



# Blackboard-based online assessment: The new norm to final dental exams during the COVID-19 era

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## Background

The closing of education institutes worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic mandated the need for online assessment platforms for timely conduct of examinations. As Malaysia declared a lockdown in March 2020, all institutes ceased face-to-face teaching. Even exams demanded bigger venues and more time to comply with the SOP and safety, which posed a challenge. A secure online assessment platform to accommodate our needs involving question creation, rubrics, storage, and testing in stipulated time was required.

## What we tried

The online tools used for assessment were Blackboard learn and Microsoft Teams. Blackboard Learn (Bb) is web-based server software that provides students with curriculum-driven, interactive learning and allows instructors' the versatility of content management. It can be used for announcements, discussions, sharing course content, assessments, and grades. The dental faculty and the IT team were involved in preparing and invigilation the final professional examinations. Faculty and students underwent brief training, during which a dry run of the assessment was performed one month before actual exams. The type of questions that were uploaded included LAQ/MEQ, SAQ, and MCQ. The duration of the exams was 1 to 1.5 hours. n=188 year 1 to 4 undergraduate dental students took the exam. Registration and verification of IDs were done 10 minutes before the start. The question paper was available only at the stipulated start time. The student invigilator ratio was 10:1

## How did we evaluate it?

Quantitative feedback – questionnaire - n=188 year 1 to 4 undergraduate dental students n=35 Faculty staff

## What did we find?

72.3% and 100% of students and faculty were overall satisfied with the Bb as an assessment tool, respectively. Many students thought the time was a concern and faced technical disruption. The faculty reported that though the additional preparation and training were time-consuming, it was beneficial in the smooth running of the process. It was a learning curve to conduct a complex high quality multiformat online examination.

## What main lessons did we learn?

- It is possible to take sufficient measures in a pandemic environment to conduct professional examinations safely.
- We required the collective support of medical school academic and administrative staff, students, examiners and external examiners, and simulated patients