ONLINE SPEAKING ASSESSMENTS: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF UNIVERSITY ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract:

With the growing integration of online learning, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of online speaking assessments has gained importance in language education. This study explores the perceptions and experiences of university ESL learners regarding online speaking assessments. A purposive sampling method was used to select nine learners with varying proficiency levels (high, average, low) enrolled in the English for Communicative Competence course. Participants completed an online speaking assessment as part of their coursework and provided feedback through e-interviews conducted via Google Forms. The study aimed to understand learners' opinions on the appropriateness of test items, confidence levels, emotional impact, and the perceived fairness of evaluations. Thematic analysis of the interview responses identified key themes such as the preference for face-to-face assessments due to technical issues and anxiety, while highlighting the convenience and flexibility offered by online formats. Despite these challenges, learners acknowledged the benefits of online assessments, including the ability to complete assessments in familiar, comfortable environments. However, they raised concerns about fairness, particularly in relation to technical difficulties affecting performance. The findings underline the need for improvements in infrastructure, enhanced technical support, and clear guidelines for conducting online assessments to ensure reliability and fairness. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of online speaking assessments, such as incorporating real-time feedback, providing more practice opportunities, and addressing technological and environmental challenges.

Introduction

Online assessments have become a crucial part of evaluating language skills in higher education in recent years. The transition from conventional in-person assessments to online formats has been driven by advancements in technology and the need for more flexible assessment methods (Du & Zhang, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift, resulting in a substantial increase in the use of online assessments as an attempt by institutions to continue education amidst restrictions (Koh & Daniel, 2022). Online assessments offer benefits such as convenience and accessibility (Rubab & Imran, 2023). However, they also present specific issues that need to be addressed to ensure their effectiveness (Loi & Ang, 2022).

Despite the growing adoption of online speaking assessments, there is limited research on how these formats specifically impact university ESL learners (Alumalai & Paramasivam, 2023). L2 learners, in general, may face particular difficulties with online assessments due to factors such as technical issues, lack of familiarity with the online format, and differences in assessment conditions compared to traditional face-to-face settings (Aljohani, Aloreafy, Alzaidi, & Meccawy, 2021). These challenges may influence learners' confidence, comfort, and overall satisfaction with the assessment process (Alumalai & Paramasivam, 2023).

In particular, the shift to online speaking assessments has posed challenges for evaluating spoken language skills. Issues such as difficulties in accurately assessing spoken proficiency, technology-related problems, and the complexity of replicating face-to-face assessment conditions can impact learners' experiences (Korkmaz, 2022). Accordingly, this study aims to:

1. Explore university ESL learners' perceptions, emotional responses, and overall experiences with online speaking assessments compared to traditional face-to-face methods.
2. Identify the technical and environmental challenges in online speaking assessments and evaluate their impact on the effectiveness and fairness of these assessments for university ESL learners.

Through these objectives, the study endeavours to provide a deeper understanding of whether online assessments meet learners' needs as effectively as face-to-face methods.

Literature Review

Overview of Online Speaking Assessments

In the realm of evaluating English as a Second Language (ESL) or second language (L2) learners, in particular, online speaking assessments have undergone significant advancements. These assessments include various approaches, notably semi-direct and fully automated speaking tests (Bernstein, Van Moere, & Cheng, 2010). Semi-direct tests involve computers for administration and response collection, but the evaluation is done by human raters. Fully

automated tests, however, are entirely computerised, encompassing all stages from development to scoring without human intervention. Previous studies have highlighted several advantages of computerised assessments, including cost-effectiveness, enhanced reliability and integrity, and better accommodation of diverse demographics and geographical locations (Galaczi, 2010; Korkmaz, 2020).

Today, in line with the advancement of technology, online speaking assessments for ESL/L2 learners have integrated more sophisticated features such as multimedia tools, real-time feedback mechanisms, and tailored difficulty levels, to better assess oral proficiency (Du & Zhang, 2022). As further described by Du and Zhang (2022), in the online environment, learner speaking performance is assessed in two primary ways. Online synchronous speaking assessments require learners to spontaneously articulate their thoughts in real-time, which replicates traditional face-to-face interactions and can test their ability to respond promptly. Conversely, asynchronous speaking assessments allow students to record their responses at their own convenience and submit them later, providing more time to prepare and refine their answers. This shift in language evaluation is significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as educational institutions had to quickly adapt to online formats as a coping mechanism during the interruption of face-to-face interactions (Koh & Daniel, 2022). This rapid transition reflects the growing reliance on digital tools for assessing speaking skills in ESL/L2 contexts and highlights the need to evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the specific needs of language learners.

Impact of Online Speaking Assessments on ESL Learners
Numerous effects have resulted from the use of online speaking assessments with ESL learners. Studies have demonstrated various ways these assessments impact ESL learners, including their performance, affective factors, and overall learning experience. In terms of their performance, research by Khan and Khan (2019) and Shofatunnisa, Sukyadi, and Purnawarman (2021) found that online assessments offer significant advantages such as increased flexibility and accessibility, which enable learners to participate in assessments from different locations and at convenient times. This flexibility help improve assessment outcomes by reducing scheduling conflicts and providing a more relaxed environment. Accordingly, this more relaxed environment contributes to reduced stress and positively impacts affective factors, as it provides a more controlled environment and immediate feedback, as indicated by Fathi, Rahimi, and Derakhshan (2024). Additionally, the overall learning experience is enhanced by the ability to access and review feedback at one's own pace, which can lead to improved learning and self-reflection (Yin, Goh, Yang, & Xiaobin, 2021).

However, these benefits are accompanied by challenges related to the validity and reliability of evaluating spoken language skills. The lack of face-to-face interaction may impact learners' ability to fully demonstrate their proficiency. Review of the literature by Yingzi (2020) highlights that some ESL learners experience heightened anxiety and reduced confidence due to technical issues and the impersonal nature of online interactions. Moreover, while online tools offer flexibility and prompt feedback, they may not fully replicate the interactive and engaging nature of in-person assessments, affecting learners' overall satisfaction and learning outcomes (Valencia Robles, 2017).

Perceptions and Experiences of ESL Learners with Online Speaking Assessments

ESL learners' views and experiences with online speaking assessments are shaped by a mix of positive and negative factors. On the positive side, many learners appreciate the flexibility and convenience of these assessments. For instance, Alumalai and Paramasivam (2023) found that the online environment can boost learners' confidence and comfort, contributing to better performance. This aligns with findings by Fathi et al. (2021), which highlight that reduced anxiety in a controlled online setting allows learners to focus more effectively on language tasks. Similarly, Korkmaz (2022) reports that students generally feel satisfied with online speaking tests, noting that regular practice through these platforms helps build self-confidence and improve public speaking skills. Sun and Yang (2022) also observed that frequent engagement with online speaking tasks reduces shyness and anxiety, leading to greater comfort and better outcomes.

However, there are challenges that impact learners' experiences. Technical issues, such as poor internet connections, are frequently cited as significant obstacles. Korkmaz (2022) and Alumalai and Paramasivam (2023) both highlight how these technical problems can disrupt assessments, leading to frustration and negatively affecting learners' views. Cramarenco, Burcă-Voicu, and Dabija (2023) further point out that these issues can interfere with the assessment process, making it difficult for learners to fully demonstrate their speaking abilities. Additionally, the lack of face-to-face interaction in online assessments can make them feel less effective, as noted by Valencia Robles (2017). Moreover, while the reliance on technology in online assessments presents challenges, it also offers benefits, particularly in enhancing students' technological proficiency. This was emphasised in studies by Alumalai and Paramasivam (2023) and Cramarenco et al. (2023), who found that engaging with online assessments can positively impact learners' technological skills.

Understanding these varied perceptions, from increased confidence and comfort to challenges related to technology and interaction quality, is essential for improving the design and implementation of online speaking assessments. By addressing these issues, educators can better align these assessments with learners' needs and preferences, ensuring they are both effective and equitable.

Challenges and Technical Considerations in Online Speaking Assessments

Numerous obstacles and technical issues associated with online speaking tests may limit their usefulness. Technical issues and unstable internet connections are frequent issues that might interfere with the evaluation process and affect the outcomes (Korkmaz, 2022). These problems lead to difficulty in giving every learner a fair experience and frequently result in inconsistencies in how assessments are administered (Alumalai & Paramasivam, 2023). Technical difficulties such as low device quality and connectivity issues also make the process more difficult. Nova (2020) highlights that both students and lecturers encounter significant difficulties during online assessments, including lagging screens and unclear audio, which can heighten anxiety and concerns about scoring accuracy. These technical and administrative challenges address the need for improved technology and more effective management strategies to ensure the reliability and fairness of online speaking assessments.

Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Online Speaking Assessments

Improving the efficiency of online speaking assessments frequently entails incorporating techniques such as video conferencing and real-time feedback. These interactive components

can make examinations feel more engaging and realistic, much like face-to-face discussions. For example, research by Yu (2022) demonstrates that videoconferencing tools significantly enhance second-language learning by providing interactive features that improve students' experiences and performance in online assessments. Similarly, Kessler (2018) emphasises the value of immediate feedback, stating that it can assist replicate the dynamics of in-person examinations in an online situation.

Another effective approach is to incorporate practice sessions and formative assessments. These strategies help students become acquainted with the online format, which can reduce anxiety and contribute to improved performance. Hampel and Stickler (2012) underline that continuous feedback during practice sessions helps learners improve their skills over time. Furthermore, providing a supportive online atmosphere in which students may engage via discussion boards and peer reviews improves the whole experience. As Chapelle and Voss (2020) suggest, this strategy lessens the sense of isolation associated with online learning. Addressing technological difficulties proactively, such as maintaining reliable technology and providing options such as recorded submissions, is also critical to making the evaluation process more efficient and successful (Chapelle & Voss, 2020).

Research Methodology
This study employs a qualitative research design to explore university ESL learners' perceptions and experiences with online speaking assessments. The study focuses on understanding the students' confidence, comfort, emotional impact, challenges, and potential areas for improvement in online speaking assessments. Data were collected through e-interviews conducted via a Google Form questionnaire. The use of e-interviews was chosen due to its efficiency in reaching participants across different geographical locations, enabling researchers to gather a diverse range of perspectives without the constraints of time and physical presence (Salmons, 2012; Creswell, 2014). E-interviews, as defined by Salmons (2012), refer to the process of conducting interviews via electronic means, such as email or online surveys, which allows for flexible and convenient data collection, especially in situations where face-to-face interviews are not feasible (Opdenakker, 2006; Janghorban, Latifnejad Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014).

A purposive sampling technique was employed in this study to select nine participants who had experienced taking online speaking assessments, chosen based on their proficiency levels, assessment marks, and availability to participate in the study. This sampling method was selected as it involved identifying and selecting individuals who were particularly knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Additionally, as Bernard (2017) and Spradley (1979) note, it was crucial that participants were available, willing to participate, and able to communicate their experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. The respondents of this study were nine university ESL learners enrolled in the English for Communicative Competence course. They were selected based on their English proficiency levels, which were categorised as high, average, and low. The categorisation was based on their previous performance in English language assessments and their overall academic records.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured Google Form questionnaire designed to capture the students' perceptions and experiences of online speaking assessments. The questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions that focused on various aspects of

online speaking assessments, including their general opinions, preferences, confidence levels, comfort, fairness of evaluation, challenges faced, and suggestions for improvement.

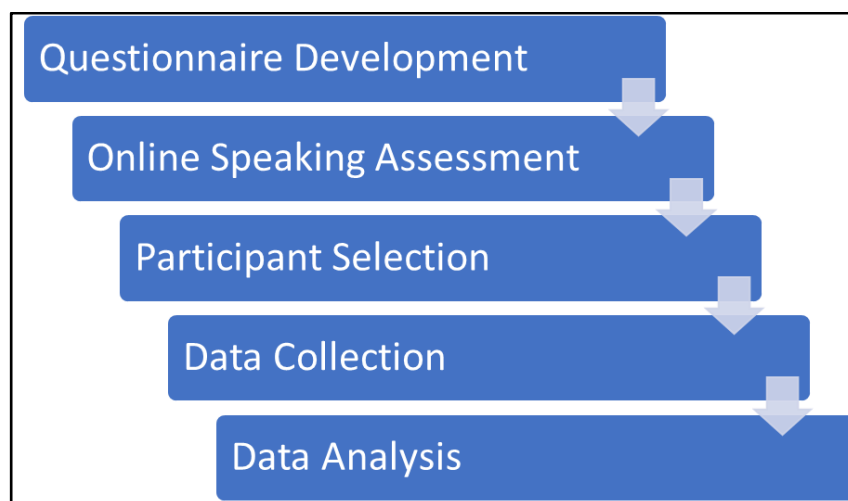The procedures of the study involved as stated below:

Questionnaire Development

Online Speaking Assessment

Participant Selection

Data Collection

Data Analysis

Figure 1: Research Procedures

Based on the Figure 1 above, the study involved a few steps beginning with questionnaire development. This questionnaire, adapted from Alumalai and Paramasivam (2023), was carefully designed to align with the objectives of the study and included open-ended questions that prompted detailed responses from the participants about their experiences and perceptions of online speaking assessments. With regards to the online speaking assessment, prior to answering the questionnaire, the learners had participated in an online speaking assessment as part of their course requirements. This assessment was conducted using an online platform, providing the context for their responses in the study. Participants later were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of proficiency levels. The selected learners were informed about the study and their consent was obtained. The Google Form questionnaire was distributed to the selected participants via WhatsApp. They were given a specified time frame to complete and submit their responses. The online nature of the questionnaire allowed participants to answer the questions at their convenience, ensuring that they could provide thoughtful and reflective responses. Finally, the responses were collected and analysed using qualitative content analysis. The data were coded and categorised based on recurring themes and patterns related to the learners' experiences and perceptions of online speaking assessments. The analysis aimed to identify common challenges, areas for improvement, and the overall impact of online assessments on students' confidence and comfort levels.

Findings and Discussions
This section will present and discuss the findings of the study based on four main themes.

Online Versus Face-To Face Mode of Speaking Assessments
Based on the interview responses, most learners prefer face-to-face speaking assessments over online ones for several reasons. They cite technical issues, particularly with internet connections, as the main factor influencing their preference. Learners believe that these

connectivity problems have increased their anxiety and nervousness during assessments. The respondents believe that face-to-face speaking assessments are preferable not only to avoid technical issues but also because the setting feels more natural. The respondents stated,

".........avoid technical issues and its feel more natural".

"I prefer face-to-face because maybe it make me less nervous a little bit since I don't need to worry about my connection".

"I wouldn't need to worry about factors that would not otherwise affect my performance. A couple examples of this is disconnecting while speaking, having trouble with the audio output/input ...."

Another respondent shared a similar sentiment, noting,

".... feel more personal, and it's easier to communicate because we can see the other person's body language and expressions".

In addition to technical issues, respondents cited concerns about cheating, the reduced worry about internet connectivity, functional and reliable devices and more personal interaction as reasons for preferring face-to-face assessments. Overall, they believe that face-to-face speaking assessments offer a better overall experience.

Although the majority of respondents prefer face-to-face assessments, some believe that online speaking assessments are advantageous. They reasoned that:

"I feel more relax because the environment that I chose to be in is more comfortable to me compare to when we do face to face assessments".

"I can save more time by not having to walk to the classroom".

In the interview, it was noted that implementing online speaking assessments has both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, they offer greater convenience, flexibility, and a less intimidating environment. However, they also come with challenges, such as technical difficulties and reduced personal interaction. These findings align with existing literature, which highlights the mixed impact of online assessments on learner experiences. Research supports the convenience and comfort of online assessments but also highlights the technical and interaction challenges that can affect assessment quality (Yu, 2022; Chapelle & Voss, 2020). Thus, while online assessments offer benefits like flexibility and ease of access, they also face significant challenges that must be addressed to improve their effectiveness and reliability.

The Affective Impact of Online Speaking Assessments
Overall, respondents reported minimal differences in their confidence levels and emotional states between face-to-face and online speaking assessments. They noted that both modes elicited somewhat similar levels of nervousness and anxiety, largely due to the nature of the assessment itself.

Regarding learners' confidence levels, the respondents shared:

"Not affected because online speaking…the level of confidence it just feel same, maybe a little more confidence when having online speaking because don't need to to see face to face with lecturer".

"My confidence level is not affected because doing it online can reduce the feeling of nervousness".

"No, it doesn't really affect my confidence level…both of the method are really nerve-wrecking for me, it doesn't matter which method".
"From my experience, there wasn't a significant increase or decrease of confidence from what I felt".

During the online speaking assessment, most respondents expressed that they felt uneasy, anxious, and pressured primarily due to concerns about potential internet connection issues. However, some participants noted that the online environment fostered a more relaxed atmosphere, as they were able to take the assessment in familiar and less intimidating surroundings, leading them feeling more confident and at ease. Below are some of the responses:
"... for me it is easier without the presence of a lecturer in front of me".
"I feel a bit anxious due to lack of immediate respond and worries about technical issues, but being in a familiar place helps me stay comfortable".
"The differences is you don't really feel pressure and even a bit chill but the thought of having internet connection problem is scary".
"For me, it felt like any other assessment, a bit uneasy and anxious but still manageable. The only difference is, with face to face, I could really feel the atmosphere of being in an environment that tells you "This is an assessment, you need to do good".

The respondents experienced mixed feelings of comfort and discomfort during the assessment. The key factors contributing to these feelings include technical issues, the assessment setting, and the nature of the assessment itself. These factors have, to some degree, influenced their emotional states and confidence levels. These findings are highlighted in the responses below:
"Online more tu lagging issues and face to face more to nervous because need to face the lecturer maybe online more comfort have your own space".
"Online speaking assessment is more comfortable than face to face as told during the discussion with my friend we are together and it can reduce excessive nervousness and fear…can be more comfortable because it is flexibility".
"I am more comfortable with an online speaking assessment…being in a familiar environment helps me feel at ease".
"I find online speaking assessments somewhat uncomfortable. While they're convenient because I can take them from any location, the lack of face-to-face interaction makes it harder for me to connect with the lecture. Technical issues like poor internet connections can also add to the stress, making it difficult to focus and communicate clearly".

These findings align with existing research, which suggests that while online assessments can offer a more comfortable environment, they also present unique challenges that may impact learners' emotional experiences (Alumalai & Paramasivam, 2023; Korkmaz, 2022). The contrast between the ease of online assessments and the stress from technical problems highlights how complex it is to understand learners' feelings about different assessment types.

In summary, these responses highlight that while online assessments might reduce some stressors associated with face-to-face interactions, technical difficulties and the lack of

immediate feedback can still contribute to anxiety, showing how different assessment modes affect learner confidence and emotional states.

Appropriateness of The Test Items and Fairness of The Evaluation
According to the interview responses, the participants felt that the questions in the online speaking assessment were well-suited to their level. They found the questions were easy to understand and well-structured. The test items were perceived as "challenging in a good way" and interconnected with one another. Consequently, participants were able to comprehend and respond to them effectively. As a result, these items did not affect their performance as much as the other factors previously mentioned.

Most of the respondents agreed that the time allocated for them to prepare and give responses to the questions is sufficient and appropriate to the difficulty level. They stated that the preparation time was ideal for discussing points and elaborations with their partners. However, one respondent felt that the preparation time should be extended, given that the assessment was conducted online and there could be internet connection issues, particularly on the students' end. This aligns with Valencia Robles (2017) who suggests that adequate preparation time is crucial, especially in an online setting where technical issues can arise.

On the other hand, the respondents believe that the evaluation of the assessment is reliable and fair, provided there are no technical issues related to the internet. They explained that internet connection issues could significantly impact their performance and the accuracy of the assessment scores. This finding is supported by Alumalai and Paramasivam (2023) who highlight the importance of managing technical difficulties to ensure fair evaluation. Below are some responses that highlight these concerns:
"I think the questions are easy to understand and not that hard. It is suitable for our level in diploma."
"The question is relevant and suitable for university student"
"I think the question used in online speaking assessment is challenging in a good way. Its fitting to test our reaction, answer and elaboration…"
"The time provided to prepare and answer the questions is sufficient and the time given can explain more carefully"
"In my opinion, it would be better to increase the preparation time considering that if the assessments are being done online, some students might encounter lagging in their internet or might have outside interference since it is not done in a proper classroom".
"I'd say the time provided is sufficient and scales well with the difficulty of the questions".
"I think the evaluation for online speaking assessments is fair and reliable when lagging or poor sound factors are carefully managed"
"I think it's not fair if the students encounter with a problem with their internet connection. It might affect the performance of the students…"

The responses indicate that while the test items and evaluation process are perceived as appropriate and fair, technical issues such as internet connectivity can still influence the assessment experience. This reflects the broader challenges noted in the literature regarding online assessments and their impact on fairness and reliability (Cramarenco et al., 2023; Korkmaz, 2022).

Challenges in Online Speaking Assessments

Based on the responses gathered, there are three primary challenges students face during online speaking assessments:

The first challenge identified is technical issues. This most frequently mentioned challenge involves technical difficulties, such as hardware failures and network problems. These issues have a direct impact on students' confidence and emotional states. The students' concerns about unreliable internet connections and potential technical malfunctions lead to increased anxiety and stress, which in turn affects their overall performance. Moreover, the anticipation of such problems makes them feel overwhelmed, thereby diminishing their ability to perform well during the assessment. As shared by the respondents:

"Technical issues such as poor internet connection make it hard to focus".
"The issue that student have is technical issue with the internet…some students that live in college they doesn't buy any internet but they just use wifi uitm for students…"
"Technical issues like unstable internet connections or poor audio quality can disrupt the flow of the conversation, making it difficult to communicate effectively".

These findings align with previous research that emphasises the significant impact of technical difficulties on students' assessment experiences and performance. For example, Alumalai and Paramasivam (2023) found that technical issues could aggravate stress and hinder performance, while Korkmaz (2022) highlighted similar challenges in online assessments.

The second challenge is related to environmental distractions. Respondents noted that disturbances from their surroundings negatively impact their focus during online assessments. Unlike face-to-face assessments where typically conducted in controlled environments like classrooms or computer labs, online assessments often occur in less ideal settings such as hostel rooms or outdoor areas around campus. These environments can introduce undesirable noises and distractions, further hindering students' concentration and performance. This aligns with findings from Yingzi (2020), who emphasised the importance of a quiet, distraction-free environment for effective assessments. As the respondents noted:

"Being in a different environment, where there were noises which gave me distractions that affected my concentration".
"Having to choose a suitable place for me and my partner to take the assessment, our own dorm room is obviously not suitable with our roommates walking around and most places prepared by UiTM are being used by many student".
"...lagging issues and surrounding issues"

The last challenge found that the respondents felt during the assessment is lack of direct interaction. The absence of face-to-face interaction in online speaking assessments is another significant challenge to the students. The respondents stated that they lacked immediate feedback and non-verbal cues both from their partners and the assessor. This lack of direct interaction can affect their ability to gauge their performance in real-time, leading to uncertainty and reduced confidence. Consequently, they may struggle to express themselves effectively and respond to prompts or questions, affecting their overall performance in the assessment. The respondents shared their experiences:

"...missing immediate respond, and speaking into a screen instead of interacting directly…feel less natural and increase anxiety".

"The challenge that I faced was that I couldn't read the facial expressions of the examiner and having the feeling of I'm not actually there for a test".
"I think the challenges i faces is unfamiliar format for online test".

These difficulties reflect the concerns highlighted by Yingzi (2020) and Amengual-Pizarro and García-Laborda (2017) who noted that the absence of non-verbal feedback in online settings can impact communication and performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations
The findings of this study have revealed a diverse landscape of learner preferences towards either online or face-to-face speaking assessment and the challenges they experience during the assessment. Based on the responses gathered, several key insights emerge:

1. **Preference for Face-to-Face Assessments**: Most learners express a preference for face-to-face speaking assessments over online ones. The primary reasons cited include the avoidance of technical issues and the more natural, engaging setting of in-person interactions. Face-to-face assessments alleviate concerns about connectivity instability, offer a more controlled environment, and facilitate better non-verbal communication and immediate feedback, which contribute to reduced anxiety and a more effective assessment experience.

2. **Advantages of Online Assessments**: Despite the preference for face-to-face interactions, some learners appreciate the benefits of online assessments, such as the flexibility to choose a comfortable environment and the convenience of saving time on commuting. These aspects can make online assessments less intimidating and offer a more relaxed setting, contributing to a potentially more comfortable experience for some students.

3. **Affective Impact**: While the emotional impact of online versus face-to-face assessments varies, respondents generally report similar levels of nervousness and anxiety due to the nature of the assessment itself. However, some find the online environment less intimidating, as it allows for a more familiar and comfortable setting, which can help reduce anxiety.

4. **Fairness and Appropriateness**: The test items in both modes are generally deemed appropriate and well-suited to the students' level, with sufficient preparation time in most cases. However, technical issues can affect the fairness of the evaluation, highlighting the need for reliable internet connections to ensure accurate assessment scores.

5. **Challenges in Online Assessments**: The main challenges identified in online speaking assessments include:
   . Technical Issues: Problems with hardware and internet connectivity frequently lead to increased anxiety and diminished performance. These issues disrupt the assessment process and contribute to feelings of uncertainty and stress.
   . Environmental Distractions: The online assessment setting often lacks the controlled environment of traditional classrooms, leading to distractions that can negatively impact students' focus and performance.
   . Lack of Direct Interaction: The absence of immediate feedback and non-verbal cues in online assessments affects students' ability to gauge their performance and respond dynamically, which can reduce their confidence and effectiveness.

In summary, while face-to-face assessments are preferred for their direct interaction and controlled setting, online assessments offer convenience and flexibility. Online speaking assessment could be more accepted by learners by improving the challenges of technical issues, environmental distractions, and lack of interaction. Addressing these challenges involves not only improving technical support and creating more stable online environments but also providing students with strategies to manage distractions and adapt to new formats. It also requires a multifaceted approach whereby improving technical infrastructure and providing stable internet connections are the utmost measures to be taken for minimising disruptions. Additionally, creating guidelines for optimal assessment environments and offering strategies to manage distractions can help students perform better. Finally, incorporating features that simulate real-time interaction and feedback in online assessments can enhance learners' engagement and effectiveness. By tackling these areas and being proactive in minimising the challenges students face in online speaking assessment, educators and institutions can better support learners and ensure a more equitable and effective assessment experience.

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