, it was shown that there was no significant difference in students' perceptions towards online speaking assessment between male and female groups.

EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOMETOWN

Table 10: Group statistics

Group statistics

	Hometown	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived ease of use(EU)	Rural area or country side	67	3.2836	.76487

	Urban or town area	88	3.4091	.74102
Perceived usefulness(PU)	Rural area or country side	67	3.4859	.59485
	Urban or town area	87	3.2695	.64380
Attitude towards using(AU)	Rural area or country side	66	3.7727	.53996
	Urban or town area	87	3.5747	.74071
Continuance to use (CU)	Rural area or country side	67	3.7537	.70910
	Urban or town area	89	3.4551	.86485

Table 11: T- test Between Groups

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Perceived ease of use (EU)	Equal variances assumed	1.126	.290	-1.030	153	.305
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.026	139.854	.307
Perceived usefulness (PU)	Equal variances assumed	.009	.924	2.137	152	.034
	Equal variances not assumed			2.159	146.987	.032
Attitude towards using (AU)	Equal variances assumed	4.258	.041	1.833	151	.069
	Equal variances not assumed			1.912	150.789	.058
Continuance to use (CU)	Equal variances assumed	2.179	.142	2.303	154	.023
	Equal variances not assumed			2.368	152.837	.019

Table 10 and 11 above show the group statistics and the t- test between genders based on the four latent variables. For (EU), the results of the study were not significant (t = 1.1.030, df = 153, p> 0.05 = .305). The researchers concluded that there was no significant difference between the rural group (m = 3.28; SD = 0.76) and the urban group (m = 3.40; SD = 0.74) for perceived ease of use.

For (PU), the result was significant (t = 2.137, df = 152, p <0.05 = .034). The researchers concluded that there was a significant difference between the rural group (m = 3.48; SD = 0.59) and the urban group (m = 3.26; SD = 0.64) for perceived usefulness.

While for (AU), the results of the study were not significant (t = 1.833, df = 151, p> 0.05 = .069). The researchers concluded that there was no significant difference between the rural group (m = 3.77; SD = 0.54) and the urban group (m = 3.57; SD = 0.74) for attitude towards using.

The results of the study were found significant for (CU) (t = 2.303, df = 154, p <0.05 = .023). The researchers concluded that there was a significant difference between the rural group (m = 3.75; SD = 0.71) and the urban group (m = 3.45; SD = 0.86) for continuance to use.

Based on the results, it was demonstrated that there were significant differences between urban and rural groups for perceived usefulness and continuance to use. As they are new to learning in university, which coincidently conducted online, their experience when they were in schools and during their live at their hometowns might have influenced how they perceived online speaking assessment. Students from rural area in Malaysia had little experience using Information Technology(IT) due to the lack of facilities at their hometowns compared to students from urban area which generally gained more exposure to IT because of better facilities provided in towns and cities in Malaysia. This has made students from rural area more enthusiastic having online speaking assessment and responded positively to the idea of having online speaking assessment in the future compared to those from urban areas.

Conclusion

The present study was carried out to explore students' perspectives towards online speaking assessment during Covid-19 outbreak and to find out if there were different views on online speaking assessment between groups of students of different genders and hometowns. The results of study revealed that the students were well receptive of online speaking assessment even with abrupt transition to online mode due to Covid-19 pandemic. The results also indicated their readiness to have online speaking assessment in the post-pandemic era. The findings revealed that there is significant difference between urban and rural groups in regards to the benefits they perceived on online speaking assessment and their willingness to have the same mode of speaking assessment in the future. The research also found out that both female and male students shared the same views towards online speaking assessment. Nevertheless, it can be seen that even though the students were well receptive of the idea of having online speaking assessment, the results observed that many were uncertain about their performance in the test. This shows that even though the speaking assessment was conducted online, students were found to have low self-efficacy in their speaking performance.

The results of the present study have brought positive insights towards the implementation of online speaking assessment in the future. Despite of the challenges that many researches had highlighted pertaining online learning, the students had favorable perceptions towards online speaking assessment. Various issues should be taken into consideration including strategies to overcome students' low self-efficacy in speaking, strategies to boost enthusiasm and engagement among students in online classes and addressing internet connection issues that could possibly influence students' acceptance towards online assessment. Students should be exposed to various speaking tasks to boost their confidence and make them feel comfortable to speak the language. Additional efforts are necessary to ensure that instructors foster a stress-free atmosphere and constructive feedback on students' performance. To make it less threatening, grouping them with their peers with similar language competency would help them to develop their confidence to speak. Instructors may take the initiative to allow students to choose the topics that they are familiar with at the initial stages of speaking activities rather than assigning topic that could be unfamiliar to them. This is to avoid the students' interest to speak switched off due to their poor vocabulary knowledge which leads to inability to construct sentences in English. Instructors also need to find ways to make students stay motivated and enthusiastic to learn in online environment. In conducting online speaking assessment, all constraint factors mainly the internet connection should be given serious attention and instructors should choose the best online platform to conduct the online speaking assessment to ensure smooth and uninterrupted assessment process. This would help students to stay focus during their oral assessment. Further research should be undertaken in this field with larger scale of respondents. As a next line of inquiry, research can be done to explore the factors that influence students' acceptance towards online speaking assessment, students'

perceptions towards other kinds of online language assessments and the factors that determine different levels of self-efficacy towards online speaking assessment.

This study has managed to answer the research question which proved that the students' acceptance on online speaking assessment amidst Covid-19 pandemic and their continuance intention to have online speaking assessment in the post-pandemic era.

Acknowledgement

References

[1]   D. Cucinotta, and M. Vanelli, "WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic,"Acta Bio-Medica: Atenei Parmensis, 91(1), 2020, pp.157–160.

[2]   P. Doshi, "The elusive definition of pandemic influenza.Bull," World Health Organ, 89, 2011, pp.532–538.

[3]   E. Chung, N. M. Noor, and V. N. Mathew, "Are you ready? An assessment of online learning readiness among university students," International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 9(1), 2020, pp.301–317.

[4]   N. H. Al-Kumaim, A. K. Alhazmi, F. Mohammed, N. A Gazem, M. S. Shabbir, and Y. Fazea, "Exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students' learning life: An integrated conceptual motivational model for sustainable and healthy online learning," Sustainability 2021, 13, p.2546. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052546

[5]   E. Chung, S. Geetha, and L. C. Dass, "Online learning readiness among university students in Malaysia Amidst Covid-19," Asian Journal of University Education. 16(2), 2020, p.47.

[6]   Europe News, https://www.neweurope.eu/article/cambridge-university-movesto-full-year-of-online-learning/, 2020.

[7]   Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, Press released by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, https://www.nst.com.my/education/2020 /06/599586/overseas-dream-put-hold, 2020.

[8]   L. F. Khairil, and S. E. Mokshein, "21st century assessment: online assessment," International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 8(1), 2018, pp.659–672.

[9]   Ministry of Education., "Executive summary; Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)," 2015.

[10]   Dhawan, Shivangi. "Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis." *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, vol. 49, no. 1, Sept. 2020, pp. 5–22, doi:10.1177/0047239520934018.

[11]   X11 V. Singh & A. "Thurman How Many Ways Can We Define Online Learning? A Systematic Literature Review of Definitions of Online Learning (1988-2018)," American Journal of Distance Education, 33:4, 2019, pp. 289-306, DOI: 10.1080/08923647.2019.1663082

[12]   Ghanbari and Nowroozi Language Testing in Asia (2021) 11:27. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-021-00143-4

[13]   Hartshorn, K. J., & McMurry, B. L. (2020). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ESL learners and TESOL practitioners in theUnited States. International Journal of TESOL Studies,2(2), 140–156. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.11.

[14]   Khatoony, S., & Nezhadmehr, M. (2020). EFL teachers'challenges in integration of technology for online classrooms duringCoronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Iran. AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy,8,1–16. https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol8.sp.1.2020.

[15]   Todd, W. R. (2020). Teachers'perceptions of the shift from the classroom to online teaching. International Journal of TESOLStudies,2(2), 4–16. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.02

[16]   Turnbull, D., Chugh, R., & Luck, J. (2021). Transitioning to e-Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: How have higher education institutions responded to the challenge? Education and Information Technologies, 1-19.

[17]   Adnan, Muhammad et al. "Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Students' perspectives". Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology, vol. 2, no. 1, 2020, pp. 45-51. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPSP. 2020261309

[18]   N. Nasri, S. N. Roslan, M. I. Sekuan, K. A. Bakar, and S. N. Puteh, "Teachers' perception on alternative assessment," Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 7(C), http://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.10.006, 2010, pp.37–42.

[19]   S. Nikou, and A. A. Economides, "Student achievement in paper, computer/web and mobile based assessment," BCI (Local), 2013, p.107

[20]   K. Cox, B. W. Imrie, and A. Miller, "Student assessment in higher education: a handbook for assessing performance," 2014.

[21]   T. S. Roberts, (Ed.), "Self, peer and group assessment in e-learning," IGI Global, 2006.

[22]   Forrester, A. (2020). Addressing the challenges of group speaking assessments in the time of the Coronavirus. International Journal of TESOL Studies, 2(2), 74–88. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.07.

[23]   Abduh, M. (2021). Full-time online assessment during COVID-19 lockdown: EFL teachers' perceptions. Asian EFL Journal., 28(1),1–22.

[24] Yulianto, D., & Mujtahin, N. M. (2021). Online assessment during COVID-19 pandemic: EFL teachers' perspectives and their practices. Journal of English teaching, 7(2), pp.229–242.   https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v7i2.2770.

[25]   C. C. Chang, C. F. Yan, and J. S. Tseng, "Perceived convenience in an extended technology acceptance model: Mobile technology and English learning for college students," Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 28(5). https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.818, 2012.

[26]   I. Lim, "Reality for Malaysia's university students: Online learning challenges, stress, workload; Possible solutions for fullydigital future until Dec.," Malay Mail, 16 March 2020. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/05/30/reality-for-malaysias-university-students-online-learning-challenges-stress/1870717

[27]   N. A. Bakar, H. Latiff, and A. Hamat, "Enhancing ESL learners   speaking skills through asynchronous online discussion forum," Asian Social Science, 9(9), https://doi.org/10.553, 2013.

[28]   P. D. Rodrigues, and M. E. Vethamani, "The impact of online learning in the development of speaking skills," Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Education (JIRE), 5(1), 2015, pp.43–67.

[29]   A. Bandura, "Social-efficacy: The exercise of control," New York: Freeman, 1997.

[30]   H. Idrus, and S. Sivapalan, "Perceived self-efficacy of ESL students with regard to their oral communication ability," Conference proceedings, a paper presented at International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities 2007, Bangi, Malaysia, 2007.

[31]   H. Idrus, and R. Salleh, "Perceived self-efficacy of Malaysian ESL engineering and technology students on their speaking ability and its pedagogical implications," The English Teacher, 15, 2017.

[32]   G. Öztürk, and N. Gürbüz, "The impact of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety and motivation," Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 70, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.106, 2013, pp.654–665.

[33] E. K. Horwitz, B. M. Horwitz, and J. Cope, "Foreign language classroom anxiety," The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x, 1986, pp.125–132.

[34] E. C. H. Chin, and M. W. Williams, J. E. Taylor, and S. T. Harvey, "The influence of negative affect on test anxiety and academic performance: An examination of the tripartite model of emotions," Learning and Individual Differences, 54, 10.1016/j.lindif.2017.01.002, 2017, pp.1–8.

[35] M. Humara, "The relationship between anxiety and performance: A cognitive-behavioral perspective," Athletic Insight, 1(2), 1999, pp.1–14.

[36] K. Struyven, F. Dochy, and J. Steven, "Students' perceptions about evaluation and assessment in higher education: A review, assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education," 30:4, DOI: 10.1080/02602930500099102, 2005, pp.325-341.

[37]   C. H. Ho, "Continuance intention of e-learning platform: Toward an integrated model," International Journal of Electronic Business Management, 8(3), 2010, pp.206–215.

[38]   M. C. Lee, "Explaining and predicting users' continuance intention toward e-learning: An extension of the expectation–confirmation model," Journal of Computers & Education, 54(2), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2009.09.002, 2010, pp.506–516

[39]   Aljohani, A., M. Aloreafy, S. . Alzaidi, and Z. Meccawy. "Saudi EFL Students' Perceptions of Online English Achievement Exams in the Era of COVID-19". *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, vol. 4, no. 5, May 2021, pp. 118-25, doi:10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.5.11.