

WEB BLOG AS AN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR HUMANITIES: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

EL FORMULARIO WEB COMO UNA ALTERNATIVA DE EVALUACIÓN PARA LAS HUMANIDADES: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO EXPLORATORIO

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Abstract

Alternative assessment recently received increased attention as it was challenging to conduct traditional high-stakes tests like traditional criterion-referenced tests and norm-referenced tests by gathering candidates to an examination hall during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it seems that the teachers/lecturers are still reluctant to move to alternative assessments in some contexts, due to various reasons like lack of technical knowledge, less awareness, practical issues, and attitudes. Thus, this study attempted to explore the student perceptions of web blogging as an alternative assessment method to English majors with the hope of examining its possibility of application to the Humanities. Following the main objective, the data for the research was collected from 10 students who took English as the main subject for their degree and five lecturers from English and Humanities at a Sri Lankan university where alternative assessment is not yet popular. The research design is an exploratory case study that belongs to the qualitative approach. In analyzing the data, the Google Form platform and thematic analysis were employed, and it has been found that web blogging is enjoyed by the participants and also found to be valid method of testing that enables the assessment of not only writing and memorizing, as in traditional tests, but also various other higher order and sub-skills. Testing in the Humanities, which primarily involves long essays, can be successfully substituted with web blogging, capturing learners' interest.

Keywords: alternative assessment, humanities, traditional assessment, web blog

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Resumen

Recientemente, la evaluación alternativa recibió una mayor atención, ya que es un desafío realizar pruebas tradicionales de alto riesgo, como las pruebas basadas en criterios y las pruebas basadas en normas, reuniendo a los candidatos en una sala de exámenes durante la pandemia de COVID-19. Sin embargo, parece que los docentes aún se muestran reacios a pasar a evaluaciones alternativas en algunos contextos, debido a diversas razones, como la falta de conocimientos técnicos, una menor conciencia y cuestiones prácticas, entre otros. Por lo tanto, este estudio intentó explorar las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre las páginas web como un método de evaluación alternativo para los estudiantes de inglés con la esperanza de examinar su posibilidad de aplicación a las humanidades. Siguiendo el objetivo principal, los datos para la investigación se recopilaron de 10 estudiantes que tomaron inglés como materia principal para su título y cinco profesores de inglés y humanidades en una universidad de Sri Lanka donde la evaluación alternativa aún no es popular. El diseño de la investigación es un estudio de caso exploratorio que pertenece al enfoque cualitativo. Para analizar los datos, se empleó la plataforma Google Form y el análisis temático, y se descubrió que los formularios web son un método de evaluación válido para los participantes, ya que permiten evaluar no solo la escritura y la memorización, como en las pruebas tradicionales, sino también otras habilidades de orden superior y secundarias. Las pruebas en humanidades, que implican principalmente ensayos largos, se pueden sustituir con éxito por formularios web, lo que capta el interés de los alumnos.

Palabras clave: evaluación alternativa, humanidades, evaluación tradicional, formulario web

Introduction

Assessment is a significant part of teaching and learning since it shows how much a student has improved. Further, assessment gets students to study, evaluate teaching methods and helps make important decisions about education (Brown, 1990). During the COVID pandemic in 2020, educational practitioners faced a difficult predicament as they were unable to conduct assessments in the usual manner. So, in general, this restriction not only affected assessment but the entire teaching and learning process.

Teachers adapted by employing various alternative and online methods for assessments. However, criticisms regarding the validity, reliability, and ethical concerns of online examinations were unavoidable. This aggregated the distress of the teachers. In a common scenario where teaching shifted from the physical classroom to the virtual classroom, the absence of reliable testing methods had adverse effects on the learning and teaching process. To address this issue, alternative assessment methods such as take-home assignments, presentations, conferences, open-book exams, collaborative assignments, reflective journals, portfolios, blogs, projects, mini-research, viva voce, etc., which substitute standardized traditional tests and testing practices, were successfully adopted in different

contexts (Adama et al., 2023; Arifuddin et al., 2021; Kaisar, 2023). Even though these alternative assessments are commonly used they tend to break the academic integrity (Adama et al., 2023). However, having no other option during the pandemic, with the right strategies, various alternative assessment methods could serve as effective means of assessing learning outcomes (Adama et al., 2023; Kaisar, 2023).

Subjects like Literature, History, and Religion, which are core to the Humanities, often rely on essay-type assessments to comprehensively evaluate students' understanding. These disciplines typically require students to engage with large volumes of text, identify patterns, and use language to persuade, evaluate, and construct coherent arguments (Holm et al., 2015).

The preference for essay responses stems from the need to assess not just students' factual knowledge, but also their ability to critically analyze, interpret, and synthesize information. However, this approach presents significant challenges in the context of online testing and evaluation. Despite the increasing popularity of online and hybrid teaching, online assessments tend to rely heavily on multiple-choice questions, often excluding essay-type evaluations (Nakayama et al., 2010).

Multiple-choice tasks are favoured in e-learning due to their ease of implementation and the straightforward management of student responses (Nakayama et al., 2010). However, essay-based assessments are essential for measuring skills, such as critical thinking and reasoning, and for providing students with an authentic learning experience (Reiner et al., 2002). The inability to assess these skills in online settings, especially during the pandemic, represents a significant gap in measuring students' true capabilities.

Consequently, the Humanities faced greater difficulties in assessment during the pandemic, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on multiple-choice formats. This raises an important question: how can higher-order thinking can be adequately evaluated in an online environment when essay-type assessments are excluded?

A study by Wahid and Oveesa (2020) examined perspectives on online exams, revealing a range of opinions. Of 50 teachers surveyed, 10 rejected the idea of online exams altogether, arguing that no method of online testing can accurately measure true student performance. Others, however, suggested that online exams can be justifiable if appropriate tools and techniques, such as specialized software for evaluation, are implemented (Wahid & Oveesa, 2020). While various institutions currently employ different software for online assessments, grading essay-type answers remains challenging due to the subjectivity involved in evaluating facts, organization, and language. A similar issue was evident within the specific educational institution under discussion in this study, where almost all subjects belong to the Humanities. Here, online assessments conducted during the pandemic had issues of reliability. The institute employed Google Meet for online exams with instructions for candidates to keep cameras on, but this did not consistently prevent copying. Marking of students' answer scripts revealed high levels of plagiarism, rendering the online examinations

unreliable. Lecturers expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of students' answers and disagreed with the examination process (Dilani, 2022).

Given these challenges, the researcher chose to adopt an alternative assessment method, opting to evaluate students' performance through web blogs rather than traditional online assessments. This shift aimed to minimize the issues typically associated with essay-type questions in online exams. As a result, this study seeks to analyze student perceptions of using web blogs as an alternative assessment method in Humanities subjects, where most examination questions are essay-type.

Although this study explored web blogging as an alternative assessment method during the pandemic, it has already been successfully practised in various contexts. For instance, web blogging has proven to be a motivational and engaging assessment tool in an academic writing class, with 83% of participants expressing approval (Nepomuceno, 2011). Additionally, web blogs have been effectively used for collaborative knowledge sharing (Obionwu et al., 2023). Both students and teachers have benefited from class blogs, with teachers using them to disseminate course content, assignments, and supplementary materials (Saad, 2023).

Although the current research was a case study focused on online assessment, it demonstrates that web blogging is a highly adaptable and applicable tool for alternative assessment in any context and at any time. With its proven success in the Sri Lankan context, web blogging shows great potential as an assessment method in the Humanities across diverse settings. This study also makes a valuable contribution to the broader body of literature on alternative assessment practices.

Literature reviews. Traditional and alternative assessment techniques

Assessment tasks and techniques vary significantly across and within disciplines, but it is essential to adhere to established assessment standards (Brown, 1990). Assessment involves gathering information to measure what students know and what they can do. Broadly, assessments fall into two major categories: traditional and alternative. Traditional assessment tools include multiple-choice tests, true/false tests, short answers, and essays. In contrast, alternative assessments encompass techniques such as cognitive assessments, performance tasks, portfolios, projects, presentations, blogs, journals and websites (Dikli, 2003).

Recently, both educators and students have increasingly advise alternative assessments (Dikli, 2003). Traditional assessments are often standardized, time-limited, and norm-referenced (Law and Eckes, 1995, as cited in Dikli, 2003), primarily measuring lower-order skills like memorization and recall. In contrast, alternative assessments are authentic, flexible, and context-driven, evaluating higher-order thinking skills (Dikli, 2003). Among the various forms of alternative assessments, this study focuses on web blogs as a tool for evaluation.

What is a Blog?

A blog (a contraction of web-based logs or weblogs) introduced as a «frequently updated online diary» (Elkhoury, 2020, p.10) has rapidly evolved to become a popular and influential form of online micro-publishing and computer-mediated communication since the 1990s (Bruns & Jacobs, 2007). A blog is an online journal where an author or authors publish/es a series of chronological, updateable entries or posts on various topics, typically of personal interest to the author(s) expressing them in a strongly subjective voice, on which readers are invited to comment (Akmajian et al., 2008).

This explanation provides a wide adaptable scope for blogging, as that suits our purpose as a method of evaluation of content, language skills, as well as other 21st-century skills of a language learner. This adaptability of blogs is a great advantage for the Humanities. Furthermore, its flexible format can be effectively controlled by the teacher according to the purpose and nature of the assessment. Moreover, this has been identified as an expedient practice in developing higher-order learning skills, authentic learning, associative thinking, interactive learning, and learner-centeredness (Akmajian et al., 2008). The ability to measure these aspects is another significant advantage of utilizing blogging as an assessment method for subjects related to the Humanities. Blogs in education enable students to acquire a personal identity along with a sense of empowerment through trying to interact with others in relevant contexts. It is also obvious that the students become more critical and analytical in creating blogs (Akabult & Kiyici, 2007). In addition to these, another most attractive aspect is its room for self and peer assessment, which has mostly been forgotten in education in the current context despite its great significance. The ability to comment by peers can be effectively used to train the students for peer review.

Is Blogging a Good Test?

Blogging possesses the characteristics of a good language test as reliability, validity, authenticity, and practicality.

Well-defined rubrics and marking criteria of a test may help establish reliability. In addition to the marking scheme, scoring by a second examiner may also contribute to establishing reliability. Analytical scoring suggested by Lam(2018)for scoring portfolios would be a good option as it evaluates multiple perspectives broadly and separately as an idea, organization, content, vocabulary, and mechanics(Hyland ,2016 as cited in Lam, 2018). This scheme of scoring is known as interrater scoring. The great advantage of peer review in blogging can also be used in assessing as a further step in establishing reliability.

In the Humanities, traditional assessment techniques persist, with poster presentations emerging as a novel approach, despite other disciplines having employed them for decades (McNamara et al., 2010).

Thus, it is obvious that there is a drawback to using technology in assessment in the Humanities. The general objective of assessments in the Humanities is to assess the subject

knowledge. Along with other specific objectives, different items could be successfully achieved through blogging, depending on the way the assessment is handled. Validity in testing means «how well a test measures what it is supposed to measure» (Update, 2018, 2)

Testing subject knowledge and information in Humanities can be effectively tested through blogs due to its unlimited scope and flexibility. Construct validity can be easily established by making the tested employ a variety of genres of writing.

The authenticity of student writing can be maintained by assigning tasks that reflect real-world relevance (Khan, 2017). Authentic tasks, which promote critical thinking and creativity, also help reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. By posing questions related to real-world issues or students' personal experiences, creativity and problem-solving skills can be better assessed. In the Humanities, where content knowledge is often the primary evaluation criterion, basing blog assignments on material covered in lectures or class discussions further supports the authenticity of the assessment. Khan (2017) supports this, confirming that web blogging serves as an authentic assessment tool in implementation of blogs in a project-based course module. Similarly, as with essay evaluations in the Humanities, web blogs effectively assess writing skills by focusing on content, word choice, style, and language mechanics (Alsamadani, 2018). To address concerns about impersonation also, blogging can be implemented in smaller classes where the instructor is familiar with each student's writing style, ensuring more reliable assessments. Another option is making blog uploads contextually dependent to test higher-order skills (Joshi & Babacan, 2012). In addition to these in order to establish authenticity and avoid plagiarism, a viva voce subsequent to the completion of the blog can be conducted on the content and subject knowledge.

A genre-based approach has been suggested to identify key features of academic blogs for content assessment. This approach informed the development of rubrics that include five categories: task fulfillment and relevance, content, organization and balance, genre-specific features, and language use (Rock, 2022). Incorporating peer reviews into the assessment process also promotes constructive feedback and helps students develop peer-reviewing skills. Additionally, this interactive element of blogging serves as a deterrent to plagiarism. Since blogs are public documents, both teachers and students bear the responsibility of maintaining accuracy and upholding high standards in their content.

Blogs for Humanities

Most subjects belonging to the Humanities aim at developing effective writing skills as a universal learning objective in higher education, and essays are a common mode of assessment (Chick, 2013). Chick (2013) suggests metaphor maps, student anthologies, and poster presentations as authentic and creative alternatives for essay-type summative and formative assessment because the same purpose expected by the essay type could be achieved through them. Alsamadani introduces blogging as a «more interactive, writerly, and readerly approach» (2018, p. 49) to improve writing skills. This research has found a noticeable

improvement in several aspects of writing, such as content development, language mechanics, style, voice, word choice, and other writing sub-skills. Thus, an essay that also basically intends to measure content, language, vocabulary, etc., is the common mode of assessment in the Humanities, and could be successfully substituted with the web blog. Likewise, considering the other advantages that the blog provides, as discussed above under the literature review, the essay can be substituted with blogs.

The effectiveness of blogs as a tool of assessment has been empirically tested in different contexts. The blog as an alternative assessment has gained the attraction of different types of students. Discussing assessment tools in Joint Arts & Humanities and Social & Historical Sciences, Mackay (2014) proposes blogging as an innovative assessment tool for geography to focus students' attention on issues in Geography and their perspective on them. Talking about its success, Mackay (2014) points out that the deep pedagogic principles of the blog in terms of allowing students to engage deeply with a topic for assessment were rooted in its success. Further, the ability to comment by external scholars has also been found to be of great success in terms of «democratizing the intellectual input» they put into their assessment, as well as helping to internationalize this particular aspect of the curriculum (Mackay, 2014).

A case study carried out at the Institute of Informatics at Tallinn University in relation to a blog-based elective course has found the possibility of improving several skills in contrast with traditional assessment. Interestingly, the study finds that the teacher's constant guidance with feedback at each phase is needed to produce good work (Tammets & Normak, 2013).

Blogging is an engaging and effective tool for improving writing skills. Its interactive and participatory nature helps learners gradually enhance their writing and related sub-skills, while also giving them insight into the wider audience they are writing for (Nepomuceno, 2011; Alsamadani, 2018; Rock, 2022; Saad, 2023). Blogging has also proven to be an effective formative assessment tool in higher education (Joshi & Babacan, 2012). Beyond its role as an assessment tool, blogging has been shown to develop writing skills, including spelling, punctuation, and grammar. For example, in one study, students in Australia were required to post daily blogs, while a group in Argentina completed handwritten journals. After 10 days, the group that blogged demonstrated greater improvements in writing, spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Douthit et al., 2015).

Various studies in different contexts have confirmed the effectiveness of web blogging as an assessment technique. Blogging has gained popularity not only as an educational tool but also as a valuable research area across disciplines.

In the Humanities, the success of blogging as an assessment tool is partly due to its adaptable characteristics. Key advantages of blogging in education—such as fostering new literacies, reducing plagiarism, its dynamic nature, ease of sharing, and promoting effective communication—have been highlighted by Elkhoury (2020) and can be effectively applied in the Humanities. Since the Humanities often test higher-order thinking by blending theory with practical knowledge, blogs provide an ideal platform for exploring practical applications

as well as student perspectives on theoretical issues. The subjective nature of blogs further supports inquiry into personal interpretations and real-world problem-solving.

In Sri Lankan higher education institutes, especially in the Humanities, the major summative assessment practices are a real-time semester-end examination and mid-semester take-home written assignments. However, formative assessment, the continuous assessment method is used to improve student throughout feedback in the teaching and learning process. The traditional assessment model, characterized by its lack of learner feedback and absence of interactive elements, poses significant drawbacks. Moreover, timed exams, often a staple in this approach, may not foster an environment conducive to students achieving higher grades and meeting their educational objectives (Jayasinghe-Mudalige & Jayaweera, 2020). In this document published by Wayamba University, the authors have listed and discussed a variety of e-based alternative assessment techniques such as online discussion, bulletin boards, collaborative assignments, self-assessment, online exams, peer review, online quizzes, computer-marked assignments, portfolios, roleplay, simulations, email, web publication, and web design and development as the most common and widely used techniques. Even though the very name blog does not appear in the document, web publication may have referred to a similar process of blogging. However, this further suggests that web blogging is rarely practiced as an alternative assessment in Sri Lankan universities despite its popularity in other contexts.

This literature review demonstrates that web blogs have been successfully utilized as an alternative assessment in various contexts across time. Existing research highlights their success in different disciplines including Humanities, a field where alternative methods are rarely employed particularly in Sri Lanka. However, the study identifies a gap in research on the use of web blogging within the Sri Lankan context.

Research Questions

- i. What is the Sri Lankan students' perception of utilizing web blogging as an alternative assessment?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by the students in creating web blogs?
- iii. What are the challenges faced by the lecturers in assessing through web blogs?

Methodology

Design

The study was conducted as an exploratory case study at a state-run university in Sri Lanka. It employed qualitative approach to explore the perception of the students in using web blogging as an alternative assessment.

Participants

In pursuit of the answer to the research question, ten students who majored in English were given a questionnaire after finishing their blog as an assessment of the course named «Approaches and Methods in Second Language Teaching». While the students are upper and lower intermediate level in their English competence, compared with English their IT knowledge is low.

The second category of participants was five lecturers teaching English and other languages at the same university.

Tools

A Google Form-based questionnaire with open-ended and closed-ended questions was sent to the students, and another questionnaire was sent to the lecturers using the same platform. The students' web blogs were also analyzed. In addition to the participants' responses, the researcher's introspection as the course instructor helped to draw conclusions.

Data analysis

The qualitative data were thematically analyzed by identifying key themes that emerged from the participants' responses and the web blogs they produced. Responses to the closed-ended questions were analyzed using the Google Forms platform, and the web blogs underwent content analysis. The findings are presented under the themes derived from the responses, supported by tables and charts generated through Google Forms.

Procedure

At the start of the course, students received training on creating a web blog, conducted by the university's IT lecturer. We used the Blogger platform for this task. After the training, students were provided with a timeline and clear guidelines on the content to focus on for their blogs. They were also given detailed rubrics for assessment, which evaluated four key aspects: content, language, presentation, and adherence to deadlines, along with feedback on peers' blogs. The assessment was marked out of eighty, with thirty points allocated for content, twenty for language, twenty for presentation, and ten for meeting deadlines and feedback. Following two training sessions on the blog, totaling four hours, the English lecturer began teaching according to the syllabus. Students independently produced blog content in parallel with the lectures, following the assigned schedule. After completing their blogs, they participated in a viva, which was worth twenty marks. The viva was based on their own blog content to assess their familiarity with the material.

Ethics

Before responding to the questionnaire both the lecturers and students were informed of the nature of the research and they responded with their consent. To assure confidentiality and anonymity, all identifying information was removed assigning them an identification code.

Findings and Discussion

Students' perception

The first research question was to inquire about the students' perception of utilizing the web blog as an assessment. Web blog was a new experience for the students. They were used to the traditional semester-end examinations. The responses to the questionnaire made it clear that the majority of the participants (90%) showed their interest in the web blog as a method of assessment.

Among the major reasons they had given, for this interest were the novelty of the experience, their interest in computer-related tasks, and the ability to work independently are prominent. It was obvious that creating the web blog was their first experience of such a computer-related task, and they eagerly engaged in that. They also have had less exposure to computer-related tasks, and consequently, they enjoyed working on the web blog. However, due to their lack of computer literacy, the IT lecturer found it difficult to train them in the creation of the web blog at the initial stage. However, in the end, they tried and learnt different features of the platform and created very attractive blogs. The following screenshots of the interfaces of the blogs evidence their creativity.

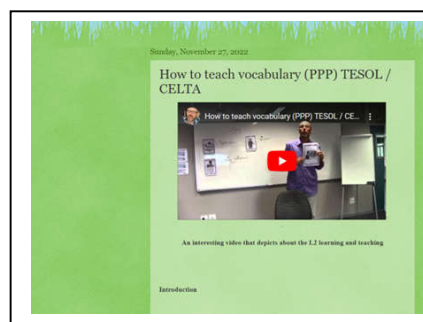




Figure 1: Interfaces of the blogs

Further, the students mentioned that they were able to gain a wealth of new knowledge through this task. Another reason that they loved this task was the fact that the blog is a public document that has access to a larger readership. They showed a sense of pride in getting their writing published on the web. One student mentioned that his mother was thrilled to see his product. Another commented that he was very happy when his friends commented on it. He had posted the link on his Facebook account as well. I also observed their pride and delight in the way they showed their posts and comments to their friends.

The advantages of the web blog according to the students are many. Among them gaining and sharing knowledge, feeling relaxed, quick communication of knowledge, creativity, and ability to score good marks and the publicity they gain are special factors. One student had stated his interest in web blogs due to their ability to easy and quick communication to a large audience as below: «I strongly agree with that, because if someone can develop the web he has the ability to communicate something to a large number of people very quickly and effectively».

The students were tired of traditional paper-based examinations. By engaging in the web blog uploads in addition to covering the exam they were able to relax themselves from stressed exam mentality.

Scoring of Blogs

Before students began creating their blogs, clear criteria and instructions were provided to ensure consistency and fairness. The topics for the blogs were assigned to promote uniformity, making assessment more straightforward. The evaluation focused on several key areas: content, language, presentation, deadlines, and peer feedback.

Content was assessed based on the relevance to assigned topics, use of evidence, organization of facts, and proper citations. Language evaluation covered grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and punctuation. The presentation was judged on how attractively the information was presented, with students encouraged to incorporate multimedia elements such as pictures, videos, emojis, clip art, and original drawings. Marks were also awarded for

meeting deadlines and providing constructive feedback on peers' blogs, promoting peer review and deeper engagement with the content.

Results showed that 90% of students scored above 65, with two students exceeding 75 marks. One student, who uploaded less than half of the required content, scored 40 marks. Interestingly, all students (100%) scored highest in the presentation category, showing a strong focus on enhancing their blogs with creative elements. Both peer and instructor feedback on draft submissions ensured that the final blogs were largely error-free.

The students expressed satisfaction with the assessment process and their marks. All the students (90%), except one, preferred web blogging as an assessment tool, particularly, appreciating the transparency of the rubrics, which were provided at the start. This allowed them to tailor their work according to the set expectations. In contrast, students often find traditional exams frustrating due to a lack of clarity in how marks are allocated, leading to unexpected results.

Finally, a viva voce for which twenty marks were awarded was conducted to verify the originality of their work and check for potential plagiarism.

Traditional Assessments against Web Blogging

Inspired by the aforementioned advantages their preference lies in blogging in comparison with traditional assessment. As Figure 01 below illustrates 80% of the sample preferred web blogging only while 10%, only one student liked the traditional assessments.

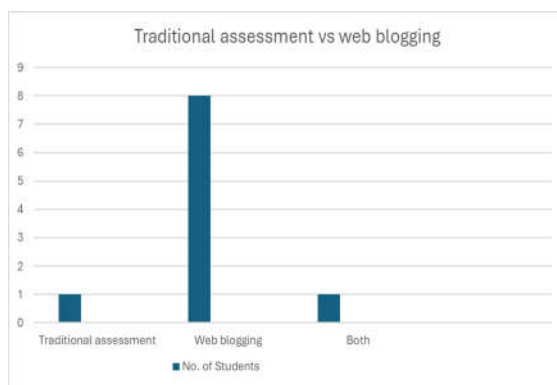


Figure 2: Traditional Assessment Vs Web Blogging

In comparison between the two types of assessments, students' responses varied. The student who preferred traditional assessments mentioned the following reasons for his interest:

- 1) Can get maximum accurate answers
- 2) Can't cheat, so the answers are real
- 3) Free from being confused about web tech problems

4) The traditional exam is lifelong familiar, and, so simple.

These reasons elucidate that technical issues and unfamiliarity with computer programs are the main factors influencing the preference for traditional tests over web blogging.

Interestingly, while the novelty of this experience becomes a reason for some students to like the traditional tests, the same reason becomes a factor for another to prefer blogging. Another student who preferred web blogging has compared it as follows:

1. We can do it in our own place.
2. Before uploading we can edit our documents several times.
3. The reader is able to understand, because it is very clear.

This once again emphasizes that the sense of relaxation and the clarity of typed content in blogs are positive factors influencing preferences. The conflict of the interests of the students on the same matter shows that the preference depends on the way they perceive this, students who enjoy change and novelty like web blogging whereas, those who resist change like to stick to the traditional method.

In summary, the majority of the students preferred web blogging over the traditional assessments they have been facing.

Blogging for the Humanities

As discussed in the literature review section under «Blogs for Humanities», most of the exam questions in the Humanities are essay type beginning with words like explain, describe, analyze, comment, review, apply, compare and contrast, etc., that request lengthy content in the answers.

The analysis of web blogs produced, by the students, evidences that all these types of assessments can be very effectively utilized in web blogging. For example, «short description about teaching methods», «A Brief Introduction to The Theories of Language Learning», «My review on L2 Learning Theories» and «L2 Teaching methods along with my review of them», are some of the titles of the uploads by the students in the blogs. Blogs could be effectively used for any subject in Humanities not only for this particular subject of L2 learning and teaching with the careful instructions of the teacher. Unlike in a traditional paper that has a restricted time and space, the teacher can manage to test the entire syllabus, if necessary, through blogging.

In addition, the common breakdown of marking in essay-type answers includes content, language, and organization. The same could be measured more creatively and authentically with an examination of higher-order skills and other 21st-century skills through blogging. This could be done basically with the interference of the teacher or by giving more autonomy to the learner. In agreement with the teacher's guide of controlled assessment, the

teacher can assign topics with time frames and clear guidelines for the learner to include write-ups with the addition of creativity and subjectivity, which are not tested in the Sri Lankan context very much. For example, the learner's opinion and application of a given issue, theory, or concept could be measured, allowing no room for plagiarism as well. In line with the second option, which is creating an autonomous environment, the students can be allowed to choose their topics from the syllabus, where the teacher intervenes little, only giving scope in order to maintain the uniformity of the assessment. This assessment not only evaluates content, language, and organization but also assesses problem-solving, critical thinking, computer literacy, analytical skills, creativity, and other relevant competencies. The blogs created by the students show how effectively they have managed the content by adding videos, pictures and creative aspects to the texts. However, the blog is flexible enough for any adaptation of the content by the teacher and the blogger. Students who have undergone traditional examinations for years and recently experienced testing through web blogging express agreement that weblogging is a preferable alternative to traditional exams.

Referring to lecturers' responses in this regard three lecturers were not familiar with blogging. Even though the other two had been exposed to them during their university period as students, they have not tried it with their students at this university. According to those lecturers, it is difficult to implement a tool as an assessment with the limited language knowledge of the students. Even though the lecturers mention that I do not agree with them because the blog can be managed as necessary.

Challenges Confronted in Using Blogs

Both lecturers and students have stated similar types of challenges related to web blogging. Almost all (100%) of them have mentioned internet connection issues and poor knowledge as the main barriers they faced in working on the web blog. A study conducted in the African context also finds less awareness of blogs among African undergraduates as a challenge (Nnanwuba & Anastacia, 2013). A similar situation was obvious in the Sri Lankan context as well according to the findings of the study. As mentioned in the above section, the novelty of the experience was embraced by the majority but for a few students, the same was a challenge.

To the question, «What is the most common assessment method you use?» all five lecturers unanimously cited «administering exam papers» as their primary assessment method, while those who opted for alternative assessment predominantly chose presentations. One significant challenge faced by the lecturers in the sample in refraining from utilizing web blogging as an assessment tool is the lack of technical knowledge and unfamiliarity with web blogging and alternative assessment methods in particular. This reluctance to embrace new assessment approaches could also be observed in the student, who appears hesitant to deviate from traditional methods.

Another significant challenge for instructors was the need to meticulously review and correct all student-written content before it could be uploaded for public access. The English

lecturer mentioned, «Correcting all their writings only to myself, with special care is very difficult.»

These challenges regarding blogging like the lack of computer facilities, technical knowledge, and extra work for the instructor could be solved at the university level by consulting IT experts and getting the support of another lecturer for correcting the content.

In that sense also blogging is more appropriate for small group classes with students specializing in the subject. Some other limitations and problems of blogging could be time-consuming in marking. Another disadvantage could be as the blogs have open access the content in them should be guaranteed. As a solution to these two problems, blogs could be used in classes with a small number of students. For example, in universities, few students specialize in a certain subject as for English, and this could be done in such classes. This helps to maintain the high standard of the final product, and a supervisor could be appointed from the department if one lecturer cannot monitor all the blogs alone. On the other hand, the availability of public access and review can be used to educate the students about the importance of their work.

Conclusion

Aligning with the three research questions, «What is the Sri Lankan students' perception of utilizing web blogging as an alternative assessment?, What are the challenges faced by the students in creating web blogs?, and what are the challenges faced by the lecturers in assessing through web blogs?» overall, students exhibit a highly positive perception of web blogging. They express unanimous preference for web blogging, citing flexibility, increased visibility, knowledge sharing and the opportunity for creativity.

Despite facing challenges such as internet connectivity and technical issues, students overwhelmingly prefer web blogging to traditional examinations. The lecturers also accepted similar challenges in addition to the increased workload they get by this. The challenges mentioned are widespread and could be effectively addressed at the institutional level. In conclusion, the evident positive sentiment from students, reflected in their thoughts, web blogs, literature, the researcher's introspection, and the lecturers' perspectives, emphasizes that web blogging can serve as an effective alternative to traditional tests for English and the Humanities.

Many subjects under the Humanities, traditionally assessed through lengthy essays, can benefit from the substitution with web blogging which not only evaluates content but also sharpens various sub-skills like creativity, content management, organization, computer literacy, and peer reviewing. In doing so, web blogging proves to be a more engaging and effective method of assessing learners' capabilities and skills compared to traditional testing approaches.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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