

## **Applicability of Virtual Language Learning and its Assessment**

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### **Abstract**

Online teaching has taken leaps during COVID-19 pandemic. The inevitability is apparent and here to stay with us, whether the Virus choses to stay! The author believes that the core principles of the pedagogical procedures and assessment would still apply to online teaching with some minor variations. Apart from the virtual instruction and assessment, which has been imparted institutionally, the other available sources also need to be utilized well to reap the maximum benefit of language learning and applications. This paper looks into the surface validity and reliability of online assessment through certain attributes such as structural formations and functional specifications. Moreover, the paper aims at focusing on two objectives. Firstly, how the online language learning sites are conducting the language assessment virtually and secondly, whether the assessment websites follow an inclusive mechanism for assessing learning.

**Keywords:** Online Language Pedagogy, Virtual Assessment, Online Test, Learner's Achievement, Feedback

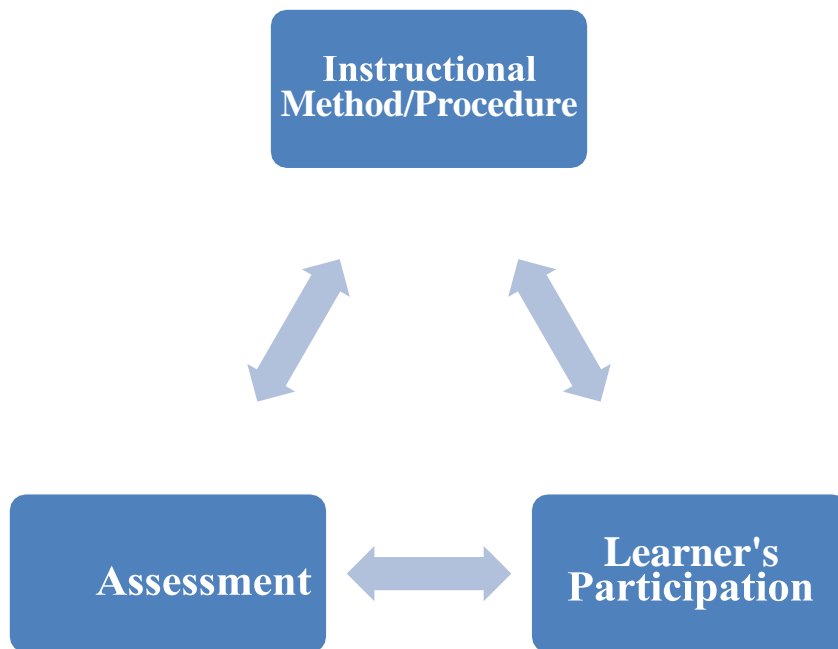
### **1. Introduction**

Assessment is a key component in learning, which systematically collects and analyses information regarding a student's learning improvement (Stassen et al., 2001). This pedagogic tool helps in knowing a learner regarding the current achievement level and ultimately functions as a motivating factor for improving learning as well as chasing higher academic or nonacademic

goals in life. The basic definition and implication of assessment hardly makes any difference between offline and online mode. If the medium difference of online and offline is removed, then assessment can be explained with the same parameters. However, there are numerous explanations available for the shape and scope of assessment. Primarily, assessment in educational context is defined as developing a deep understanding about a learner's achievement level from multiple sources (Suskie, 2004). She further elaborated that assessment is all about evaluation and improvement of a learner. COE<sup>1</sup> (2020) has suggested two functions for conduction of an assessment, such as measuring a learners' proficiency without referring to a language course, or to measure the extent of a learner's goal achievement in a particular programme of learning. However, it can be said that assessment aims at improvement of learning process as well as product.

Assessment is an important element in the pedagogical cycle, with other co-constructs like instructional method/procedure, teacher's deliberation as well as learner's participation. Pedagogical cycles are controlled and regulated by teacher as well as learner. They contribute not only to the dynamic classroom activities and processes but also regulates the generation of learning outcomes. The first construct of the pedagogical cycle is controlled and regulated by teacher; the second construct records the learner's activity. Moreover, both teacher and learner have predetermined roles in the whole course of action of assessment. Both the teacher as well as learner seek their respective benefits. Assessment guides a teacher in determining the future course of action. If a learner performs well than the teacher might continue with the methods that he/she followed before but if the performance is poor than the teacher will do necessary changes to the method used before. Hence, assessment is the core principle that regulates the pedagogical process to the maximum extent. This pedagogical cycle can further be premeditated, when we start creating instructional material for our learners, evaluation automatically follows. The instructional process initiates with certain set goals. Thereafter, assessment portrays the role for determining whether the goals of education are being met. The following diagram shows the cyclic process of the three segments, with bidirectional operations.

**Figure 1**



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<sup>1</sup> COE= Council of Europe

Assessment has differential effect on various domains such as grades, advancement, instructional needs, placement and curriculum. If the whole concept of assessment will be dealt in relation to online context, then also not much difference will be noticed. An online assessment also operates in the same manner as an offline test does. It evaluates a person's qualities added with abilities. According to Smith, & Johnson (2019) "Online assessments refer to the use of computer-based tests to measure an individual's cognitive abilities, behavioral tendencies, and personal characteristics." Computer does play a significant role in conducting any online test. Moreover, the digitized assessment has been conducted over the Internet by using available web technologies.

## **2. Attribute Detailing**

Digital assessment is free of time and space limitations and computer assisted. This type of assessment provides evidence, for judging student achievement, collected through the medium

of computer technology (NZQA, 2015, n.p.n). The current study focuses on the attributes of the online language assessment websites. For the ease of analysis, the attribute detailing has instrumented on structural description and functional specifications with a tabulated presentation.

## **2.1 Structural description:**

The structural description lists out the website names and the language count for which assessment is available on a specific website.

### **i. Website Names:**

This section enlists the name of the websites chosen for surveying the attributes of the digital language assessment. These websites are chosen on the basis of user-friendliness and accessibility. The names of the referred websites for the attribute analysis are inspera.com, languagecert.gr, cambridgeenglish.org, learnenglish.britishcouncil.org, ef.com, tracktest.eu, esl-languages.com, futurelearn.com, classtime.com, stgeorges.co.uk, and crowdmark.com. Most of the websites provide freemium service (whereby basic services are provided free of charge while more advanced features must be paid for), depending on the different types of assessments and learning levels.

### **ii. Number of languages available for learning:**

It provides the numerical count of the languages for which the assessment service is available in a particular website. This feature captures the linguistic diversity of the website. The numerical count has got a bi-divisional representation in the upcoming analysis such as single and multiple. It also reflects the language rich as well as reach of a website. More is the accessibility and diversity of a website; more is its efficacy and pragmatically applicable.

## **2.2 Functional specifications:**

These specifications search for the special method employed as well as the medium adopted by a particular web site and web platform<sup>1</sup> for conducting language assessments. According

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<sup>1</sup> Web platforms are interactive tools

to Conole (2013), "Web platforms differ from static websites by offering user-generated content, collaborative spaces, and tracking of learner activity." Hence web platforms provide scope and space for learner interactivity. A learner in such online mediums functions as an active contributor but not just stay as a passive receiver.

This aspect of attribute analysis investigates the distinctive layout and deployment of assessment procedures. The functional attributes selected for the analysis are medium of digital assessment, assessment types, assistance types, certificate-based exam, availability of demo practice, scope for academical activities, method for assessment. The following section is an elaboration of the listed attributes.

**i. Medium of digital assessment:**

Medium refers to the mode for conducting an activity. This attribute has got a dichotomy for presentation such as online and offline. Online assessment is digitized that may happen in an immediate class environment with computers or in any other location. Contextually, the online mode carries out the conduction, attempt, and submission in a single spatial-temporal cycle. In contrast, the offline digitized assessment ignores the locative limitations. This mode provides the question paper and provides comparatively more time period than online mode, for submitting the answer script through the online mode.

**ii. Types of assessment:**

This attribute searches whether a particular language assessment website undertakes formative or summative or both method for evaluation. Harmer (2007:379) has provided a detailing on differentiating summative and formative assessment. Summative assessment is to evaluate student learning, once the instruction gets over, she described summative assessment as a kind of measurement that takes place to round things off or make a one-off measurement and include in the end-of year tests. She further explains that formative assessment as the kind of feedback teachers give students as a course is progressing and which in turn, helps in the improvement of performance. Black and Wiliam (2004), describes the primary concern of assessment in its very design and practice officiates the purpose of promoting

learners' learning". He further claims that the developmental set up and instructional mechanism of assessment is focused enough for achieving the learning objectives. Summarily, formative assessment tracks a learner's growth continuously and supplies feedback.

**iii. Assistance Type:**

This attribute checks for the type of computer assisted assessment provided by a particular website. The assistance type has been divided into two categories such as academic or non-academic. The academic assistance includes the classroom-based goals and objectives. The non-academic assistance mostly talks about services such administrative performance as well as professional goals. This attribute enquires the academic and personal admittance of a website.

**iv. Certificate Based Exams:**

According to Longman advanced dictionary of contemporary English (2010), certificate is an official document which validates that a learner has completed a course of study or passed an examination. Furthermore, Cambridge English dictionary defines certificate as the qualification that learner receives when she/ he gets successful in an exam. Hence, this attribute enquires whether a particular website conducts certificate-based exam or not. Yes/No, dichotomy has been followed for the analysis.

**v. Availability of Demo Practice:**

Demo practice supplies the necessary guidelines, a simulation for the upcoming final test. Taking a demo practice for an offline exam, helps in developing familiarity with the question pattern, strengthens confidence level and develops a rough idea regarding the attempting procedure. But for an online exam, the requirement for demo practice for online practicing tools has been emphasized more. A successful attempt of an online test *makes the final undertaking a breeze*. It is mainly due to while in a real examination situation, a candidate should not face any inconvenience with the question type but also with the technical procedure. Hence, this attribute checks whether a particular website provides scope for demo practices or not.

**vi. Other academical activities:**

Primarily, academic activities are those assigned work or project, which are employed to determine an academic credit. This point sees though the academical activities which are organized to inculcate the academic zest in students in the context of language learning such as workshop, conference and webinar. All these academic attempts also certify an attendee for participation or presentation. The conduction of such academical efforts enhances the academical credibility of a website. Therefore, this attribute enquires whether a particular website facilitates such academic activities or not.

**vii. Test Type:**

There are numerous types of tests available for testing a particular language skill. Few of such test types are direct, indirect, diagnostic, and interim. However, in this context this attribute checks whether a particular website takes the test through oral or written mode. The oral test retrieves the aspired information in spoken form, whereas the written test elicits information in the form of a written script and is administered on paper or computer, depending on the online or offline mode. However, evaluating an oral test is quicker that a written test.

**3. Analysis of the assessment websites:**

This segment has given a tabulated analysis of the websites that concerns assessment, using the above parameters. The following table has got 10 columns and each column except 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> counts for functional specifications (medium of digital assessment, types of assessment, assistance type, certificate-based exams, availability of demo practice, other academical activities, and method of assessment). 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> columns provide the serial number, website names and language count respectively. The following Table 1 is the reference box for filling in the table of analysis (Table 2).

Table-1

| <b>Column No</b> | <b>Features</b>               | <b>Category</b>       |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Language Count                | Single/ Multiple      |
| 4 <sup>th</sup>  | Medium of Digital Assessment  | Online/Offline        |
| 5 <sup>th</sup>  | Assessment Type               | Formative/ Summative  |
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | Assistance Type               | Academic/Non-Academic |
| 7 <sup>th</sup>  | Certificate Based Exam        | Yes/No                |
| 8 <sup>th</sup>  | Availability of Demo Practice | Yes/No                |
| 9 <sup>th</sup>  | Other Academic Activity       | Yes/No                |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | Method Of Assessment          | Oral/Written          |

**Table 2<sup>3</sup>**

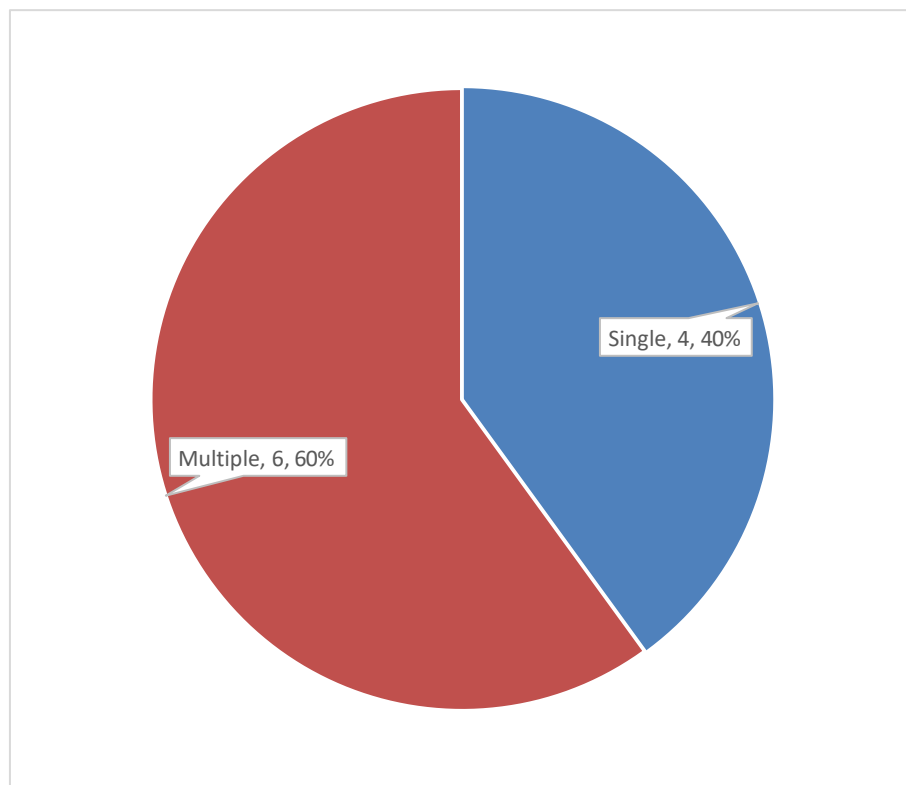
| Serial No. | Website Name                       | Language Count  | Medium of Digital Assessment | Assessment Type | Assistance Type | Certificate Based Exams | Availability of Demo Practice | Other Academic Activity | Type of Test |
|------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 1          | Inspira.com                        | Single          | Both                         | Both            | Both            | Yes                     | Yes                           | Yes                     | Both         |
| 2          | Languagecert.gr                    | Multiple (3)    | Online                       | Both            | Academic        | Yes                     | Yes                           | No                      | Both         |
| 3          | Cambridge english.org              | Single          | Online                       | Both            | Both            | Yes                     | Yes                           | No                      | Both         |
| 4          | Learn English. British council.org | Single          | Online                       | Both            | Both            | Yes                     | Yes                           | Yes                     | Both         |
| 5          | Stgeorges.co.uk                    | Multiple (13)   | Online                       | Both            | Both            | Yes                     | Yes                           | Yes                     | Written      |
| 6          | ef.com                             | Multiple (12)   | Online                       | Both            | Both            | Yes                     | Yes                           | No                      | Both         |
| 7          | Tracktest.eu                       | Single          | Online                       | Both            | Both            | Yes                     | Yes                           | No                      | Both         |
| 8          | Esl-languages.com                  | Multiple (N.A.) | Online                       | Both            | Non-Academic    | Yes                     | Yes                           | No                      | Both         |
| 9          | Classtime.com                      | Multiple (15)   | Online                       | Both            | Academic        | No                      | Yes                           | Yes                     | Both         |
| 10         | Crowdmark.com                      | Multiple        | Online                       | Both            | Academic        | No                      | Yes                           | Yes                     | Both         |

<sup>3</sup> The websites chosen for the attribute analysis in this article are for bona-fide and fair use for academic and research purpose only

#### 4. Findings

This section displays the principal outcomes of the undertaken study. Each column represents a website attribute, starting from column number 3 to 10. Against each website, its features are analysed assigning findings in different form. The mode of representation of the findings is both graphical and descriptive depending on the findings of data analysis. The Columned feature is named C3 to C12 and the corresponding findings are numbered as F3 to F10. The findings are numbered according to the column numbers.

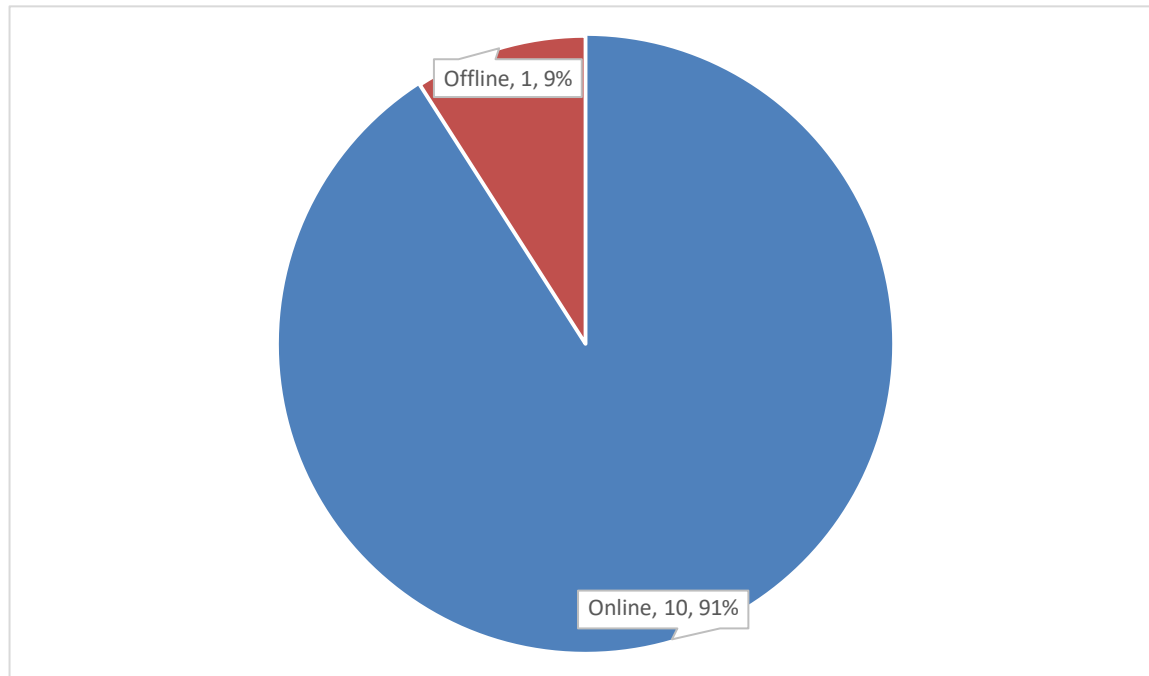
**C3. This column enquires for the number of languages available for assessment in a specific website. (Single/Multiple)**



**F3.** The above graphical presentation shows that number of websites supplying assessments in multiple languages are more in number than those websites, which are running assessments

in a single language.

**C4. This feature enquires into the online and offline mode of digital assessment:**



**F4:** The above graphical distribution displays the dominance of online medium of assessment. The ratio lies at 10:1.

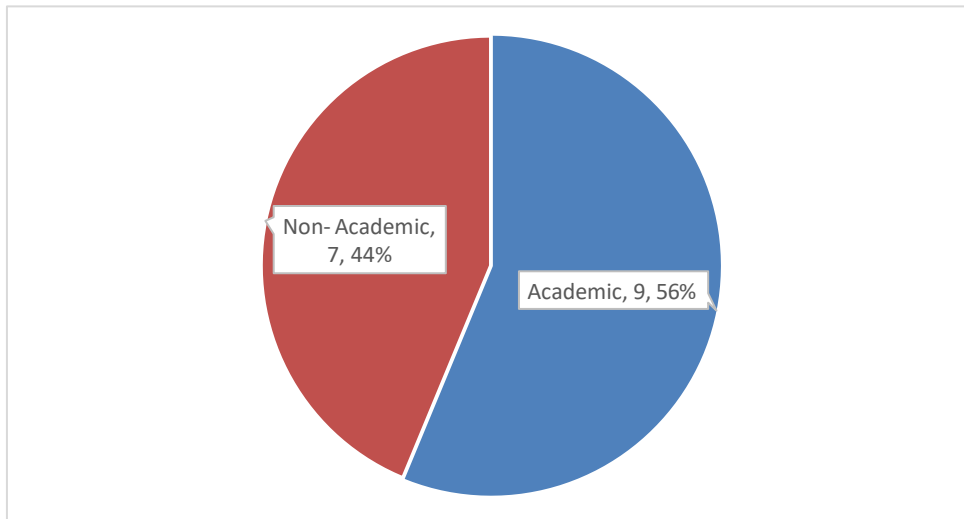
**C5: This attribute enquires for the type of assessment such as formative or summative conducted by the selected websites.**

**F5:** The Findings suggested that all the websites enlisted in the table conduct both formative and summative assessment. As all the enlisted websites conduct both formative and summative, thereby it does not require any graphical representation.

This can be instantiated with an example. As for instance, crowdmark.com, which is posited in number 10, provides the facility for administering and grading online and in-class assessments without any fixed time frame. This allows a test/examination administrator to

supply unrestricted facility to undertake formative as well as summative assessment with valuable feedbacks for further improvement. Its undebatable and undisputed that more will be the rate of formative assessment, better will be the learner's performance.

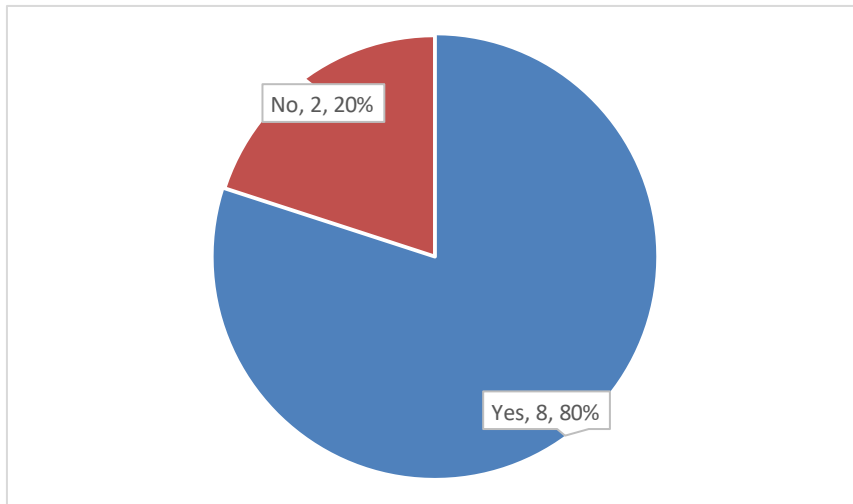
**C6: This attribute surveys for the assistance type (academic/ non- academic) by the mentioned websites.**



**F6:** The graphical analysis clearly conveys that the distribution of academic and non-academic assistance lies at 56% and 44% respectively.

**C7: The attribute in this specific column searches for whether a particular website**

**certifies a learner for his/her performance or not**

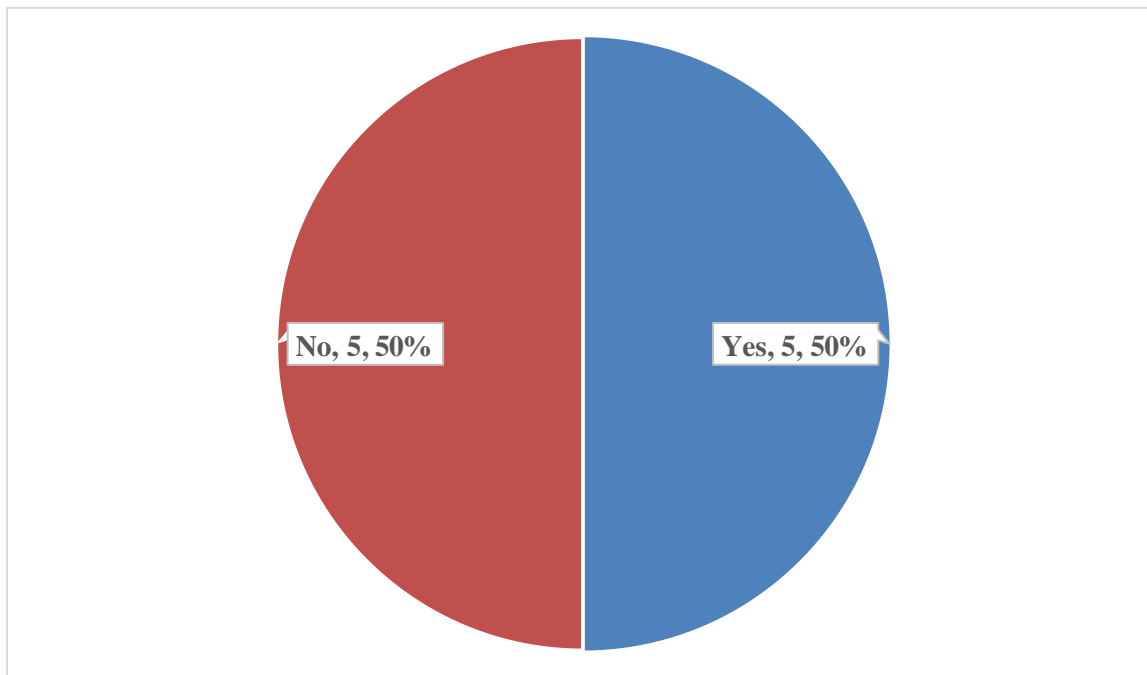


**F7:** The above graphical illustration in a circle, demonstrated that 80% of the websites gives certification for learners' performance, whereas 20% websites don't show any such provision.

**C8:** The attribute in the column-8 investigates whether, a specific website pre-supply demo practice or not before the actual test.

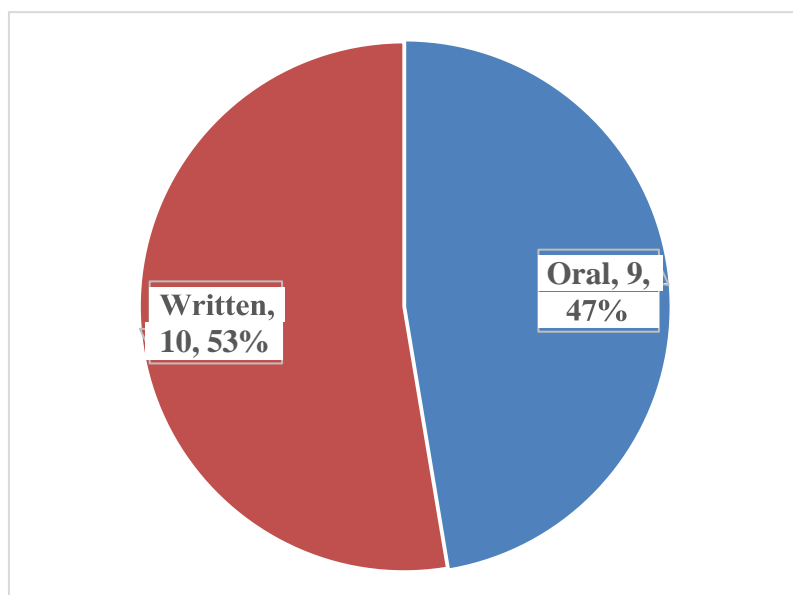
**F8:** The result show that all the websites have the facility of demo practice. Hence, it does not require any graphical representation.

**C9:** This column receives the data entry for inspecting, whether a specific website promotes other academical activities (seminar, conference, workshop) or not.



**F9:** The data distribution shows the numerical count of websites for providing or not providing scope for other academical activities, do display the same proportion.

**C10: The data entry for the last column enquires for the test type (Oral/ Written):**



**F10:** The pie presentation signifies that the distribution of written and oral test conducted by the websites lie at 53% and 47% respectively.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The attribute analysis of the assessment websites has supplied several derivations such as most of the websites provide assessment facility for multiple languages and still accommodating more and more. The website should necessarily take into consideration the requirement of learners with special needs while designing and executing assessment procedures which definitely make an inclusive propagation of education. More and more emphasis should be given on academical activities like webinar, online conference and workshops as it can accelerate the innovative faculty of language learning. The incorporation of both oral and written mode test should be adopted by all the websites. This in turn provides ample scope for enhancement of the oral communicative competency.

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