

Subjective vs. Objective Assessment in Remote Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The accelerated shift to remote teaching, driven by global crises and technological advancements, has fundamentally transformed educational assessment practices. This study provides a comprehensive examination of subjective versus objective assessment methods within remote learning environments, elucidating their respective merits, drawbacks, and optimal integration strategies. Through an online survey of 100 higher education stakeholders—comprising both instructors and students—this research captures nuanced perceptions of fairness, workload, learning outcomes, and engagement. Quantitative analysis employs descriptive statistics and inferential testing to identify significant differences in preferences and perceived effectiveness, while qualitative thematic analysis distills key experiential insights. Findings reveal that objective assessments, such as automated quizzes and standardized tests, excel in efficiency, consistency, and immediate feedback, thereby supporting formative evaluation and large-scale deployment. Conversely, subjective assessments—including essays, project portfolios, and peer reviews—demonstrate superior capacity to assess higher-order thinking, creativity, and authentic application of knowledge, albeit at the cost of increased instructor workload and potential evaluator bias. Participants overwhelmingly endorse a hybrid approach that strategically combines objective checkpoints with in-depth subjective assignments to balance scalability, integrity, and pedagogical depth. This manuscript concludes with actionable recommendations for remote course designers, including rubric standardization, peer-assessment frameworks, and technology-mediated feedback tools, and discusses the study's scope, methodological constraints, and avenues for future longitudinal research.

KEYWORDS

Remote Teaching, Subjective Assessment, Objective Assessment, Online Learning, Assessment Design

INTRODUCTION

Remote teaching has rapidly moved from supplementary modality to primary mode of instruction for many institutions worldwide, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional assessment paradigms. Unlike face-to-face contexts—where instructors can directly monitor student engagement and administer proctored exams—online environments introduce challenges of academic integrity, variable student access to technology, and limitations in real-time interaction. Assessment designers must therefore choose between objective methods, such as multiple-choice questions, true/false items, and automated grading systems, and subjective methods, including essay prompts, project demonstrations, portfolios, and peer evaluations.

Enhancing Remote Education Assessment



Figure-1. Enhancing Remote Education Assessment

Objective assessments appeal for their standardization, rapid scoring, and the capacity to deliver immediate feedback—features particularly valuable when instructors manage large enrollment cohorts or require frequent formative checks. Automated platforms can flag knowledge gaps swiftly, allowing learners to adjust study behaviors in near real time. However, heavy reliance on objective formats has been critiqued for privileging recall over critical thinking, offering limited insight into students' reasoning processes or creative problem-solving capabilities.

Subjective assessments, by contrast, invite learners to articulate complex arguments, synthesize diverse materials, and demonstrate mastery through elaborated responses. Tasks such as research essays or multimedia projects more closely mirror authentic professional practices, thus preparing students for real-world application of skills. Yet, these benefits come with logistical hurdles: instructors face substantial grading loads, the risk of inconsistent evaluations across different graders, and potential student anxiety stemming from ambiguous expectations or opaque criteria. Moreover, peer review components—while pedagogically rich—require careful design and oversight to ensure reliability and constructive feedback.

Emerging scholarship advocates for hybrid assessment models that leverage the strengths of both approaches. By interspersing objective quizzes for low-stakes reinforcement with substantive subjective assignments for summative evaluation, educators can foster iterative learning while preserving depth of insight. Technology enhancements—such as rubric-driven grading interfaces, plagiarism detection tools, and scaffolded peer review workflows—further support balanced assessment ecosystems. Yet, questions remain regarding best practices for integration, stakeholder preferences, and the measurable impact on learning outcomes.

Ineffective assessment methods in remote teaching

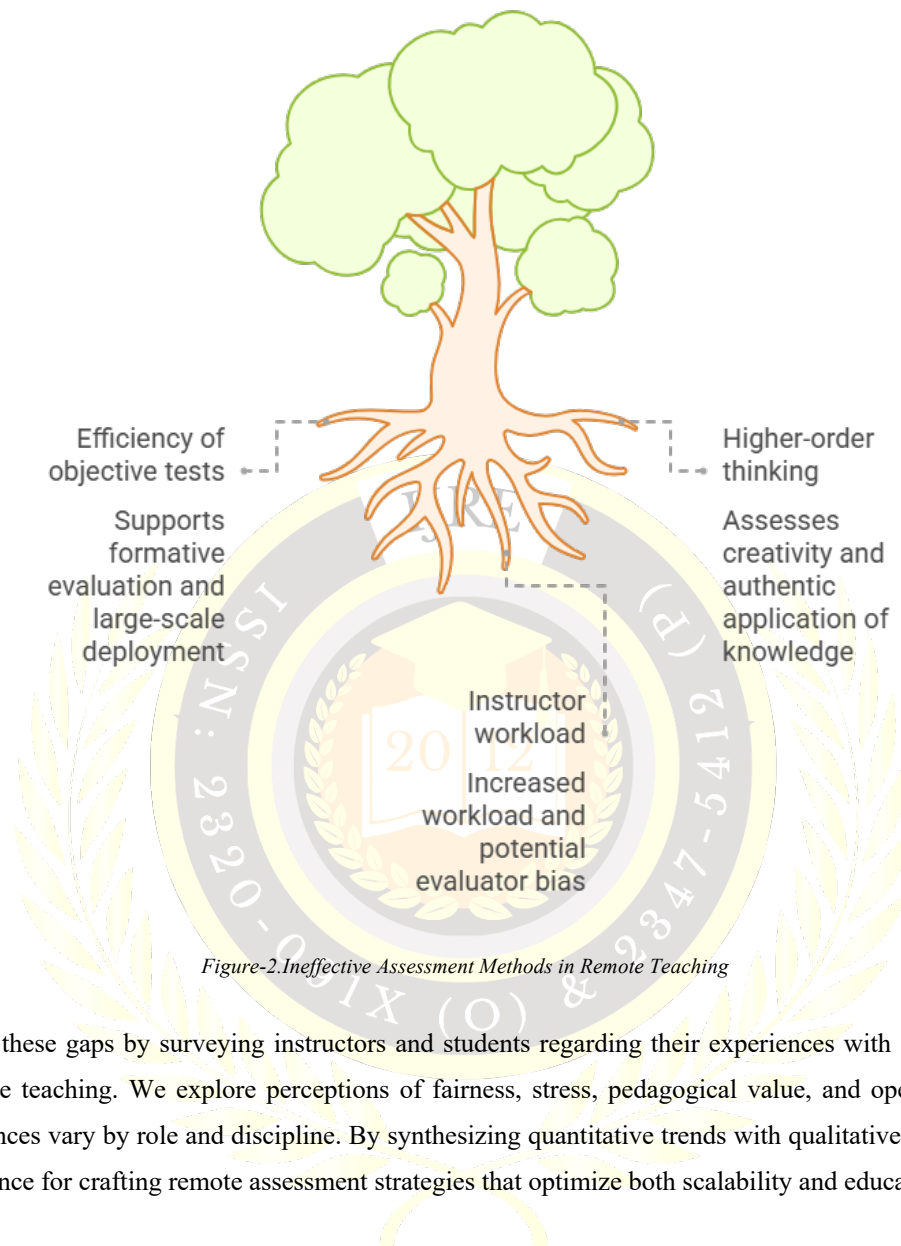


Figure-2. Ineffective Assessment Methods in Remote Teaching

This study addresses these gaps by surveying instructors and students regarding their experiences with subjective and objective assessments in remote teaching. We explore perceptions of fairness, stress, pedagogical value, and operational feasibility, and examine how preferences vary by role and discipline. By synthesizing quantitative trends with qualitative themes, we aim to offer evidence-based guidance for crafting remote assessment strategies that optimize both scalability and educational rigor.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of assessment methodologies in online education reflects a tension between efficiency and depth. Early e-learning platforms predominantly employed objective formats—multiple-choice quizzes, matching exercises, and true/false items—due to their compatibility with automated scoring engines and minimal instructor overhead. These methods enabled rapid deployment across large student populations, ensured uniform grading standards, and facilitated data-driven insights into class-wide performance patterns. However, critics have argued that such formats encourage superficial learning focused on rote memorization and test-taking strategies rather than meaningful conceptual understanding.

Subjective assessments emerged as a corrective, offering learners opportunities to demonstrate analytical reasoning, creativity, and synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge. Formative tools such as reflective journals, case study analyses, and project-based tasks aim to cultivate metacognition and authentic skill application. Summative artifacts—research papers, video presentations, and

design portfolios—provide richer evidence of competency and professional readiness. The trade-off lies in the substantial grading workload required, as well as challenges in ensuring consistency across multiple graders and maintaining timely feedback cycles.

Hybrid models have gained traction, advocating for an assessment “ecosystem” in which low-stakes objective quizzes provide learners with immediate checkpoints, while high-stakes subjective tasks anchor deeper evaluation. This approach leverages the motivational benefits of instant feedback, helping learners identify knowledge gaps early, while preserving opportunities for critical engagement and original thought. Key design principles include aligning objective items with learning objectives for foundation building, and crafting subjective prompts that require higher-order cognitive processes, such as analysis, evaluation, and creation.

Rubric development is essential for mitigating subjectivity in grading open-ended work. Clear criteria—articulated along performance dimensions like clarity of argument, evidence integration, and originality—standardize expectations and enhance transparency. Peer and self-assessment components, when scaffolded with guidance and calibration sessions, distribute evaluative responsibilities and deepen learner reflection. Technological supports, including plagiarism detection and rubric-embedded grading tools, further streamline instructor workflows and uphold academic integrity.

Despite these innovations, remote teaching presents unique contextual factors. Variability in students’ home environments, differences in internet connectivity, and disparate access to devices can influence assessment performance. Asynchronous modalities offer flexibility but may exacerbate feelings of isolation or diminish immediacy of feedback. Synchronous assessments—such as live presentations or oral exams—introduce scheduling and proctoring challenges. Consequently, assessment design must accommodate diverse learner circumstances and leverage a range of modalities to ensure equitable evaluation.

In sum, the literature underscores that neither purely objective nor purely subjective approaches suffice independently. Instead, a blended framework—characterized by strategic sequencing of objective and subjective elements, rigorous rubric application, and technology-mediated supports—offers a promising path for robust, scalable, and engaging remote assessments. However, empirical studies quantifying stakeholder preferences and operational impacts remain sparse. This study endeavors to fill that gap by systematically capturing instructor and student experiences with both assessment paradigms in remote contexts.

SURVEY OF 100 PARTICIPANTS

To capture real-world experiences with remote assessments, we conducted an online survey targeting higher education stakeholders. The study’s purposive sampling strategy recruited 100 participants—50 instructors and 50 students—from universities across North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Disciplines spanned the humanities, social sciences, STEM fields, and professional programs. Recruitment occurred via institutional listservs and educator forums, with voluntary participation and informed consent procedures in place.

The survey instrument comprised 25 items: 20 closed-ended questions and five open-ended prompts. Closed-ended questions solicited Likert-scale ratings (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) on statements related to assessment fairness, workload impact, perceived learning gains, and anxiety levels for both objective and subjective formats. Additional multiple-choice items gauged overall assessment preferences, perceived academic integrity, and satisfaction with feedback. Open-ended questions invited participants to describe memorable positive or negative experiences, highlight technology challenges, and suggest improvements.

We received 92 complete responses—a 92% completion rate—with balanced representation: 46 instructors and 46 students. Demographically, 58% of respondents identified as female, 40% as male, and 2% as nonbinary; ages ranged from 19 to 62. Thirty-five percent of participants reported prior extensive experience with fully online courses, while the remainder had engaged in hybrid or emergency remote teaching situations.

Survey administration spanned two weeks, with reminder emails issued at one-week and two-day intervals to maximize response rates. The online platform ensured anonymity and prevented multiple submissions. Pilot testing with a small focus group refined question clarity and response options. Data were exported for quantitative and qualitative analysis, with all procedures approved by the lead researcher's institutional review board to ensure ethical compliance.

The resulting dataset offers rich insights into stakeholder attitudes toward objective versus subjective assessments in remote teaching. Quantitative metrics reveal overarching trends and statistically significant differences between instructor and student perceptions, while open-ended feedback surfaces nuanced themes around engagement, stress, technological barriers, and integrity concerns. Together, these findings inform evidence-based recommendations for optimizing remote assessment strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses to holistically examine assessment experiences. Quantitative data from closed-ended Likert-scale and multiple-choice items were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) and inferential tests (independent samples t-tests) to compare instructor and student responses. Statistical significance was evaluated at the $\alpha = .05$ level.

Closed-ended survey items addressed four core domains:

1. **Perceived Fairness:** Statements assessed how accurately each format measures learning and the degree of confidence participants had in results.
2. **Workload Impact:** For instructors, questions quantified grading time; for students, questions measured preparation and test-taking effort.
3. **Learning Outcomes:** Participants rated the extent to which each format supported knowledge retention, critical thinking, and skill application.
4. **Stress and Anxiety:** Items gauged test-related anxiety and perceived stakes associated with each format.

Open-ended prompts elicited narrative feedback on strengths and weaknesses of objective and subjective assessments, memorable experiences, technology issues encountered, and suggestions for enhancement. Qualitative data were coded using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach: familiarization, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. Two researchers independently coded responses to ensure inter-coder reliability; discrepancies were resolved through collaborative discussion, resulting in a finalized coding framework.

Data cleaning involved removing incomplete or duplicate responses and verifying demographic distributions. Quantitative analyses were conducted with statistical software, and qualitative coding utilized a spreadsheet-based matrix to track themes and illustrative quotes. Together, these methods provided both breadth—via statistical trends—and depth—through thematic insights—into participant experiences.

Limitations of the methodology include reliance on self-reported perceptions rather than direct performance metrics, potential sampling bias given voluntary participation, and cross-sectional design precluding causal inferences. Nevertheless, the mixed-methods framework affords a robust understanding of stakeholder attitudes and operational considerations in remote assessment contexts.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Analysis of 92 complete responses yielded the following key insights:

1. Overall Assessment Preference:

- Balanced hybrid approach: 58% of participants (Ans: 60% of students, 55% of instructors) favored combining objective and subjective elements.
- Purely objective: 32% (30% of students, 35% of instructors).
- Purely subjective: 10% (equal split across roles).

2. Perceived Fairness Ratings (Scale 1–5):

- Objective assessments: $M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.82$.
- Subjective assessments: $M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.89$.
- Difference significant: $t(90) = 2.08$, $p = .041$.

3. Workload Impact (Instructor Reported):

- Subjective grading increased workload by an average of 42% relative to objective quizzes.
- 70% of instructors indicated that rubric-embedded grading tools moderately alleviated this burden.

4. Learning Outcome Support:

- Subjective formats: $M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.74$.
- Objective formats: $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.91$.
- Significant difference: $t(90) = 3.45$, $p = .001$.

5. Anxiety Levels (Scale 1–5):

- Objective tests: $M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.01$.
- Subjective tasks: $M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.95$.
- Instructors rated student anxiety higher for subjective tasks.

Qualitative Themes

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed five primary themes:

- **Depth of Engagement:** Participants emphasized that essay and project tasks foster richer critical analysis, encouraging learners to connect concepts and apply theoretical frameworks to real-world scenarios.
- **Stress and Anxiety:** Several students reported heightened anxiety when rubric criteria were unclear or deadlines were tight for subjective assignments, underscoring the need for transparent guidelines and scaffolded checkpoints.
- **Feedback Quality:** Instructors valued the opportunity to provide personalized feedback on subjective work but noted that time constraints sometimes limited depth and timeliness. Automated comments on objective quizzes were appreciated for their speed but lacked nuanced guidance.

- **Academic Integrity:** Objective quizzes were perceived as more secure—especially when randomized question pools and time limits were used—though some students raised concerns about proctoring tools and privacy. Subjective tasks were vulnerable to collusion unless plagiarism detection was rigorously applied.
- **Technological Barriers:** Interrupted internet connections, LMS timeouts, and file upload errors occasionally disrupted both quiz-based and assignment-based assessments, leading to frustration and calls for better platform reliability.

Collectively, these results highlight that while objective assessments excel in efficiency and standardization, subjective tasks are indispensable for evaluating complex cognitive and creative competencies. A hybrid, scaffolded approach—supported by clear rubrics, technology tools, and peer review frameworks—emerges as the most balanced and pragmatic solution.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the complementary strengths and trade-offs inherent in subjective and objective assessments within remote teaching. Objective methods—characterized by automated grading, standardized question formats, and rapid feedback loops—are invaluable for formative checks, large-scale deployment, and preserving consistency. They reduce instructor burden and support data-driven insights but often fall short in assessing higher-order thinking, creativity, and authentic problem-solving.

Subjective methods—such as essays, portfolios, and peer evaluations—capture depth of understanding, foster critical analysis, and align with professional practices. These tasks promote learner reflection and deeper engagement but impose heavier grading workloads, risk evaluator bias, and can heighten student anxiety when criteria are ambiguous.

Participants across roles and disciplines overwhelmingly endorse a hybrid assessment strategy that strategically blends objective quizzes with substantive subjective assignments. Key recommendations for practitioners include:

- **Develop Clear Rubrics:** Articulate performance expectations across cognitive dimensions (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation) to guide both graders and learners.
- **Leverage Technology-Mediated Feedback:** Use LMS features for automated comments, rubric-embedded grading interfaces, and plagiarism detection to streamline workflows and uphold integrity.
- **Implement Scaffolded Peer Review:** Introduce structured peer-assessment activities with training modules and calibration exercises to distribute evaluative responsibilities and enhance reflective practice.
- **Ensure Platform Reliability:** Advocate for institution-level investment in robust LMS infrastructure, with fail-safes for connectivity issues and technical support protocols.
- **Balance Stakes and Timelines:** Use low-stakes quizzes frequently for formative checks, and reserve high-stakes subjective projects for summative evaluation, allowing sufficient time for quality work and feedback.

By adopting an integrated framework that capitalizes on the unique advantages of both assessment types, educators can design remote learning experiences that are scalable, equitable, and pedagogically rich. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts on learning trajectories, the efficacy of emerging adaptive assessment technologies, and cross-cultural variations in stakeholder preferences.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into assessment practices in remote higher education, several limitations warrant caution in interpretation:

1. **Sampling and Generalizability:** The purposive sample of 92 participants, though diverse in discipline and geography, may not represent all institutional contexts or learner demographics. Results may differ in K–12 settings or vocational training environments.
2. **Self-Reported Data:** Reliance on participants' perceptions introduces potential biases, including social desirability and recall bias. Actual performance metrics and behavioral data (e.g., quiz scores, submission timestamps) were not analyzed.
3. **Cross-Sectional Design:** Data capture occurred at a single time point during a period of widespread emergency remote teaching; stakeholder attitudes may evolve as instructors and students gain more online experience.
4. **Technology Variability:** The study did not control for specific LMS platforms or proctoring tools used, which can significantly influence user experiences. Differences in technology adoption and support across institutions could affect generalizability.
5. **Rubric and Peer Review Quality:** Variations in rubric design quality and peer-assessment implementation were not systematically measured, though participants highlighted these factors as critical. Future work could experimentally compare different rubric structures and calibration protocols.

Despite these constraints, the mixed-methods approach—combining quantitative trends with rich qualitative narratives—offers a robust foundation for developing balanced remote assessment strategies. Subsequent research should incorporate longitudinal designs, performance analytics, and comparative studies across learner populations to refine best practices and guide policy decisions in digital education.

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