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Exploring Student and Lecturer Perceptions of Web Blogging as an Alternative Tool for Language Assessment



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Abstract

This study explores student and lecturer perceptions of web blogging as an alternative assessment tool for language testing in the Sri Lankan context. Rooted in constructivism, the research investigates how web blogging engages learners in meaningful language use and reflects real-world communication. The study seeks to identify (i) What language skills can be effectively assessed through web blogging? (ii) How do Sri Lankan students and lecturers perceive the use of web blogging as an alternative assessment method? (iii) What challenges do students face when creating web blogs for language assessment? and (iv) What challenges do lecturers encounter in assessing language skills through web blogs? A qualitative approach was employed, using open-ended questionnaires for students and lecturers and content analysis of the student-created web blogs to gather rich, contextual data. The findings reveal that blogging supports the assessment of various language skills and soft skills while also fostering learner autonomy and engagement. However, challenges such as digital access, workload, and assessment criteria were noted. The study concludes that, despite some limitations, web blogging holds strong potential as a student-centered alternative to traditional language assessments.

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

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Introduction

Assessment plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. Assessment helps to identify the learners' needs, document their progress, and determine how teachers and planners are doing (Frank, 2012). Among various assessment methods, traditional assessments primarily focus on evaluating what students know, whereas alternative assessments, which are gaining increasing popularity, encourage students to explain, apply, critique, and monitor their own learning (Demir, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and 2020 brought significant changes to the education sector, particularly affecting assessment practices. One notable development in the Sri Lankan context was the rising popularity of alternative assessments, which had not gained much traction earlier due to the impracticality of conducting traditional, in-person examinations.

To overcome issues related to traditional assessments, a range of alternative assessments, such as take-home assignments, presentations, conferences, open-book exams, collaborative tasks, reflective journals, portfolios, blogs, projects, mini-research work, and viva voce, were successfully introduced in various educational settings (Adama et al., 2023; Arifuddin et al., 2021; Kaisar, 2023). Before the pandemic, such methods were rarely used in Sri Lanka. However, some teachers who adopted them found them engaging and chose to continue using them beyond the pandemic. The current study stems from one such practice, initiated during the pandemic and sustained due to students' enthusiasm for it. A study on English teachers' perceptions of traditional versus alternative assessments revealed that many still prefer traditional assessments due to their ease and familiarity in classroom settings (Fadilah et al., 2023), a trend observed in Sri Lanka as well. In this context, it is important to explore the perceptions of the students and the lecturers, the key stakeholders involved in assessment, regarding the use of alternative assessment methods.

Web blogging has been used effectively as a tool for language assessment across various educational contexts. For example, Huang and Danny (2016) found that while the majority of students scored well and expressed positive attitudes toward using blogs to assess English speaking skills, many still preferred not to use blogging as an assessment method. Similarly, Montero-Fleta and Sabater (2010) reported positive outcomes of blogging for improving language fluency and writing with purpose. In the Indonesian context, blog-based language teaching and assessment have also yielded successful results (Muslem et al., 2022).

Given these findings, it is important to explore how blogging could be adopted for English language assessment in the Sri Lankan context. Investigating whether Sri Lankan students' and lecturers' experiences align with previous studies will offer valuable insights into the broader applicability of blog-based assessment. Accordingly, the present study aims to explore the use of web blogging as an alternative assessment tool for English, focusing on evaluating students' performance and examining both students' and lecturers' perceptions of web blogging in comparison with traditional assessments.

Literature Review

Assessment Techniques

Assessment should serve as an effective component of language teaching and learning, not only for measuring students' progress but also for motivating them to engage with the language learning process (Phongsirikul, 2018). Primarily, assessments can be divided into two major categories as either traditional or 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).

The above goal of assessment is often not fully achieved through traditional methods such as pencil-and-paper tests (Dikli, 2003). In contrast, alternative assessments such as journals, learning logs, portfolios, self-assessments, and peer assessments play a vital role in addressing the limitations of traditional assessments by offering more meaningful and learner-centered evaluation approaches (Phongsirikul, 2018).

These traditional test items mostly have a summative focus on discrete answers, evaluating non-interactive performance and catering to extrinsic motivation. In contrast, alternative assessments mentioned above are mostly continuous, long-term assessments with contextualized communicative tasks encouraging open-ended, creative answers. Further, they involve interactive performance, fostering intrinsic motivation (Phongsirikul, 2018). Recently, both educators and students have increasingly favored alternative assessments (Dikli, 2003). Traditional assessments are often standardized, time-limited, and norm-referenced (Law & 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).

Finally, both traditional and alternative assessments have merits and demerits. While traditional assessments like multiple choice strategies are more objective, reliable, and valid, alternative methods are authentic, flexible, and show positive washback (Quansah, 2018). Likewise, assessment tasks and techniques vary significantly across and within disciplines, but it is essential to adhere to established assessment standards (Brown, 1990).

Web Blogging

A blog, short for “weblog”, has been introduced as a “frequently updated online diary” (Elkhoury, 2020, p. 10), but has rapidly evolved since the 1990s into a popular and influential form of online micro-publishing and computer-mediated communication (Chawner, 2007). It is an online journal where an individual or group of authors publish a series of chronological, updatable posts on various topics, typically of personal interest, expressed in a distinctly subjective voice, and open to reader comments (Akmajian et al., 2008). This broad and adaptable format makes blogs a valuable tool for evaluating content knowledge, language skills, and other 21st-century competencies in language learners. The flexibility of blogging allows educators to tailor it to different assessment purposes and contexts. Furthermore, blogs have been shown to support the development of higher-order thinking, authentic learning, associative and interactive thinking, and learner-centeredness (Akmajian et al., 2008). In educational settings, blogs help students build personal identity and feel empowered as they engage in meaningful interactions. Notably, blogging also encourages students to become more critical and analytical in their writing (Akmajian et al., 2008).

With the flexibility of blogging as an assessment, teachers can design the content of the question according to the purpose of the test and students’ needs (Fitriah & Rofiqo, 2019). In addition to these aspects, 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.

Web Blogging as an Assessment Tool

The effectiveness of blogs as an assessment tool has been empirically explored across various educational contexts.

Web blogging as an alternative assessment tool showed increased engagement with the content, enhanced student learning and dialogue about the profession, and facilitated peer learning (O’Rourke &

Doyon, 2024). In addition to these benefits, blogging provides a high level of autonomy while providing the opportunity for peer interaction (Williams & Jacobs, 2004).

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, such as communication skills, self-directed and community-based learning skills and applying social media tools for learning in contrast with traditional assessment. While the study found that the teacher's constant guidance with feedback at each phase was needed to produce good work, both the teachers and students faced various challenges at various phases (Tammets & Normak, 2013).

Web blogging has proven to be effective in enhancing language skills. An experimental study found that learners in the experimental group developed greater self-expression and self-reflection through blogging for professional development, which encouraged more fluent language production. The use of blogs as an intervention led to improvements in both writing and reading skills. These findings align with the current study's approach to testing language learning (Montero-Fleta & Sabater, 2010).

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 (Alsamadani, 2018; Nepomuceno, 2011; 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. 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 language teaching.

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).

A study based on a similar research question to the current study, which investigated the students' and teachers' perceptions of alternative assessments, found that they preferred traditional assessments like pencil-and-paper quizzes and exams mainly due to validity and reliability issues of WeCreate activity, and Learn & Teach Project which the study employed as alternative tools (Phongsirikul, 2018).

In Sri Lankan higher education institutes, especially in the Humanities, the major summative assessment practices are semester-end examinations and mid-semester take-home written assignments. However, formative assessment--the continuous assessment method, is used to improve students throughout 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.

A recent study that investigated web blogging as a written assignment assessment found positive student attitudes. The research found the students to be highly motivated to write blog posts due to their shareability feature, incorporating multimedia to present the content attractively, to receive positive feedback (Embogama, 2022). This study is similar to the current one in many ways, except for the research site.

A study investigated the perceived satisfaction with assessment practices in the national university system with special reference to peripheral and metropolitan universities. The study recommends that the university authorities should take steps to deviate from the traditional assessments and introduce alternative methods (Dhanapala, 2021).

Theoretical Focus

While several assessment theories align with the current study, constructivist learning and assessments are particularly relevant. In a constructivist learning environment, learners are active participants rather than passive recipients of information (Olusegun, 2015; Thomas, 2023). Therefore, assessment within this framework should be student-centered, with learners actively engaged in the assessment process (Thomas, 2023).

Constructivist assessment emphasizes the importance of continuous feedback, allowing students to improve and reflect on their learning. From this perspective, teachers tend to favor alternative assessments over traditional ones, as they are often formative rather than summative (Thomas, 2023). Assessment tools, therefore, should support this paradigm by encouraging active involvement, reflection, and ongoing development.

Web blogging embodies these characteristics, making it a suitable tool for use in a constructivist learning environment. It allows for creativity, personal expression, peer interaction, and iterative feedback, all of which support deeper engagement and meaningful language learning. Thus, constructivism applies to the current study at different levels.

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, and 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 language skills can be effectively assessed through web blogging?
- ii. How do Sri Lankan students and lecturers perceive the use of web blogging as an alternative assessment method?
- iii. What challenges do students face when creating web blogs for language assessment?
- iv. What challenges do lecturers encounter in assessing language skills through web blogs?

Methodology

Design

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

Participants

Ten students enrolled in a course titled “Approaches and Methods in Second Language Teaching” formed one category of participants in the study. These students were at both upper- and lower-intermediate levels of English proficiency.

The second category of participants consisted of five lecturers who teach English and other languages at the same university. Among them, two had previously used blogs as a tool for assessing students, while the remaining three had not.

Procedure

At the start of the course, students received a short training session of four hours on creating a web blog, conducted by the university’s IT lecturer. The Blogger platform was used for this task. Following the training, students were given a timeline and clear guidelines outlining the blog content, which was designed to align with the entire syllabus. They also received detailed assessment rubrics covering five key aspects: content, language, presentation, adherence to deadlines, as well as their engagement with peer feedback. The blog was assessed out of 80 marks: 30 for content, 25 for language, 15 for presentation, and 10 for meeting deadlines and providing peer feedback. After the training, as the course progressed, students independently developed their blog content in parallel with the lectures, following the assigned schedule. Upon completing the blogs, students participated in a viva voce worth 20 marks. This oral examination was based on their blog content and aimed to assess their familiarity, understanding of the material, and speaking skills.

Tools

Two separate Google Form-based questionnaires, featuring both open-ended and a few closed-ended questions, were administered to five lecturers and ten students. Alongside these, student blogs and the researcher’s introspective observations, as the instructor of the course, served as key tools for data collection.

Data for the first research question was primarily gathered from the students’ blogs and the questionnaires. The remaining three research questions were addressed using data exclusively from the two questionnaires administered to both students and lecturers. In addition to participants’ responses and the analysis of the blogs, the researcher’s introspection as the course instructor also contributed to the study’s conclusions.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was thematically analyzed by identifying key themes that emerged from the participants’ responses. The student-produced blogs were examined through content analysis to explore recurring ideas and patterns. Responses to the closed-ended questions were analyzed using the Google Forms platform, which also facilitated the generation of tables and charts. The findings are presented

according to the themes derived from the data, supported by visual representations created in Google Forms.

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. Even though the students had the choice to make the blogs private if they wished, all the students wanted the blogs to be public.

Findings and Discussion

Students' Interest in Web Blogs

One focus of the second research question was to explore students' perceptions of using a web blog as an assessment tool. According to the questionnaire results, all students responded positively to web blogging as a form of assessment. They unanimously agreed that it was an engaging and interesting way to be evaluated.

For the majority of students, using a web blog as an assessment tool was a novel experience, as they were more familiar with traditional semester-end examinations. This shift in assessment format sparked enthusiasm and curiosity among the learners. One student remarked, "That was an exciting course since it was new to me. I got to enter a new area that I had not experienced before." This sentiment was echoed by many others, who described the experience as refreshing and engaging. Students frequently mentioned that the web blog allowed them to explore new dimensions of assessment, encouraging creativity, independent thinking, and continuous learning, elements often missing from conventional exam-based evaluations.

Several students highlighted that the process of maintaining a blog throughout the course provided them with a sense of ownership and personal connection to the material. They appreciated the opportunity to express their understanding more interactively and reflectively. Across the board, students described the experience as not only enjoyable but also meaningful, as it introduced them to a form of assessment that fostered deeper engagement and real-world skills such as digital literacy and communication. In summary, the transition to blog-based assessment was widely perceived as a positive and enriching departure from traditional methods.

Among the various reasons students cited for their interest in blog-based assessment, several stood out as particularly significant. The novelty of the experience, their enthusiasm for computer-related tasks, and the opportunity to work independently were frequently mentioned. These aspects made the assessment feel both modern and personally meaningful. One student reflected on this by saying, "I strongly agree with that, because if someone has the ability to develop a web page, they have the ability to communicate something to a large number of people very quickly and effectively." This response highlights the sense of empowerment students felt through mastering digital communication tools, which they viewed as relevant and useful beyond the classroom setting.

The freedom to express their ideas in a creative and self-directed manner also appealed to many students. This also aligns with the constructivism that encourages freedom and space for creativity for learners. Unlike traditional exams, which often limit students to structured responses, blogging allows for more personalized exploration of course content. The blogs clearly demonstrate how students employed their creativity to make their content visually appealing and engaging. Many incorporated multimedia

elements such as images, videos, and hyperlinks effectively, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This creative freedom played a significant role in sustaining their interest, as the flexibility to design and present their work in an attractive format allowed them to take greater ownership of their learning and express their ideas more dynamically.

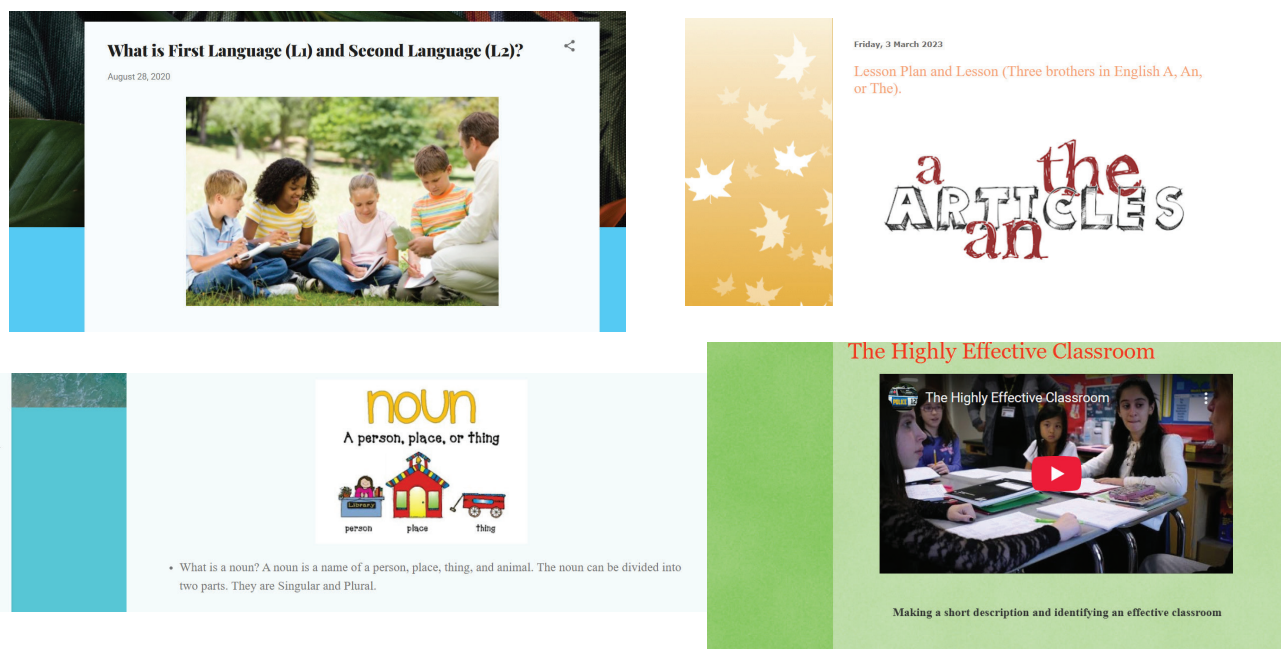


Figure 1 *Interfaces of the Blogs.*

It also gave them a sense of audience and purpose, knowing their work could potentially reach readers beyond their instructors. Overall, the combination of digital skills development, autonomy, and real-world relevance, which are main principles of constructivism, contributed greatly to students' positive perceptions of web blogging as an assessment method.

Additionally, students shared that they gained a wealth of new knowledge through this task. Another key reason for their enthusiasm was the public nature of the blog; being accessible to a wider audience gave the activity a real-world relevance that traditional assessments often lack. Many students expressed a sense of pride in having their writing published online. One student shared that his mother was thrilled to see his blog, remarking: "I was thrilled to see the happiness of my mother seeing me on the web." Meanwhile, another mentioned how happy he felt when his friends left comments on his post. He had even shared the blog link on his Facebook account to reach a broader audience. The students' pride and excitement were observed firsthand, as they eagerly shared their blog posts and the feedback they received with their peers.

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 limitations in computer literacy, the IT lecturer found it difficult to train them to create their web blog at the initial stage. However, in the end, they tried and learnt different features of the platform and created beautiful blogs.

A similar study conducted in Indonesia by Fitriah and Rofiqo (2019) reported comparable findings, highlighting students' motivation and engagement with blog-based assessments. Likewise, O'Rourke and Doyon (2024) emphasized students' enthusiasm for using web blogs as an assessment tool, noting

that such methods effectively support authentic learning experiences and better prepare students for their future careers. These studies, like the present one, utilized questionnaires to gather student feedback and consistently revealed a strong preference for blog-based assessments over traditional evaluation methods across diverse educational contexts. Consistent with these findings, a high level of student motivation in producing their web blogs was observed. Their interest and enthusiasm are clearly reflected in the creativity and effort evident in the examples shared in Figure 1.

Perception of the Lecturers

Among the five lecturers who responded to the questionnaire, two had prior experience of using web blogging as an assessment tool, while the remaining three were not previously familiar with this approach. However, through their exposure during the study, even those without prior experience gained insight into the potential of blog-based assessment. They expressed a growing interest in the concept and acknowledged its value as a modern, student-centered evaluation method. This is an idea that constructivists admire most in alternative assessment. These lecturers noted that web blogging could encourage creativity, digital literacy, and independent learning among students, skills increasingly relevant in contemporary education. Their willingness to explore and adopt new assessment practices reflects a positive shift toward more innovative and engaging forms of evaluation in higher education.

Advantages of Blogs as an Assessment

Both students and lecturers have identified a range of advantages in using web blogs as a form of assessment, highlighting their potential as an engaging and effective educational tool.

From the students' perspective, the benefits of blog-based assessment were numerous. They emphasized the opportunity to gain and share knowledge, the relaxed and less stressful nature of the task compared to traditional exams, and the ease and speed with which they could communicate their ideas to a wider audience. The creative freedom blogs provided was also a key motivator, along with the perception that they could earn good marks through consistent effort and expression. The public nature of the blogs—being visible to peers, family, and the broader community—was another motivating factor. One student noted that they appreciated the blog's potential for “easy and quick communication to a large audience,” which made their work feel more meaningful and impactful.

Lecturers, on the other hand, placed a strong emphasis on skill development. They identified the promotion of essential academic and professional competencies such as assessment literacy, creative thinking, computer literacy, and writing proficiency. This perspective reflects a broader, more developmental view of assessment, not merely as a tool to evaluate what students have already learned, but as an integral part of the learning process that fosters growth and prepares students for real-world challenges. Furthermore, lecturers described blog-based assessment as enjoyable, interesting, and motivational for both students and lecturers, contributing to a more dynamic classroom environment.

These findings are supported by existing literature, which has recognized several pedagogical advantages of using web blogs in assessment. O'Rourke and Doyon (2024) highlighted how blog-based assessments support active knowledge construction and peer interaction, foster engagement, and help bridge academic learning with industry-relevant skills. Similarly, Akdağ and others (2021) noted that web blogs enhance lesson preparation, facilitate information sharing, encourage active student participation, and contribute to improved academic achievement. Together, these insights underline the potential of web blogging to transform assessment into a more collaborative, reflective, and skill-oriented learning experience.

Scoring of Blogs

Before students began creating their blogs, clear criteria and detailed instructions were provided to ensure consistency and fairness in the assessment process. Topics were assigned to promote uniformity across submissions, which also helped streamline evaluation. The assessment focused on five key areas: content, language, presentation, adherence to deadlines, and peer feedback.

Content was evaluated based on relevance to the assigned topics, appropriate use of evidence, logical organization of ideas, and correct citation practices. Language assessment included grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and punctuation. The presentation was judged on the visual appeal and creativity of the blog, with students encouraged to incorporate multimedia elements such as images, videos, emojis, clip art, and original drawings. Marks were also awarded for punctual submission and the quality of constructive feedback provided on peers' blogs, thereby promoting a culture of peer review and active engagement.

Assessment results were encouraging, with 90% of students scoring above 65 marks, with two students exceeding 75. One student, who submitted less than half of the required content, received 40 marks. Notably, all students (100%) scored highest in the presentation category, reflecting a strong focus on enhancing the visual and creative aspects of their blogs. Both peer and instructor feedback on draft versions helped ensure that most final submissions were polished and largely free of errors.

Student feedback revealed high levels of satisfaction with both the assessment process and their performance. All but one student (90%) expressed a preference for blog-based assessment over traditional exams, particularly valuing the transparency of the rubrics provided at the outset. These rubrics helped students understand expectations and align their work accordingly. In contrast, many students described conventional exams as frustrating due to unclear marking criteria and unexpected results.

To verify the authenticity of each student's work and address concerns about plagiarism, a viva voce worth 20 marks was conducted. Students were questioned on their blog content, ensuring they had a thorough understanding of what they had written and could confidently explain and defend it.

The rubric used in this study aligns with several established models in higher education. For instance, the University of Westminster includes "reflection," "knowledge and understanding," "peer learning," and "writing style" as core components of blog assessment (*Example Grading Criteria for Marking Blogs in Higher Education*, 2017). These criteria emphasize critical reflection, subject knowledge, peer engagement, and effective written communication. Similarly, the University of Wisconsin's rubric includes categories such as "content and creativity," "voice," "text layout and multimedia use," "timeliness and tags," "citations," and "writing and proofreading quality" (Franker, 2018). This approach not only evaluates the originality and depth of student work but also considers design, citation practices, and writing mechanics.

In addition to this structured assessment adopted for scoring the blog as a summative assessment, the lecturer provided continuous feedback on the content, and peer feedback was also incorporated, aligning with constructivist principles.

Despite variations in terminology and specific components, these rubrics share common elements: a strong emphasis on content quality and creativity, clarity and correctness of language, and the overall visual and technical presentation of the blog. This alignment highlights the growing recognition of blogs as effective tools for integrating critical thinking, communication, and digital literacy within academic assessments.

Language Skills Tested

The first research question aimed to investigate what aspects of language could be tested through web blogging, one of the primary objectives of using web blogs as an alternative assessment tool. It focused on evaluating students' English language proficiency, particularly since the participants were English majors, in addition to the content and other aspects. As outlined in the procedure and scoring criteria, 25 out of 80 marks were allocated specifically for language. This component assessed grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and punctuation, with particular emphasis on the accuracy and appropriateness of grammar, sentence structures, and vocabulary. Additionally, stylistic elements and mechanical accuracy were considered in the evaluation process. The following table (Table 1), extracted from the mark sheet, presents the language scores students received, along with corresponding comments. Overall, the marks indicate that the students demonstrate a solid command of written English even beyond my expectations, with language skills that are notably above average.

Table 1 *Marks for Language*

Student	Language (possible score of 25 marks)	Remarks
1	18	Good understanding of grammar and vocabulary. Adhere to one tense. Errors in mechanics. Refine your sentence structure. Use different structures.
2	20	Very good command of language. Clear and mostly accurate grammar usage. Vocabulary is appropriate and varied.
3	16	Basic grammar errors. Inappropriate vocabulary use in some places. Try to combine most of the simple sentences.
4	21	Very good performance. Minor issues in punctuation or sentence structure, but overall, very effective use of language.
5	20	Good grasp of language. Sentences are clear and vocabulary is appropriate. Continue polishing finer grammar points.
6	17	Good attempt. Some errors in mechanics and vocabulary choice. Focus on using a wider range of sentence structures.
7	18	Shows a good foundation. Work on refining grammar accuracy and punctuation consistency. Think of improving sentence structures.
8	22	Excellent use of language. Accurate grammar, varied vocabulary, and strong mechanics. Very well done!
9	16	Fair performance. Continue to work on clarity and consistency in grammar and punctuation. Stick to one tense. Use citations correctly. Refine sentence patterns. Add various structures.
10	19	Good job. Mostly accurate grammar and appropriate vocabulary. Improve sentence flow.

In addition to assessing their writing skills, students' reading skills were also indirectly evaluated through the peer review process. Five marks were allocated for providing peer feedback. In order to review their peers' blogs, students were required to read them attentively. Providing feedback was compulsory for all participants. The students were expected to read and comment on at least one peer's blog in order to obtain the full five marks.

The following are a few examples of peer comments extracted from the blogs. On a video posted by one student, a peer commented, "This is an interesting video, but I do not think that it matches the

topic you have discussed. Please see my suggestion,” and he included a link to an alternative video. Another student responded to a post on language learning theories with, “I agree with your idea about behaviorism. Even though it is a traditional teaching method, I also believe that it has many merits in terms of vocabulary teaching.”

An examination of these comments clearly reveals that students engaged in close reading of their peers’ blog content in order to provide thoughtful and relevant feedback. The nature and quality of the comments suggest a high level of comprehension and critical engagement. Consequently, these responses received nearly full marks. This component not only encouraged active participation but also supported the development of reading comprehension, critical thinking, and collaborative learning through peer interaction. Not only were students required to read their peers’ blog posts, but as illustrated in the comments above, they also had to watch and listen to videos in order to provide meaningful feedback. Almost all students had included videos in their blog entries, which meant that peers needed to engage with multimedia content, not just text, before commenting. This further reflects the depth of interaction required in the peer review process, demonstrating students’ ability to comprehend, analyze, and respond to a variety of content formats. It also highlights the multimodal nature of the task, which extends beyond reading and writing to include listening and viewing skills as part of their language learning experience.

Upon completion of the blogs, students participated in a viva voce examination worth 20 marks. This oral assessment was based on their own blog content and was designed to evaluate their familiarity with the material, their understanding, and their speaking skills. Both prepared and impromptu speaking abilities, along with presentation skills, were assessed during the viva. Typically, students began by presenting their experiences related to the course module and the process of creating their blogs. Following the presentation, the lecturer asked questions related to their blog content to assess not only their comprehension but also the reliability and authenticity of what they had submitted. This kind of oral test was planned to reduce the likelihood of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. The expectation to explain and defend their own work in real-time makes it more difficult for students to present plagiarized content as their own, thereby promoting originality and genuine engagement with the subject matter. Unlike traditional written assessments, which typically test one or two skills and memorization, a web blog allows for the assessment of multiple skills in a more engaging and motivating way.

In this manner, it becomes evident that web blogs serve as an effective tool for assessing all four language skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking, as well as three key language systems: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Unlike traditional written examinations, which often focus on isolated skills, this integrated approach allows for the simultaneous evaluation of a wide range of competencies. Additionally, it provides opportunities to assess various soft skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, presentation, and digital literacy, all within a single assessment task, something that is rarely achievable through conventional testing methods.

Traditional Assessments vs Web Blogging

Inspired by the aforementioned advantages, students showed a clear preference for blogging over traditional assessment methods. As illustrated in Figure 2, derived from the Google Form responses, 80% of the participants exclusively favored web blogging, while only 10%, a single student, preferred traditional examinations. Additionally, one student expressed an equal preference for both methods. This notable shift underscores the growing appeal of web blogging as a modern, student-centered assessment tool.

One student who preferred web blogging explained his choice 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.

These responses emphasize that the relaxed nature of blogging, combined with the ability to revise and present clear content, positively influences students' preferences.

05. Do you prefer the traditional examinations or web blogging?

10 responses

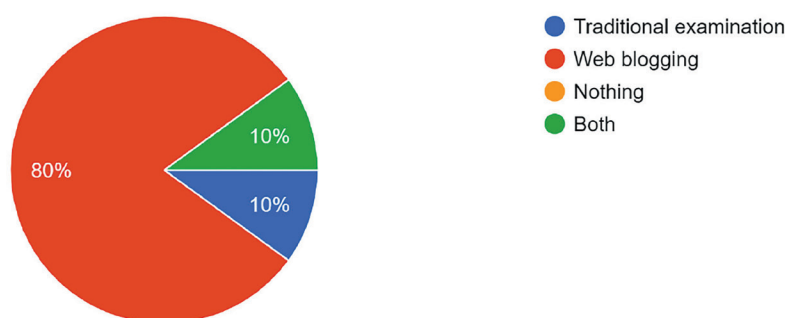


Figure 2 *Traditional Assessment vs Web Blogging.*

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. Cannot 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 suggest that technical challenges and a lack of familiarity with digital tools are the primary factors influencing the preference for traditional assessments over blogging. Interestingly, the novelty of web blogging, which some students embrace, can also deter others who find comfort in the familiarity of traditional methods.

The contrasting views demonstrate that students' preferences depend significantly on their perception of these assessment methods. Those who value stability and familiarity lean towards traditional assessments, while those who embrace change and innovation are drawn to blogging. This dichotomy reflects the individual adaptability and openness of students to new assessment paradigms. In summary, the majority of the students preferred web blogging over the traditional assessments they had faced.

An analysis of the lecturers' responses revealed that three out of the five had primarily relied on traditional assessment methods, such as written examinations, for evaluating students. However, they occasionally incorporated alternative assessment techniques, including PowerPoint presentations, research paper writing, poster presentations, creative writing (such as poems or stories), dictation exercises, and listening tasks. These lecturers observed that students generally demonstrated greater interest and engagement when assessed through these alternative methods compared to standardized exams.

The remaining two lecturers in the sample had already implemented web blogging as an alternative form of assessment. Both unanimously agreed that students responded more enthusiastically to web blogging than to traditional forms of evaluation. One lecturer remarked: “I found them enjoying web blogging more than any traditional examination. I also enjoyed evaluating the blogs rather than reading boring papers.”

This observation underscores a significant shift in both student and lecturer perspectives. It suggests that not only do students find blog-based assessments more engaging, but educators themselves also appreciate the dynamic and creative nature of this format. Such assessments allow for more interactive, personalized, and meaningful evaluation processes, making teaching and learning more enjoyable and relevant to real-world communication practices.

This emerging preference among both groups highlights the potential of web blogging to serve as a powerful pedagogical tool, one that enhances student motivation while providing educators with a refreshing and innovative approach to assessment.

In summary, the majority of students showed a strong preference for web blogging over traditional assessments. The appeal of blogging lies in its flexibility, opportunities for revision, and clarity, which align with modern pedagogical practices. However, the challenges of technical issues and resistance to change remain factors for some students’ continued preference for traditional methods. These findings underscore the need for educators to address technological barriers and provide adequate support to ensure a smooth transition to innovative assessment practices like blogging.

Challenges Confronted with Using Blogs

Both lecturers and students have stated similar types of challenges related to web blogging. Almost all 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. In the Indonesian context, finding materials has been identified as a challenge (O’Rourke & Doyon, 2024).

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 three lecturers who used alternative assessments predominantly relied on student 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 by 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 the time-consuming nature of 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

Aligned with the four research questions, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the use of web blogging as an alternative method for language assessment.

In response to the first research question, the analysis of student blogs demonstrates that blogging is an effective tool for assessing both content and language skills. Specifically, in the context of English language learning, the primary focus of this study, blogging, facilitates the assessment of the four core skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. It also supports the evaluation of various sub-skills and soft skills, thereby confirming its value as a comprehensive language assessment method.

Regarding the second research question, findings indicate that both Sri Lankan students and lecturers hold highly positive perceptions of web blogging. Participants appreciated the flexibility, increased visibility, opportunities for knowledge sharing, and the creative freedom afforded by the platform. These benefits contributed to a unanimous preference for web blogging over traditional examinations.

The third and fourth research questions address the challenges faced by students and lecturers, respectively. Students identified issues such as limited internet connectivity and technical difficulties. Lecturers, while also acknowledging these technical challenges, highlighted the additional workload involved in assessing blog content. Nonetheless, both groups agreed that these issues are manageable and could be mitigated through institutional support and training.

In conclusion, the convergence of positive feedback from students, expressed through their blogs, reflections, and questionnaire and the supportive views of lecturers underscores the potential of web blogging as an effective and engaging alternative to traditional language assessments.

Limitations

Despite the encouraging findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged:

The study was limited to a specific group of Sri Lankan students and lecturers, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Only 10 students followed that course and the entire group took part in the study. Both students and lecturers faced time limitations. For students, balancing blog creation with other academic responsibilities was challenging. For lecturers, the time-intensive nature of evaluating blogs may have impacted the depth of assessment. As with any alternative assessment method, assessing creativity and language skills through blogs may involve a degree of subjectivity, potentially affecting reliability and consistency in grading.

Implications

Based on the findings and limitations, the following recommendations are proposed for future practice and research.

- i. Expand the study: Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample across multiple institutions and educational contexts to enhance the generalizability of results.
- ii. Training and guidelines: Clear assessment rubrics and training sessions for lecturers and students can help ensure consistency and reduce subjectivity in evaluating blog content.
- iii. Blended assessment models: Web blogging could be integrated with traditional assessment methods to balance creativity and academic rigor while addressing time and workload concerns.
- iv. Application to other subjects: While this study concluded that blogging is an effective tool for assessing English language skills, its application can be extended beyond English to other language teaching contexts. Furthermore, the versatility of blogging as an assessment method makes it suitable for any subject that involves the integration of content knowledge and language skills. Subjects that require critical thinking, reflection, articulation of ideas, and written expression such as humanities, social sciences, and even certain areas of science and technology, can benefit from incorporating web blogging as a formative or summative assessment tool. This approach fosters deeper engagement, creativity, and learner autonomy across disciplines.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

No conflict of interest exists.

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