DIGITAL-BASED ASSESSMENT IN BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: A PATHWAY TO MORE EFFECTIVE EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

Assessment in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) such as Business English must address the need for authentic and practical language use in professional contexts. However, traditional paper-based assessments often fall short in reflecting real-world communication tasks. With the rise of digital technology and the shift toward online learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, integrating digital-based assessment has become both a necessity and an opportunity in higher education. Yet, limited empirical research exists on how such assessments are perceived and implemented in the Indonesian context. This study aims to explore the implementation of digital-based assessment in a Business English classroom at a private university in Indonesia. Specifically, it investigates how digital tools affect student engagement, the authenticity of assessments, and the challenges experienced by both instructors and students. A qualitative research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of student assignments and feedback. The participants consisted of one lecturer and twenty-five undergraduate students enrolled in a Business English course. The findings show that digital-based assessment significantly improves student engagement by enabling timely feedback and fostering an interactive learning environment. Students valued platforms like Google Classroom for providing real-time input that helped them revise and improve their performance. Moreover, digital tools enhanced the authenticity of tasks such as business emails, virtual negotiations, and presentations, making assessments more reflective of real-world scenarios. However, challenges were also evident, including digital literacy gaps, limited technological access, and unstable internet connections. Both students and the instructor expressed the need for more structured support and training to optimize the use of digital tools in assessment. In conclusion, digital-based assessment offers clear advantages in terms of engagement and authenticity in Business English instruction. Nonetheless, its effectiveness depends on institutional support, teacher readiness, and student digital competence. Strategic planning, infrastructure development, and targeted professional development are essential to fully harness the benefits of digital assessment while minimizing its barriers.

Keywords: *Digital-based Assessment, Business English, ESP, Higher Education, Formative Feedback*

INTRODUCTION

Assessment has long played a pivotal role in language education, serving not only as a tool for measuring learning outcomes but also as a means of informing instruction and enhancing pedagogical strategies. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly Business English, assessment becomes even more critical, as it must align with the practical and communicative needs of learners in professional settings. With the rapid advancement of digital technology, traditional assessment practices are increasingly being replaced or complemented by digital-based alternatives that offer greater flexibility, accessibility, and real-time feedback (Rachmawati and Purwati, 2022). These digital tools also allow for the integration of authentic, task-based assessments that mirror real-world business communication scenarios. As a result, educators are increasingly exploring how digital-based assessments can be leveraged to create more meaningful and effective evaluation processes in language classrooms.

Business English, as a branch of ESP, demands an instructional and evaluative approach that reflects real-world business communication contexts. In Indonesian higher education institutions, particularly private universities, the teaching of Business English often emphasizes task-based learning, presentation skills, report writing, and other professional communication tasks. These areas require assessments that go beyond paper-and-pencil tests and instead focus on performance-based and authentic tasks (Rachmawati and Fadhilawati, 2024). The integration of digital tools in such assessments holds the potential to provide more nuanced and dynamic evaluation processes. Digital assessments can simulate workplace situations more effectively, allowing students to demonstrate language proficiency in contextually relevant ways. Consequently, the alignment between assessment tasks and actual business communication practices becomes stronger, supporting both language acquisition and professional preparedness.

The global shift toward digital education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has further underscored the relevance and urgency of adopting digital-based assessments in language classrooms. Learning Management Systems (LMS), online quizzes, e-portfolios, and digital rubrics have become integral parts of many

educational ecosystems. In the Business English classroom, these tools can support the assessment of both linguistic competence and pragmatic skills, which are essential for future professionals operating in English-dominant work environments.

Previous studies have highlighted the growing effectiveness of digital-based assessment in language learning environments. For instance, Rachmawati and Fadhilawati (2024) found that the use of online formative assessments in ESP classrooms significantly improved learner engagement and self-regulated learning behaviours. Similarly, a study by Romadhon (2024) demonstrated that integrating digital tools in Business English writing tasks enhanced both the clarity of assessment criteria and students' performance. In the Indonesian context, research by Erito (2023) revealed that the implementation of technological-based assessment platform facilitated timely feedback and improved student accountability in ESP courses. In addition, (M. Li, 2018) observed that students perceived digital-based writing assessments using computer-mediated collaborative writing as more authentic and reflective of real-world business communication, though challenges related to digital literacy and connectivity persisted.

Despite the growing interest in digital-based assessment practices, there remains a gap in empirical research, especially in the Indonesian context regarding how these technologies are perceived, implemented, and experienced in real classroom settings. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how digital-based assessment is conducted in a Business English course at a private university in Indonesia. By employing a qualitative research design, this study aims to gain in-depth insights into teachers' and students' experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of digital assessment tools. Furthermore, the study explores how digital assessments contribute to more effective evaluation processes in Business English classes. Effectiveness in this context is measured not only in terms of accuracy and comprehensiveness but also in the assessment's ability to support learning, foster engagement, and encourage autonomous learning. A qualitative approach allows for a detailed examination of the subjective experiences and perceptions of participants, thus providing a richer understanding of the phenomenon.

This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of assessment for learning (AfL), which emphasizes the formative use of assessment to support student learning rather than merely judging it. Digital technologies, when used appropriately, can enhance formative assessment practices through features such as immediate feedback, interactive tasks, and multimodal submissions. In Business English classrooms, such practices can help learners monitor their progress and adapt their learning strategies accordingly. The context of the study is a private university in Indonesia adds a valuable dimension to the research, as private institutions often have greater autonomy in adopting educational innovations but may also face challenges related to infrastructure, digital literacy, and teacher training. Investigating how digital-based assessments are implemented within such a setting provides practical insights for other institutions seeking to improve their assessment practices. Additionally, the study considers the role of the teacher as a mediator in the digital assessment process. The effectiveness of any assessment tool depends significantly on how it is designed, administered, and interpreted by educators. Thus, understanding teachers' perspectives, including their confidence in using technology, pedagogical beliefs, and perceived constraints, is essential for informing sustainable implementation strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital-Based Assessment in Language Learning

Digital-based assessment refers to the use of technology tools and platforms to evaluate student learning, performance, and progress. These assessments range from simple online quizzes and automated feedback systems to more complex platforms such as e-portfolios, digital presentations, and interactive simulations. According to Rachmawati et al. (2024), digital assessment tools can improve efficiency, provide instant feedback, and enhance formative assessment practices. In language education, especially in contexts that require communicative competence, digital assessments can offer more authentic and multimodal means of evaluation, such as video-based speaking tasks, online peer reviews, and

collaborative writing activities. These formats allow for better alignment with 21st-century skills and professional workplace requirements.

Assessment is a fundamental component of the teaching and learning process, serving both summative and formative purposes in education. Traditionally, language assessment has relied heavily on standardized tests and written examinations that prioritize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary recall. However, as educational paradigms shift toward more learner-centered and competency-based approaches, the role of assessment is being redefined to support continuous learning, critical thinking, and real-world application. This shift has been particularly evident in English language teaching (ELT), where the emphasis is now on communicative competence and the practical use of language. In this evolving context, the integration of technology into assessment practices is not only inevitable but also necessary to meet the changing demands of learners and the modern workplace.

Assessment in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Business English

Assessment in ESP, including Business English, must reflect the specific communication needs of learners in professional settings. As Brown (2015) explains, ESP assessments should not only test general language proficiency but also evaluate task-specific competencies relevant to a given field. In Business English, this might include assessing learners' abilities to write formal emails, conduct presentations, negotiate deals, or participate in meetings. Traditional forms of assessment often fall short in capturing these real-world skills. Therefore, integrating digital tools such as presentation software, business simulation apps, or email writing platforms offers a more practical and accurate way of assessing learners' readiness for workplace communication.

Moreover, digital-based assessments in Business English not only provide authentic contexts but also allow for greater interactivity and learner autonomy (Rachmawati and Purwati, 2021). For example, learners can record and submit video presentations, engage in simulated business negotiations via virtual meeting platforms, or collaborate on reports using shared online documents. These tasks

mirror the communication tools commonly used in professional environments, thereby increasing the relevance and applicability of the assessment. Additionally, digital assessments can be designed to include iterative feedback cycles, where students revise their work based on peer or instructor input, further enhancing learning outcomes. As a result, digital integration in assessment practices supports a more holistic and competency-oriented approach to evaluating Business English proficiency.

Advantages and Challenges of Technology Integration in Assessment

Several studies have emphasized the advantages of using technology in classroom-based assessment. Digital tools enhance accessibility, promote student engagement, and support differentiated instruction (Widodo, 2015). Moreover, online platforms allow for the collection of rich assessment data, including student reflections, peer feedback, and iterative submissions, which can inform teaching practices more effectively. However, researchers also highlight potential challenges, such as digital literacy gaps, unreliable internet connectivity, and resistance to change among educators (Borkovska et al., 2024). In developing country contexts like Indonesia, these challenges can be more pronounced, especially in institutions with limited technological infrastructure or teacher training.

To address these challenges, recent research suggests the need for targeted professional development programs that equip educators with both the technical and pedagogical skills necessary for effective digital assessment implementation. Institutional support, such as providing stable digital infrastructure and fostering a culture of innovation, is equally crucial in ensuring successful integration. In the context of Business English, where communication tasks often mimic professional scenarios, instructors can be guided to select or design assessment tools that balance technological accessibility with pedagogical goals. Furthermore, involving students in the assessment design process and offering orientation sessions can help mitigate issues related to digital literacy and engagement. These strategies not only reduce

barriers but also promote a more inclusive and empowering assessment environment for all stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the implementation and perceptions of digital-based assessment in a Business English classroom at a private university in Indonesia (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the experiences, attitudes, and contextual factors influencing both teachers and students in using technology for assessment purposes. The participants consisted of one Business English lecturer and twenty-five undergraduate students enrolled in a Business English course during the academic year 2024–2025. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in digital assessment activities throughout the semester.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interviews, conducted individually with the lecturer and in small focus groups with students, aimed to capture their perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits of using digital tools in assessment. Classroom observations were carried out over a period of six weeks to examine how digital assessments were integrated into daily instructional practices and how students interacted with them. In addition, relevant documents such as student assessment tasks, digital rubrics, and feedback records were analyzed to provide contextual support and triangulate findings.

The primary research instruments included an interview guide, an observation checklist, and a document analysis framework developed based on previous studies on digital assessment and ESP evaluation practices. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, following Richard (2015) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This method allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns and deeper

meanings related to the use and impact of digital-based assessment in the specific context of Business English instruction.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data reveal key themes regarding the implementation, challenges, and perceptions of digital-based assessment in the Business English classroom at the private university.

Theme 1: Positive Perceptions of Digital Assessment

During the interviews, both the instructor and students expressed positive perceptions of digital-based assessment, particularly its ability to provide timely feedback and increase engagement. The lecturer noted:

"The use of digital tools has allowed me to give immediate feedback on assignments, which students find extremely useful. For example, in their business email writing tasks, I can highlight specific areas for improvement and provide suggestions within minutes, rather than waiting for a scheduled meeting."

This sentiment was echoed by students, who reported feeling more engaged with the feedback process. One student remarked:

"When we use online tools like Google Classroom, we get feedback instantly. It's helpful because we don't have to wait for the next class to find out how we did, and we can improve our work right away."

Field notes from classroom observations further support these findings. For instance, in one session, students were observed reviewing peer feedback on a presentation assignment using an online rubric, which led to in-depth discussions and revisions. The immediacy of digital feedback appeared to enhance student motivation and allowed them to better understand the areas where improvement was necessary.

Theme 2: Challenges with Digital Literacy and Access

Despite the positive feedback, several challenges emerged related to digital literacy and access to technology. The lecturer highlighted:

"While most students are familiar with basic digital tools, some struggle with more advanced features, such as uploading multimedia content for presentations or navigating assessment platforms like Moodle. This slows down the process and occasionally leads to frustration."

In line with this, students also acknowledged difficulties in using certain digital tools effectively. One student shared:

"Sometimes I have trouble submitting my assignments, especially if they involve video presentations. The internet connection at home isn't always stable, and it takes longer to upload my files."

These challenges were observed during the classroom activities as well. In one session, a student experienced difficulty in submitting a video presentation via Google Classroom due to a slow internet connection. The instructor intervened and allowed the student to email the video file directly, but this delay highlighted the ongoing issue of technological barriers. Document analysis of assignment submissions showed that a small number of students (approximately 10%) failed to meet deadlines due to such technical issues.

Theme 3: Increased Authenticity and Relevance of Assessments

A significant theme that emerged from the findings was the perceived increase in the authenticity and relevance of assessments. Students appreciated the opportunity to engage in real-world business tasks that were closely aligned with professional environments. The lecturer noted:

"The use of business simulation apps in assessments, like creating a business proposal or participating in a virtual negotiation, has made the tasks more authentic. Students can see the direct link between what they are learning and how it will be applied in their careers."

This perspective was supported by students, with one stating:

"I like that we can do things like mock presentations or negotiate with classmates online. It feels like real business scenarios, not just school exercises."

Field notes further illustrated this theme. During a mock negotiation session conducted via a video conferencing tool, students demonstrated a high level of engagement and applied communication strategies relevant to a business context.

The assessment required students to negotiate a business deal, with the instructor observing and providing feedback based on real-world criteria.

Theme 4: Teacher Support and Training Needs

While the use of digital tools was generally viewed positively, the data also revealed a need for further teacher training and support. The lecturer mentioned:

"I've had some training, but it's been more about basic functionalities rather than how to design effective digital assessments that align with learning objectives. There's definitely a need for more professional development in this area."

This challenge was corroborated by student feedback, with one stating:

"Sometimes, it feels like we are figuring out the digital tools on our own. It would be helpful if the teacher could provide more guidance on how to use them properly for assignments."

Classroom observations revealed that while the instructor made efforts to explain the tools at the start of each assessment, there were instances when students seemed unclear about the expectations, particularly when using multimedia tools for presentations. In response, the instructor introduced additional instructional materials, such as tutorial videos on using specific platforms, which were appreciated by students, but it was clear that more consistent support could enhance the effectiveness of digital-based assessments.

The analysis of digital assignments, rubrics, and feedback forms further highlighted the role of digital tools in shaping the assessment process. The digital rubrics used for grading presentations provided clear, detailed criteria, which were more transparent than traditional rubrics. Students were able to track their progress and identify specific areas for improvement based on the feedback provided. For instance, in the rubric for a presentation, the categories included not only language proficiency but also the use of visual aids, delivery, and audience interaction, criteria that are crucial for professional business communication. This approach allowed for a more holistic evaluation of the students' skills.

The findings reveal that while digital-based assessment in the Business English classroom is largely perceived positively, there are several areas that require attention. The immediate feedback provided by digital tools was a key benefit for

both instructors and students, enhancing engagement and improving learning outcomes. However, challenges related to digital literacy, internet connectivity, and the need for further teacher training remain significant barriers. These challenges are particularly pronounced in a developing country context like Indonesia, where access to reliable technology may vary across institutions. Despite these obstacles, the use of digital tools in assessments significantly increased the authenticity of tasks, allowing students to engage in real-world business scenarios that were directly applicable to their future careers. Moving forward, it is essential to provide more support for both students and teachers, ensuring that digital tools are used effectively and inclusively in the assessment process.

This study set out to explore the implementation of digital-based assessment in a Business English classroom at a private university in Indonesia, investigating its impact on student engagement, the authenticity of tasks, and the challenges faced by both students and instructors. The findings provide valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of digital assessments, aligning with existing research and theoretical frameworks on language learning, assessment, and technology integration.

One of the most significant advantages of digital-based assessment, as highlighted in the findings, is the immediacy of feedback. This finding resonates with Nguyen and Tran (2023) assertion that timely, formative feedback is crucial for improving student learning, particularly in language education. According to Li and Wang (2023), digital tools facilitate quicker feedback loops, which are more effective than traditional methods, especially in fostering learner motivation and improving performance. In this study, both the lecturer and students emphasized how the use of platforms like Google Classroom and email allowed for faster, more targeted feedback. The ability to provide real-time suggestions on written assignments, such as business emails, significantly enhanced students' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, a point also supported by (Teng, 2024), who argue that effective feedback must be timely, specific, and focused on improvement.

These findings are also consistent with the conceptual framework of formative assessment proposed by Black and Wiliam (2009), which emphasizes that assessment should be a continuous process that actively informs and enhances teaching. Digital assessments, particularly those offering immediate feedback, align with this framework by promoting iterative learning, where students can adjust and improve their work before the final submission.

Despite the positive aspects of digital-based assessment, challenges related to digital literacy and technological access emerged as key barriers. These issues were particularly apparent in the context of Indonesian higher education, where the infrastructure for digital learning may not be as robust as in more developed countries. The difficulty students faced in using digital tools for assignments, such as submitting video presentations or navigating online platforms, echoes the findings of previous research on the digital divide in developing countries (Rachmawati et al., 2023). According to Biju et al. (2024), such barriers can limit the effectiveness of digital assessments, particularly if students are not adequately trained or if technological resources are inconsistent.

The challenges of digital literacy were compounded by unreliable internet connections, as reported by several students. This finding is aligned with research by Rachmawati and Hastari (2022), who found that digital inequality, particularly in countries with limited access to high-speed internet, can significantly affect the equitable implementation of digital assessments. The fact that approximately 10% of students in this study failed to meet deadlines due to technical issues is a stark reminder of the disparities that still exist in access to technology, which could hinder the benefits of digital assessments for all learners. Therefore, as suggested by Rachmawati and Purwati (2022), it is essential for institutions to consider the socio-economic context when implementing digital assessments, providing adequate infrastructure and training to ensure that all students can fully participate in the digital learning experience.

A key finding of this study was the increased authenticity of assessments facilitated by digital tools. As the literature on ESP and Business English suggests, assessments in these contexts must mirror the types of tasks students will encounter

in their professional lives. Basturkmen (2019) argues that ESP assessments should move beyond measuring general language proficiency and focus on evaluating task-specific skills that are directly applicable to the professional context. The findings of this study support this argument, as students in the Business English course appreciated tasks such as business email writing, presentation simulations, and virtual negotiations. These tasks allowed students to practice real-world business communication, aligning with what Widodo (2015) describe as the "authentic assessment" in language learning, assessments that replicate real-world tasks and competencies.

The use of digital platforms for business simulations and interactive assessments is particularly relevant in the 21st-century classroom, where technological proficiency is a key component of professional success. As noted by Anderson (2016), incorporating digital tools in assessments not only enhances the relevance of tasks but also develops students' digital literacy, which is increasingly critical in the modern workplace. The Business English course observed in this study successfully integrated these elements, allowing students to apply their language skills in ways that are directly connected to their future careers.

Another significant finding of this research was the need for increased teacher training and support to optimize the use of digital assessment tools. The lecturer's comments highlighted a gap in training related to the pedagogical design of digital assessments, which is a recurring issue identified in the literature (Black and Wiliam, 2009). While technical proficiency in using digital tools is necessary, educators must also be equipped with the knowledge of how to design and implement effective digital assessments that align with course objectives and enhance learning outcomes.

This aligns with the work of Silitonga et al. (2024), who argue that while technology can enhance assessment, its effectiveness is largely dependent on the instructional design and the teacher's ability to integrate digital tools in a meaningful way. Moreover, the need for professional development in this area is crucial, as suggested by Rachmawati et al. (2021), who emphasizes that teacher

attitudes and preparedness are significant factors in the successful integration of technology into the classroom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the implementation of digital-based assessment in Business English classrooms, showing both its potential benefits and challenges. The integration of technology into assessment practices enhances the authenticity, relevance, and immediacy of feedback, which is crucial in preparing students for real-world business communication. However, challenges such as digital literacy gaps, technological access, and the need for teacher training must be addressed to ensure that these tools are used effectively. By fostering a supportive environment and providing ongoing training, institutions can better equip both students and educators to thrive in an increasingly digital educational landscape.

The findings of this study have important implications for both practice and future research. For practitioners, the results highlight the need to provide adequate training for both students and teachers in using digital tools for assessment. Institutions should ensure that students are equipped with the necessary digital literacy skills and provide ongoing technical support to address issues related to access and connectivity. For educators, there is a clear need to balance technological innovation with pedagogical soundness, ensuring that digital assessments are not only efficient but also aligned with the learning objectives of the course.

Future research should further explore the long-term impact of digital-based assessment on student performance and career readiness, particularly in ESP contexts. It would also be beneficial to investigate how different digital assessment tools compare in terms of student engagement, learning outcomes, and ease of use. Additionally, studies examining the experiences of both students and instructors across different cultural and institutional contexts could provide more generalizable insights into the benefits and challenges of digital assessment in language learning.

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