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Towards Sustainable Assessment in Higher Education: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

Assessing students' knowledge and skills has been widely discussed among educators. The present study investigates lecturers' and learners' views on the assessment practices implemented in two higher education institutions. Their perceptions on providing feedback, variety of assessment tasks, use of peer-evaluation, and promotion of learning through the assessment activities have been explored. Twenty-one students and thirteen teachers from the Uzbek university and ten students and eight lecturers from the Latvian university participated in the semi-structured interviews. The comparative analysis revealed participants' similar opinions on the importance of varying assessment assignments and feedback-giving practices. However, different views on the peer review, assessment and students' learning processes were observed. The study has identified that despite some differences teachers at both universities promote sustainable assessment practices.

Key words: sustainable assessment, assignments, higher education, feedback, peer review, learning process, continuous assessment

Introduction

Assessing students' knowledge and skills has always been an integral part of the teaching and learning process in the higher education (HE) establishments. Gibbs (2006) highlights that "assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behavior" (p. 23). A great number of studies have been conducted on summative and formative assessment practices in different contexts (Knight, 2002; Yorke, 2003; Fastré et al., 2013). These have found that students' continuous involvement in assessment for learning (i.e., formative) might lead to positive results in assessment of learning (i.e., summative). However, some studies identified that beliefs about the importance of formative assessment and its application might mismatch (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, recent discussions among educators have revealed that more insights into the assessment practices are required.

Boud introduced a concept of sustainable assessment and explained that it "is not a notion that can be located in particular activities or which is independent of the context of learning" as "it will need to be continually reinvented and reconceptualized by teachers and learners over time" (2000, p. 163). Boud (2010) also clarifies that university

teachers should strive for the improvement in assessment practices as they might positively influence the quality of students' learning. Sustainable assessment would not only lead to the positive results in the assignments, but also enhance the learning process itself so that students continue learning after graduating from the HE institution (Fastré et al., 2013). That is, one of the key aspects of sustainability in assessment is the stimulation of lifelong learning among students.

Another important component of the sustainable assessment process is a variety of tasks that enable learners to demonstrate their knowledge and productive skills obtained during their studies. A variety of assessment activities could be applied to allow students to evaluate their progress throughout the course (Fastré et al., 2013). Brown (2005) explains that although assessment methods might be influenced by the purposes of assessment, they should encourage students to apply what they have learned and be practice oriented. The assessment methods introduced at the tertiary level are various, but as several research studies have confirmed not all of them contribute to students' learning. Therefore, Boud and Soler (2016) highlight that it is required that the assignments be aligned with the learning outcomes of the course and support students in developing their judgements of their performance. Learners should be actively involved in the assessment process and would not perform the tasks only for the purpose of achieving the learning outcome. Self-assessment might play a crucial role in this process as students become more responsible for their learning and professional growth (Tan, 2008). Boud and Falchikov (2006) also explain that tasks can focus on meeting the needs of certification but could also promote lifelong learning.

Providing feedback on the students' performance contributes to sustainability in assessment as well. The way the comments are given might depend on the course learning outcomes, nature of the task, students' level of knowledge, availability of technology and several other aspects. Abera et al. (2017) highlight that using feedback as an intervention appropriately in higher education context can contribute to students' learning. Gibbs and Simpson (2005) clarify that teachers' feedback should be timely and frequent so that students can have an opportunity to see their progress within a course. To ensure sustainability in assessment, university teachers are required to provide students with quality feedback on their performance; however, learners could also be encouraged to seek feedback from other resources rather than teachers (Boud, 2010). Peer feedback is one of such possibilities for learners as it allows them to become responsible for their learning and develop evaluative judgements on the quality of learning processes of their peers (Carless & Boud, 2018). Being more responsible for their learning will also facilitate ongoing and proactive learning as a student "effectively builds and rebuilds her or his knowledge and skills base as circumstances change" (Hays & Reinders, 2020, p. 30).

The review of the literature has identified the importance and application of different assessment practices in promoting sustainability in higher education. Although sustainable assessment was introduced more than two decades ago and discussed in several studies, this notion was not widely researched in different learning contexts. The purpose of the current study is therefore to explore university teachers' and students' perceptions of the assessment practices introduced in the HE institution. It also aims at investigating their views on the importance of feedback in the assessment processes as well the contribution of the assessment tasks to the students' learning.

Methods

The qualitative study was conducted in two HE establishments situated in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and Daugavpils (Latvia). The language of instruction in the former university is English, and in the latter one it is Latvian, but some classes might be conducted in English as well. At both universities, bachelor's (four years), master's (two years), and PhD (three years) courses are taught.

Twenty-one undergraduate students (UzSt1-UzSt21) and thirteen lecturers (UzT1-UzT13) at the Uzbek campus participated in the semi-structured interview. The students and teachers are multilingual, speaking Uzbek, Tajik, Karakalpak, Korean, Tatar, and Russian. Some of them have good knowledge of French, German, Turkish and Arabic. For all student participants, English is a foreign language that was certified by IELTS examination upon university entrance (with the minimum 6.0). Thirteen female and eight male students, eight female and five male lecturers participated in the study. Ten undergraduate and postgraduate students (LSt1-LSt10) and eight lecturers (LT1-LT8) at the Latvian university were also interviewed. All students and lecturers are multilingual speaking Latvian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian. They also speak good Belarusian, German, Finnish, Slovak, and French. The student participants have different levels of English language knowledge, from pre-intermediate to advanced. All of them passed a state examination when graduating from school, the results of which might not be required upon entrance to the university. Seven students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) are females and three are males (only undergraduates). All Latvian lecturers are females.

The semi-structured interviews were first conducted in Uzbekistan, and then in Latvia. This data collection method was chosen due to a possibility of asking core questions applicable for both learning contexts and having additional questions to gain more depth in a specific context. The data were collected either face-to-face or online using the Zoom platform. Prior to the interview, all the participants were contacted via email and only after receiving their consent were interviewed in the mode most appropriate for them. The interviews lasted for 30–45 minutes each. The confidentiality was guaranteed to all the participants.

Results

Students' Views

As feedback is considered an integral part of the sustainable assessment process, students at both universities were asked about the ways it is provided and its importance in the learning process.

Uzbek University

The students at the Uzbek campus informed that depending on the nature of the task feedback might be given in a combination of different ways, i.e., orally (during and after the class, or during the office hours), in a written form (on students' paper), or electronically (email correspondence, comments in the Word or Google document). All participants mentioned that the lecturers provide suggestions for improvement in the content, structure, use of sources, referencing, writing style, relevance and flow of ideas,

focus/area of research, and language use. One of them explained that "The teacher guided us precisely and gave comments which lead to comprehend and answer our questions by ourselves" (UzSt16)[1]. Five participants noted that detailed explanation on different aspects of oral or written assignments at different stages helped them to understand and perform better. Three informants referred to error correction made by teachers in the tasks related to language. One student mentioned that lecturer's recommendations on the online materials were useful in performing assessment tasks.

All participants from the Uzbek university found lecturers' oral comments helpful as such a face-to-face discussion of the task allowed establishing a dialogue between them. Twelve students explained that verbal feedback was also provided as an additional effort after getting written or electronic comments. Feedback given on the written assessment tasks in the Google documents was found to be another useful way by most students. Two participants informed that it resembled a dialogue with a teacher on a regular basis as both had access to the document and were able to communicate the messages online. All respondents stated that teachers' comments helped to improve the quality of the task in terms of content, structure, and language. Three informants clarified that lecturers' reference to the assessment criteria in feedback helped them understand the nature of the task more clearly. Four other students highlighted that they were able to receive higher marks. One of them explained "It would have been more difficult for me to gain a high mark if I hadn't gotten analyses of my arguments from the expert [lecturer] in legal field" (UzSt14).

The comments provided by lecturers were found to be mostly clear. All participants of the Uzbek university informed that teachers are open for discussion, and in case anything is not clear they are available after the class, during the office hours or via email. One of them noted "I never struggled with understanding what my tutor was suggesting to me" (UzSt8). Most students mentioned having an opportunity to ask questions and receive answers on a regular basis. Although detailed explanations and suggestions for improvement were found to be important, three respondents informed that sometimes teachers' comments were vague, and they were not able to respond to them. Two other participants explained that feedback given on the drafts or after delivering presentations was always easy to understand, but the comments provided on the final assessment task were found to be abstract. One of them noted "it should be more detailed and clearly show student where he or she made mistakes and what exactly should have been different" (UzSt13).

The respondents from the Uzbek university expressed different views on peer feedback. Three students considered it useful only in group projects. One of them explained "My peers and I were collaborative in assisting each other by assessing each other's work or by providing with some suggestions" (UzSt7). Three other participants believe that peers might be helpful when explaining the assessment task, understanding the online submission process, and asking for clarification on certain aspects of assignments. One of them noted "I asked for peer review, and it was very helpful in terms of honest opinion whether my idea was clear and understandable to the reader" (UzSt9). Two other students explained that peers helped them to find mistakes that they could not identify in their written tasks. However, four respondents found peer feedback useless especially for the individual assignments. Two other participants informed that in most cases they are asked for help, while the rest never addressed their peers for feedback on any assessment task.

Latvian University

The participants of the Latvian university informed that they are provided with oral, written, and online (Zoom chat box, email correspondence or track changes in the Word document) comments on the assessment tasks. All undergraduate student participants find teachers' feedback important for their learning. In the language classes, error correction and suggestions for improvement prevail. The common language mistakes identified in the feedback are sentence structures, word choice, style of writing, pronunciation, meaning of the text (oral or written), logical flow of ideas, and punctuation. Two students also mentioned that teachers recommend online resources and printed materials that might be helpful for improving their knowledge and skills.

All undergraduate informants appreciate immediate oral feedback provided by teachers. One of them explained that "When a person talks to a person, they understand it way more easily" (LSt5). The participants believe that comments given right after the task is performed allow understanding what the mistakes are and being able to respond to them immediately. One student mentioned "Even comments given to other students are helpful for me because I can remember them and then try not to repeat the same mistakes (especially if it is connected to pronunciation)" (LSt6). The participants informed that in most cases the lecturers' feedback is quite clear, but if some students do not understand anything they can approach their teachers as they are open for discussion. All the students appreciate their peers' help as they find their feedback (e.g., explaining the nature of the task) helpful. Only one respondent informed that he rarely asked for peers' feedback, but usually provided support by himself.

In comparison to undergraduate informants, the postgraduate respondents mentioned that content and structure-wise comments are usually provided orally; and in written feedback, lecturers might also focus on language aspects and provide some suggestions for improvement. Sometimes teachers can ask leading or loaded questions to guide students, which students appreciate. For instance, one of them informed "Such kinds of questions force students to study more and get ready for the class" (LSt8). She explained that in that case students will be better prepared and other students who listen to such comments will take them into account as well. Oral comments are valued more often as they allow students to react immediately.

Postgraduate participants are less dependent on teachers' feedback but appreciate it if proper explanation is provided. One of them explained "I am a mature person, but I feel like a child who expects constructive feedback, both praise and critical comments" (LSt9). Another participant clarified "We just need coaches who guide us and give critical comments" (LSt10). Interestingly, one of the informants did not accept the teacher's comments on the content easily and explained that being well educated she can deal with the tasks on her own. All participants rarely ask for additional comments when the final mark is published.

Peers' support is appreciated by all the postgraduate participants. They rely on and value each other's feedback and support. Students explained that they are mature people, and therefore it is interesting to observe how and what they share with each other. One of them noted (LSt7):

> *Only those who are competing, might be afraid to share something with their peers because they need to have a higher score, or they want to get a scholarship. But we are not competing and therefore, we are happy to help each other.*

Two informants also clarified that teachers just monitor or guide the learning process. They highlighted that their peers provide feedback, make each other think, give examples from their life experience, and learn a lot from each other.

The student participants at both universities were also asked about the use of assessment tasks and application of knowledge and skills in their studies and professional life.

Uzbek University

Students at the Uzbek university are required to do different assessment tasks, which are done either individually or in groups, e.g., written portfolios, essays, business/ research reports, oral presentations, simulation of moot court and job interviews, in-class tests, mid-term and final exams. All respondents believe that knowledge and skills they gain in one module might be applied in other modules at the university. One student explained "I have understood that all modules are connected to each other, and naturally, knowledge I got from AE [Academic English] helped me to do my best in other modules as well" (UzSt12). Another student informed about the development of research skills and gaining knowledge in conducting surveys and interviews that she was able to apply in several modules at the university. All participants clarified that good knowledge of the English language, use of source, writing, referencing, and presentation skills are important in all subjects. Two respondents mentioned that the knowledge and skills they obtained could be applied in their future career (e.g., CV and cover letter writing, working in a team, and critical thinking). One student also noted "I could extend my outlook, because I covered various topics in the lessons and read scientific articles while doing writing assignments" (UzSt5).

Latvian University

Students at the Latvian university perform different types of assessment tasks, e.g., oral presentations, group discussions, progress tests, reports, essays, interview analysis, and final exams. They find most of them useful as it is possible to apply the knowledge and skills in professional life. As an example, two undergraduate participants (both are professional sportsmen) mentioned that they can easily write emails in English and are able to help their team-mates who face difficulties. One student also clarified after the discussions organized in the classroom, she started pronouncing some words correctly (as a fitness trainer she used them on a regular basis in her online training sessions) after listening to the teacher's comments. Two undergraduate students mentioned the improved writing skills and knowledge of vocabulary in English. Postgraduate participants expressed a similar positive view on the assessment assignments and their use. Four postgraduate students appreciate that assessment tasks give them an opportunity to learn and express themselves. One of them explained (LSt9):

> *I do the task because I want to do it, not because I really want to get a high mark and please my teacher. I will learn something new myself and develop new skills.*

Three informants noted that they clearly see the connection between the subjects taught at the university and can apply what they learn. One of them also clarified "Subjects are interrelated and knowledge that you get in one subject can be applied in other subjects or be relevant for dissertation" (LSt10).

Lecturers' Views

The lecturers at both universities were asked about the ways of providing feedback, learning and assessment processes introduced in their universities.

Uzbek University

The lecturers at the Uzbek university informed that the way they provide feedback depends on various factors. Four respondents explained that students' preferences are considered, i.e., they might give written electronic (side comments and track changes in the Google or Word documents), oral face-to-face (during the class or office hours, and after the lesson) or comments written on students' paper. Three teachers prefer providing electronic feedback, but if required they can also give additional oral comments. Five lecturers usually have a combination of written electronic and oral face-to-face comments. One of them clarified that in her classes, undergraduate students are given e-feedback and upon their request they might be provided with oral comments; however, for post-graduate students, face-to-face discussions prevail. One of the participants believes in the effectiveness of various ways, and explained "when it is combined, and a student has an opportunity to read the comments and then ask questions about unclear points during oral feedback, then it can be considered as a good one" (UzT13).

Different aspects influence the types of comments provided to students. Two lecturers mentioned the quality of students' work, while three other teachers informed that comments might also depend on the assessment task and purpose of feedback (i.e., part of formative assessment). Most teachers provide suggestions for improvement in content and structure, language use, argumentation, and referencing. Only some of them referred to error correction in the written tasks. Two respondents informed that they give detailed explanations on different aspects of the students' work. Four other participants mentioned asking leading questions in both written and oral comments. One of them explained that such feedback leads to a meaningful dialogue between teachers and students and allows learners to find the answers to the questions themselves. Three lecturers informed that they also recommend online resources for learners to find additional information on the task. Three other teachers mentioned referring to the assessment criteria in their feedback.

The clarity of comments was evaluated differently. Five lecturers at the Uzbek university believe that in most cases their feedback is clear to students. One of them explained that when he provides comments, he takes a students' role and tries to vary the language he uses in oral and written feedback. Other teachers clarified that sometimes their comments might be vague to students because of the word phrasing, use of meta-language, or if they apply some new terminology. All respondents highlighted that they are open for discussion, and students can contact them via email or approach them after class or during the office hours. One lecturer also mentioned opening online discussion boards for students to ask additional questions on the tasks. However, one of the teachers

noted that some students do not approach even if the feedback is not clear to them. Another participant explained "Those students who do not take advantage of feedback often feel sorry for not using this opportunity" (UzT1).

The lecturers' views on students' learning varied. Three respondents believe that responsibility for learning primarily lies with students. Three other participants think that teachers should motivate and guide students to learn better. One of them clarified "As once Einstein said, a student is not a bucket which should be filled but he/she is a torch one needs to light up" (UzT2), so teachers should light students. Another one explained that "Very often the atmosphere in class, the rapport, and the ability to stimulate students' learning lie at the core of effective teaching", so then teaching can lead to learning (UzT5). All other lecturers consider a learning process to be a collaborative work as learning happens if both learners and teachers are actively involved in the process. However, one of them noted that lecturers are responsible for a teaching process and clarified (UzT12):

> *... teachers should not be acting as a sole motivator, but they should be able to reflect on the learning environment they create in the classroom, and if most of the students in the class are not moving forward, then probably a teacher might be doing something wrong and it could be a good time to sit back and reflect or maybe ask someone to attend their class and provide constructive feedback.*

Another teacher also explained that (UzT4):

> *Active learning is important but first it should be instilled in students, and this requires huge efforts/commitment from teachers in the form of feedback sessions, office hour face to face meetings and contacts during seminars.*

All participants from the Uzbek university believe that teachers and students can learn from each other. Interestingly, the majority made connections between the learning process and improvement in their teaching practice highlighting the opportunity to find more appropriate ways of teaching. One teacher explained "...if teachers observe how their students behave or apply what they learn and analyze why students are acting in a particular way through reflection, teachers can learn a lot from their learners" (UzT7). However, another lecturer clarified (UzT1),

> *... people are different and some teachers, who enjoy being in the "position of power" probably do not learn much from their students. The same is applicable to the students. "Know-it-all", lazy, and ignorant students will probably learn less.*

One of the participants mentioned that "Everyone is different in terms of interests, perspectives in life, thus I always find something useful in my students while reading their work or discussing their ideas" (UzT9). Another respondent exemplified (UzT10):

> *I love finding myself in situations where a student challenges me. In the end, I am there to facilitate the learning through the exchange of knowledge and experiences.*

Only one teacher referred to learners as digital natives and noted that students can teach their lecturers to use certain applications or platforms. Three lecturers mentioned

the situations when students sent them email letters of appreciation for the learning that happened and all the knowledge and skills they obtained.

Lecturers' views on assessment differ. Four respondents believe that it is an integral component of the teaching and learning process. One of them clarified that assessment tasks are to be chosen carefully so that they "will be effective to harvest from students what they learnt and will not be too stressful" for students (UzT2). The other one highlighted (UzT8):

> *Without it [assessment], the learning process is incomplete as assessment gives an opportunity for teachers to see if learning happens and what might require improvement or change, and for students to identify their weaknesses and strengths in learning.*

A similar view was shared by another lecturer who considers assessment a learning tool for both teachers and students. She clarified that in case most students performed poorly in the assessment, then it probably signals about either the inappropriate way the teacher delivered the material or the wrong assessment task. Six participants believe that assessment should be done in a way to motivate students to learn and clarified that each assessment task should fit its purpose. However, one of them also noted that "implementing the principle of assessment for learning is challenging for teachers as it increases workload for teachers" (UzT4). One of the lecturers thinks that assessment in current education does not give a full picture of students' knowledge and skills, but it cannot be avoided as students should be informed about their progress. However, another respondent noted that students would see the results of their hard work and therefore it is important to have an assessment so that "to celebrate our students' achievements" (UzT9). Two lecturers also expressed a positive view on involving students in formative assessment to enhance their learning.

Latvian University

The teachers at the Latvian university explained that depending on the subject, the assessment tasks vary, i.e., group projects, oral presentations, written assignments (reports, essays, text analysis), progress check (both oral and written), group discussions, mid-term tests, use of applications, and final exams. One of the lecturers mentioned that she is against having one final exam at the end of the course as students learn better when they are involved in continuous assessment during a semester. Overall, a similar view was expressed by three respondents. A language teacher explained that she puts an emphasis on continuous assessment because "If they have no continuous assessment, then they think that they do not need to attend the English classes and they can write their final test because they know the English language, but in most cases such students get a low mark" (LT2). Another lecturer clarified that it is good for learners not to leave everything until the end of the semester because usually they start preparing for the exams and trying to put all the material into their head in the last two days. The respondents informed that to avoid this, in several seminars on the course students perform certain practical tasks (either oral or written), the results of which are accumulated and become part of the overall mark before the final assessment is done.

All teacher participants expressed a positive view on providing feedback to students. One of them clarified that "Feedback helps to understand what is not clear to students

and which points should be emphasized or explained more and what kind of examples might be added" (LT4). The way comments are given differ, e.g., orally (face-to-face), in written form, or using online comments. Interestingly, although all respondents mentioned both oral and written comments, the majority provides oral feedback during the classes or after the task is performed on a regular basis. One lecturer explained that "I felt not comfortable as I spent too much time explaining and writing something, but I didn't feel my students were using this opportunity to go through these notes" (LT2). Another informant noted that written feedback is given upon students' request, while four other ones highlighted that if the task is written, then they first give written comments and then provide additional oral explanation.

The types of comments are similar among the respondents as the majority mentioned identifying positive and negative sides, detailed explanation, error correction, and suggestions for improvement. One lecturer clarified that providing detailed explanation on the task and supporting them with real-life examples is particularly important in her subject as it helps students to understand that the problem is solved properly and correctly, and the chosen option will serve the purpose best. Two teachers noted the relevance of asking leading questions when providing oral feedback. One of them highlighted that "It is good if you have someone from outside who is not giving you the right answers, but just helping you with the right questions" (LT1). In her opinion, such a discussion allows establishing a dialogue between teachers and students. All respondents mentioned that learners have an opportunity to ask questions on or clarifications for the tasks or marks as teachers at the university are approachable and available offline and online. One of them noted "I explain that when they ask for clarification, it does not influence their mark anyhow, but helps them" (LT3). Thus, teachers encourage learners to provide questions and communicate the message so that learning happens.

Most Latvian lecturers believe that students' learning depends on students themselves. One of them explained that students perceive the information differently as they have different abilities and skills; therefore, she tries to find new ways to explain or provides a variety of examples to make the topic clear to the majority. Another one mentioned that "it [learning] is individual and much depends on the students, how he evaluates himself, what kind of requirements he has" (LT6). She clarified that depending on the life experience, work-study balance, and even place of living, learners might work hard to get excellent marks or study to have a pass mark and diploma. Three teachers also stated that students' motivation plays a great role in their learning. One of them exemplified a minimum and maximum program that can be reached by learners, while the other one noted that a simple task can be done in an exceptional way because they want to do it perfectly. All the respondents agreed that teachers and students can learn from each other. Two lecturers informed that both parties motivate one another, and one of them highlighted that "When there is a dialogue between you and students, you can grow professionally and improve something" (LT1). One teacher called a learning process a "two-way story" meaning that teachers cannot know everything, so learners can share their life experience and information they possess that can increase teacher's knowledge as well (LT2). Another lecturer mentioned that younger students can always teach her to apply some new applications or platforms.

Assessment is viewed differently by the lecturers at the Latvian university. One teacher stated that it is a process that can help students to learn better and highlighted that "No matter how short or long the process is, at the end there should be some actual

results achieved" (LT8). Two participants mentioned that assessment is a complicated process, and although there might be some opponents to marking, a certain measurement should be provided. One of them clarified that "Mark makes sense when a student understands how he has been developing his skills from the very beginning until the end of the course, what he knows well and what he should learn more" (LT7). Therefore, in her opinion, feedback should be an integral part of the assessment process. Two lecturers believe that assessment is the most difficult part of the learning process because they should concentrate not to miss certain elements and see what they gave and what they did not give to their students, and if there is any result of their work. One of them also highlighted that she feels disappointed when she does not see positive results as she contributed so much to written or oral feedback, but she understood that it was a waste of time and there was no good. One participant compared assessment to "a life" because it is evaluation of what has been done and what will be, and a constant process that allows getting or not getting satisfaction from what a teacher did on the course (LT6). A similar view was shared by another lecturer who called assessment a "multilayered concept" and clarified that "assessment is not for them [students], it is for me to check if I taught something to them or not" (LT2).

Discussion

Feedback: Students' Perspective

The analysis of findings reveals that the students at the universities experience different ways of getting teachers' feedback. Learners of the Uzbek university mostly receive written electronic or oral face-to-face comments on their assessment tasks, while Latvian students get oral feedback during the class. The types of comments also differ as Uzbek learners mentioned suggestions for improvement and detailed explanations, whereas Latvian undergraduates mostly referred to error correction and postgraduate ones noted suggestions on the areas for improvement in the content and structure. Students at both universities mentioned recommendations of online resources provided by teachers. Postgraduate Latvian learners also referred to the use of leading or loaded questions on the tasks. Interestingly, students at both universities appreciate oral face-to-face feedback as it is immediate and allows better understanding and establishing a quality dialogue between teachers and learners. Similar findings were observed by Yorke (2003) who identified that formative feedback leads to teachers' and students' engagement in the discussion of the task. Uzbek students also consider the comments in the Google document to be effective as they can refer to them at any time and can discuss the written work online. The use of technological tools in ensuring sustainable assessment practices is supported by Williams (2008), who believes that these tools are a "key in experience of the digital natives" (p. 405).

The results show that learners of both universities find lecturers' feedback clear and helpful. They mentioned that teachers are approachable, and they have an opportunity to ask for clarification if needed. However, the way students contact their lecturers is different. Uzbek students mentioned additional face-to-face discussions after classes and during office hours, and email correspondence, whereas Latvian ones referred mostly to the classroom time. One of the postgraduate learners explained that they do not feel comfortable taking much of teachers' time especially if the group is big and too many questions arise. Students at both universities believe that teachers' feedback helps them to improve

the quality of the assessment tasks. Uzbek learners also referred to better understanding of assessment criteria and increase of marks, while Latvian undergraduates informed that lecturers' comments helped to identify common mistakes and avoid them in the future. Postgraduate students appreciated guidance that allows doing the task correctly.

Peers' feedback was considered differently by participants of both universities. Most Uzbek students do not find it beneficial for individual assessment tasks, especially written ones. As Kippers et al. (2018) proposed, this might be explained by the fact that some teachers do not encourage students to peer or self-evaluate the assessment tasks as students might lack the necessary skills. Only a small number of respondents referred to the use of peers' comments in the group projects as they perform the task together with them. They might also approach their university friends to provide explanations of the assessment tasks or give feedback on the written tasks, which allows finding some mistakes. In contrast, Latvian students appreciate peers' support and address them on a regular basis. As they informed, in most cases these are oral comments or explanations. Postgraduate learners clarified that peers' feedback helps them to share views and learn from each other, therefore they ask for their opinion especially after performing oral presentations. Based on their investigation, Abera et al. (2017) suggested involving students in peer feedback and self-assessment as these processes might lead to self-reflection and promote better learning.

Feedback: Lecturers' Perspective

The analysis of the findings demonstrates different views of lecturers on providing feedback. Uzbek teachers believe in a variety of methods and give oral, written, and electronic comments. Most of them mentioned considering students' preferences and quality of work when providing feedback. In contrast, Latvian lecturers informed that depending on the nature of the task (i.e., written or oral) they provide corresponding comments, but mostly they are oral. Only a few referred to a combination of different ways of giving feedback. Interestingly, respondents from both universities referred to error correction, suggestions for improvement, and detailed explanation. A similar view is provided by Fastré et al. (2013), who recommended not to focus on the weaknesses but advise on how these weaknesses can be resolved. Some teacher participants mentioned asking leading questions in their feedback as it allows creating a conversation between them and students. A few Uzbek teachers also explained that referring to the assessment criteria in their feedback helped students to better understand the requirements of the task. One Latvian lecturer referred to the importance of providing real-life examples to allow further application.

Lecturers at both universities find their feedback clear to students and give an opportunity for them to ask for clarification. However, some respondents from the Uzbek university believe that sometimes their comments might be vague due to the use of metalanguage. One of the Latvian participants explained that the way people communicate might influence understanding feedback, especially in the era of technology when students speak a different language. The way learners approach their lecturers differs. Latvian teachers referred to the classroom time for additional questions, and only two of them mentioned email correspondence, whereas Uzbek lecturers informed that they are available for their students online (email correspondence) and offline (classroom time and office hours).

One of them mentioned creating online discussion boards on the learning management system, which is used for asking additional questions. Interestingly, one Uzbek and one Latvian respondent shared a similar view on the workload, as they explained that providing feedback is time consuming and it is not always paid back by university authorities. These results are in line with those of Hernandez (2012) who found that providing effective feedback in a timely manner might be quite challenging for teachers, especially if the number of students is great. Another similar opinion was expressed by two teachers at both universities as they noticed that lecturers spend a lot of time providing detailed comments, but they doubt that students read or appreciated it. Brown (2005) clarifies that feedback giving might be time consuming, but teachers should devote their energy and focus on both positive and negative aspects of the task as it allows students to develop further.

Learning: Teachers' and Students' Views

The results show that students at both universities believe that what they are learning at HE institutions can be applied in and outside the university. The participants expressed similar views on proper development of language and soft skills and found a proper link between the subjects taught at the universities. One of the Latvian postgraduate respondents reported that they felt that their teacher of the Professional English course even discussed the topics with other content lecturers. Some Uzbek students also mentioned that they could easily find reliable sources and reference them in different modules they study at the university. Although participants of both HE institutions consider application of knowledge and skills important for university studies, their views on applying them in real life differ. Most Latvian students informed that they were able to apply what they learn in their careers, whereas only two Uzbek learners mentioned this aspect. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of Latvian participants are already employed, while most Uzbek students study and cannot apply their knowledge and skills outside the university settings yet. Struyven et al. (2005) therefore suggest teachers should apply such assessment tasks that might encourage students to apply knowledge and skills in their real-life context later.

The teachers expressed different opinions on students' learning. Most Latvian lecturers believe that learning depends on students, as they have different abilities and learning styles, conditions, and motivation to study. However, most Uzbek respondents consider learning a collaborative work of both teachers and students and think that lecturers might motivate learners by applying different activities. Hays and Reiders (2020) propose that to ensure sustainability of learning, educators could promote learning that will help students to focus more on "learning to learn and optimizing learning from experience" (p. 40). Interestingly, participants of both universities believe that teachers can learn from their students. They expressed similar views on the differences in life experience, which might lead to sharing knowledge and mutual learning (e.g., use of gadgets). Monteiro et al. (2012) highlight that good relationships and positive attitude towards students can foster active learning and better academic performance. Most Uzbek respondents mentioned that observing students' learning might lead to reflection on teaching and further improvement of teaching practice through professional development activities, whereas only two Latvian teachers shared a similar opinion.

Assessment: Lecturers' Perspective

The analysis of findings reveals that the teachers at both universities view assessment differently. Oral and written assessment tasks are mostly similar at the universities; however, in Latvian university individual assignments are performed more often in comparison to Uzbek HE institution where both individual and group projects are introduced. The lecturers explained this by the number of students in the groups (i.e., minimum three in Latvian university and maximum twenty-eight in Uzbek one) and requirements of the universities. Boud (2016) highlights that the practices in assessment might differ due to local peculiarities; however, to ensure sustainability in the assessment process, students should be actively engaged in the assessment activities to be able to achieve the learning outcomes. Most Uzbek lecturers consider assessment to be an integral part of a teaching and learning process. Some of them also believe that assessment could motivate students to learn and will not become only a measurement tool. Some Latvian participants expressed a similar opinion, and clarified that assessment is a complicated and difficult part of learning as it is connected to the quality of teaching. A few of them also reported that it is important to see the results of teachers' work, therefore it must be measured. Most Latvian teachers believe that continuous assessment might be emphasized as it shows students' progress and allows accumulating results of several tasks (e.g., progress check) within a semester. These findings are supported by Hernandez (2012) and Carrillo-de-la-Peña and Pérez (2012) who identified that students' engagement in continuous assessment could motivate them to learn and increase academic achievement. Therefore, one Latvian lecturer argued against having only a final examination which does not give an opportunity for students to show their knowledge and skills. A similar view was also expressed by one of the Uzbek teachers, who believes that exams might be stressful for students. These findings are compatible with the view provided by Gibbs and Simpson (2005) who explain that examination cannot be considered a good predictor of students' performance as students tend to fail exams but can demonstrate better learning when coursework is required.

Conclusion

The current study aimed at investigating the opinions of university lecturers and students on the assessment practices applied in two educational settings. The respondents commented on the assignments, ways of providing feedback, peer evaluation, and the importance of the assessment process for the students' learning and application of skills. The comparative analysis identified some similarities in the assessment tasks and the feedback giving practices introduced in both HE institutions but revealed differences in the views on the teachers' role and assessment activities in the students' learning process. Despite these differences, both universities were found to be striving for sustainability in assessment through the implemented activities (Heasly & Iliško, 2021). Thus, the study contributed to the current state of knowledge and growing body of research on the importance and relevance of applying sustainable assessment practices in higher education. However, the findings are limited to the perceptions of the lecturers and learners of two universities; therefore, further research in other learning contexts is recommended.

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