Comparison Between the Perceptions of School and University Teachers on the Use of AI Tools for Assessing Writing

M.I. Fouzul Kareema, and S. Lamiah

Abstract The rapid use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the educational field has started to change the area of writing assessment. Thus, this study examined and compared the perceptions of school and university teachers about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the evaluation of student writing. Drawing on qualitative design, data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and teachers' reflective narratives. Ten teachers from the Kalmunai education zone and five ELT lecturers from South Eastern University of Sri Lanka were chosen based on purposive sampling. The analysis focused on the participants' understanding of the benefits, challenges, and pedagogical implications of AI- assisted assessment. Findings suggest that although both cohorts of teachers acknowledge the potential for AI for improved efficiency and consistency of writing assessment, their engagement with applications differs significantly. These findings indicate that the way teachers perceive is not only personal, but it is influenced by the institutional structures. The study argues that professional development and policy must be designed based on the context: helping support responsible and developmental use in schools, while helping universities to manage matters of integrity and how to design sustainable assessment practices. In both cases, the recursive interpretive role of the teacher is crucial in ensuring that technology can be used as a means of service rather than replacing authentic learning.

***Index Terms*— Artificial Intelligence, Writing Assessment, Teacher Perceptions, University Lecturers, School Teachers**

I. Introduction

STUDYING the perceptions of teachers of English Language Teaching (ELT) on the use of AI tools to assess writing in ELT is important for several reasons. AI tools are used to evaluate grammar, vocabulary and coherence in most of the academic settings. Additionally, they are also used for checking plagiarism made by students in writing activities. As potential examples, ChatGPT, Grammarly, and AI-assisted Turnitin technology are most commonly used for this assessment purpose. So, it is crucial to study the perceptions of the teachers on the use of these AI tools to understand the validity of the AI tools and their practicality in the assessment process for student writings in ELT. Since the teachers are gatekeepers of knowledge, it is important to know their point of view to ascertain whether such tools are used effectively or resisted. Teachers must make sure that their pedagogical values 'hang well' with these AI tools to accept AI as tools which positively shape writing and assessment.

It is also important to study the differences between the perceptions of a school teacher and a university teacher to understand the different contributions of the AI tools in assessing the writing in each of the settings. The school teachers are more concerned about the younger learners in the school and the standardised testing, and following the curriculum that is provided for the younger children to be completed. So, their perception towards AI tools in the assessment of writing would be based on these concerning issues. Meanwhile, the university teachers are mostly concerned with the integrity of student writing, academic writing, writing research and the autonomy of the assessment. These striking differences lead to different perceptions between the school teachers and the university teachers, and understanding these different perceptions might help policy makers and curriculum designers to integrate AI tools for assessment and evaluation of student writing in future.

AI tools induce fear of ethical use in checking the writing of students. AI sometimes tends to undermine student creativity and propagates the use of plagiarism to some extent. AI also manages to generate biased evaluations between student writings. Teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards AI can influence how these tools can be used in a responsible way, both in school and university settings. Many studies [1], [2] focus on the technical accuracy of AI tools and student usage of AI tools, but a few studies explore the teacher perceptions on the usage of AI tools for the assessment of writing, and almost none of the studies compare the differences between the university and school teacher perceptions. This study remedies this gap and therefore adds to the literature of educational technology adoption. This research is focused on finding the answers to questions like "What are school teachers' perceptions of AI tools

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in writing assessment?, How do university teachers view the use of AIs in writing evaluation?, And what are the differences and similarities in their perceptions on pedagogical, ethical and practical dimensions?"

II. Literature Review

Artificial intelligence (AI) has seriously shifted from a shiny, imaginative idea and has made a real-world impact on the classroom, particularly in the higher education sector, for the last 20 years. In the early days, it mostly had to do with those fancy tutoring systems, which tweaked lessons after you got a question or two right [3]. Now, you can observe AI popping up in the form of adaptive learning platforms, auto-grading tools and even natural language processing apps that converse with you in written or verbal form [4].

When it comes to assessment, cutting down on human bias, and spitting out feedback in a flash, AI becomes popular in getting things done faster [5]. Further, although Turnitin was applied to detect plagiarism at its beginning, it has now also become a formative friend that keeps us honest when it comes to academic writing [6]. Grammarly is everywhere, from high school to grad school, providing us with instant grammar, style, and vocab nudges that many say even surpass what a human tutor would be capable of giving us at first glance [7]. And then came the big friends like ChatGPT, which have thrown a wrench into the old assessment methods by allowing us to generate text automatically, opening up the scaffolding opportunities, as well as the plagiarism headaches [8].

AI hype is the most obvious when considering writing assessment. Studies show that AI provides quick feedback, allowing us to be more engaged with the revision of our drafts, especially for formative purposes [9]. AWE (Automated Writing Evaluation) systems enable instant, individualised feedback for second language learners, which was difficult for their teachers to manage in a single class, due to class time constraints [10].

Nonetheless, we do not need to get too obsessed with these tools. Even though AI is a great tool to identify grammatical errors, its ability to check the flow, critical thinking, and coherence of essays logically is limited [11]. AI can help with drafting and resubmitting, but taking it as a summarising verdict raises issues of validity and reliability [12].

In general, teachers are more excited and cautious about the application of AI in assessing writing. Many love to apply it because it reduces workload, provides uniform feedback, and accelerates grading, which is a win-win situation for both teachers and students [1]. Some others appreciate its application as the students receive instant responses that are lost in the traditional cyclical feedback loops [13].

Still, there is a nagging worry about the accuracy of the assessment. Educators have doubts regarding whether AI tools can ever detect nuance, creativity, and contextual stretch in students' writing [11]. There are also some great concerns about data privacy, ownership of content, and whether learners are becoming too attached to these suggestions to actually think for themselves [14]. Above all, many teachers are not sure if they are ready to accept AI use into their workflow, as the majority of them lack professional development in this area [15].

In this scenario, understanding the perception of teachers in schools and universities and how much AI applications for writing assessment are adopted by teachers has a big impact. In schools, the curriculum becomes oriented to basic literacy and standardised tests, so efficiency and correctness come as the first priority [2]. Teachers may view Grammarly as a tool for language practice, yet at the same time, they have fears that its excessive use may hinder authentic writing development. Schools also tend to have less autonomy over their decision-making when it comes to technology, since assessment requirements are stringent and teachers are given fewer opportunities to make technology choices for themselves [16].

At the university level, writing is all about critical thinking, originality and conformity with disciplinary norms. However, the use of AI in education is often emphasised by professors as a supplement to human feedback, notably in the structure of argument and depth [17]. The concern of academic integrity appears greater since plagiarism detection and authorship checks are the major keys to course authenticity [6]. Unlike in school, college professors typically enjoy greater discretion in their use of AI, but that, too, places the burden on them to choose their way through the ethical minefield and establish the rules for students.

While there is no shortage of studies of AI writing tools in the school environment, and also in universities individually, a direct comparison between the two is lacking in the literature. Most research isolates a particular group (such as secondary English teachers [2] or university lecturers [1]) rather than a cross-level research. That gap means that we don't really know how the different contexts, institutional rules, and teacher roles helpfully shape perception.

There are hints of prescribed differences: the emphasis on correctness, reduced burden, and the risk of relying too heavily on AI by high school teachers; the issues of authenticity, ethics and deep engagement by university staff [8], [17]. What is missing is a systematic comparison, but if we could do that, it would provide us with a fuller picture of how AI should be adapted at each level of learning and help us navigate through the pros and cons of AI.

III. Conceptual Framework

This research uses an integrative approach that draws on the models of the Technology Acceptance Model, TAM [18] and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, TPACK [19], as well as principles essential to understanding assessment theory [20] to describe and compare the perceptions of school and university teachers who use AI tools to assess writing. Each framework has its own complementary explanatory power: TAM explains individual acceptance and intention to use technology; TPACK locate teacher competence and pedagogical fit; assessment theory brings concern about validity, reliability and fairness that are central to assessment decisions. Integrating these accounts makes it possible to design how beliefs about usefulness and ease of use have to do with teachers' professional knowledge and assessment values to produce adoption choices and attitudes.

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IV. METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study is a qualitative method. A qualitative approach is suitable since perceptions are subjective, context-bound and are best captured through detailed descriptions rather than by numerical data [21]. The data were gathered using online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling was applied for this research, selecting ten school teachers and five university lecturers who teach English as a second language. After collecting the data, a thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

To allow for consistency of analysis, two independent coders analysed the qualitative data using the same coding framework. Inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen's Kappa ($K = 0.82$), which demonstrated a high level of agreement. Themes were fine-tuned through repeated discussion and checked with the raw data in order to keep themes credible [21]. Member checking was also undertaken for three participants in each group to gain accuracy in interpretation. This multi-step validation process helped to increase the trustworthiness of the findings.

Informed consent was collected from all the participants and the anonymity was ensured for data protection and protection of the participants. The comparative orientation is directly related to the research aim of looking at differences among the school English teachers and university English/ELT lecturers.

Using the qualitative methodology (purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires and thematic analysis), a very nuanced exploration of the perceptions of teachers in the school and university regarding artificial intelligence tools in writing assessment will be possible. By lifting up the voices of teachers, the research does more than simply identify concrete issues of concern and anticipated benefits and situate them in broader institutional and contextual realities.

V. FINDINGS

For schoolteachers, efficiency was freedom from workload. One teacher explained the vast number of essays they mark each week:

"When exam term starts, I occasionally come home with piles of papers." After school, I am still marking until midnight. Grammarly reduces this time. Instead of line by line, I can easily recognise the most common mistakes and concentrate on encouragement."

In contrast, university lecturers stressed aspects of efficiency where they are able to deliver richer, more personal feedback.

"I have approximately sixty undergraduates in the course on academic writing. Before AI, the time taken to return essays with proper feedback took almost three weeks. Now, I can utilise the similarity reports or even the suggestions of ChatGPT for writing feedback. I don't exactly copy it, but I do a rendering of it and send it back to them a week or so later.

Both groups place great importance on efficiency, but for school teachers, it means dealing with a large number of exam papers, whereas for university lecturers, it means delivering more and better feedback in less time. University teachers are more proactive and frequently use AI feedback in their workflow, whereas school teachers tend to use it as an additional tool for correction.

When they were asked about consistency and fairness, one schoolteacher with a seven-year experience explained:

As for the person who corrects the bogus documents: "If I am tired, sometimes I mark strictly, other times more leniently." An AI tool doesn't have a mind or moods. It makes the process the same and easier.

University lecturers, however, were very diligent:

"Yes, it provides consistent surface-level feedback, but academic writing has other subtle components, such as whether an argument flows logically or not. AI cannot sense that. So, being consistent at a sentence level is not a guarantee of fair play in academic assessment."

A university lecturer explained the other side of this issue:

"ChatGPT writes smoothly, yes, and when I check the citations, half of them are fake."

Both groups perceived AI as an attack on originality. University lecturers have direct cases of bad behaviour, so they are more interested in monitoring and controlling AI bad behaviour and guiding students away from it.

"At times, I receive essays that look way beyond the skills of my students." The structure, the vocabulary, everything is too well done. When I ask, they admit they had to use ChatGPT. That undermines the assessment completely, and I just hesitate to mark the paper and to mark papers.

University teachers exhibit greater bonding with AI, with their high autonomy and freedom to choose. They can try out strategies of integration, while schoolteachers mostly do not have the opportunity. A depressed school teacher put their limited role this way:

"We cannot go beyond the ministry syllabus. Even if I wanted to try something new with AI, I can't. Everything has to be up to the official exam marking scheme."

A University lecturer wrote the opposite:

"I have the liberty to design assessments." Sometimes, for students, I need to require them to turn in a ChatGPT draft as well as their revision to teach students how to critically use the tool."

University lecturers interact more with AI applications than do school teachers. This increased engagement subjects them to a greater variety of problems (e.g. academic misconduct, fabricated citations), but also opens a space for them to learn to apply AI effectively and positively. School teachers, by contrast, are still less involved in using AI in a sporadic way as a correction assistant, but are confined by exam-based curriculum and institutional regulations because of pre-written course books of the ministry.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results of this research show a complex and contradictory image of the perception of the role of artificial intelligence tools in the evaluation of written work by the teaching personnel at school/university levels. While both groups accept the efficiency and consistency which AI tools can provide, in their depth of engagement, nature of concerns and strategies deployed, they differ in many ways.

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One of the most important differences lies in the degree of engagement. University teachers are much more involved in experimenting with AI tools, not so much to decrease workload but to learn how feedback is presented, as well as how students interact with writing tasks. This pattern is similar to earlier work by Holmes [22], who described the tendency for the contexts of higher education to act as testing grounds for educational technologies before they find their way into the school. The present study strengthens that argument: Lecturers were saying, not only on using tools like Turnitin or Grammarly, but also making use of generative AI as part of the teaching process, for instance, having the students compare AI-generated drafts with their own writing. Schoolteachers, on the contrary, again tended to characterise AI as a supportive resource which is helpful for mechanical corrections but rarely integrated into lesson design.

These different views can also be seen in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM, which states that the perceptions of usefulness and ease of use pave the way for adoption of these tools. University lecturers had obviously found utility in the use of AI to help them manage large cohorts, and also respond more quickly with feedback, and to just ease of use for surface-level error correction was important for school teachers. Yet the reluctance of school teachers also identifies the model's limitations; usefulness is not enough to ensure that the model will be adopted, because teachers are concerned that relying on AI will limit learning or conflict with institutional expectations.

Institutional context also plays a strong role. University teachers (given extra freedom to design their assessments) described in many instances how they would experiment with creative strategies to incorporate AI into their teaching. Some teachers spread the annotation of AI-generated drafts among students, while others had students reflect on the limitations of AI feedback. These approaches suggest that, at least in higher education, AI is starting to be seen not necessarily as something to be feared, but as a pedagogical object, something to be studied and interrogated, critiqued and harnessed. In contrast, school teachers felt restricted in the context of the national syllabus and examination. Their accounts of "waiting for directives" or "following ministry rules" point to a lack of institutional support, which makes them uncertain as to what constitutes acceptable practice. In this sense, the results are consistent with Kozma's [23] argument that innovation in educational technology is often cut down not by teachers' attitudes alone, but by systemic constraints.

What is particularly important is that even though they were hesitant, school teachers did not reject AI outright. Their point of view had an air of cautious curiosity rather than complete rejection. Many likened AI to the previous technological changes, such as the calculation in mathematics, and suggested that if guided properly, AI usage may one day be normalised in English language teaching. University lecturers, meanwhile, swung between enthusiasm and suspicion, thrilled by the efficiency and pedagogical possibilities, but also reluctant to those intellectual shortcuts that it allows.

Table 1 summarises the themes connected in the comparison of perceptions of teachers and lecturers in the use of AI-bolstered instruments for assessing the writing part of the students, according to the qualitative data obtained by the research.

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF THEMES COMPARING THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

Theme	School teachers' perception	University teachers' perceptions
Reliability and accuracy	AI misses style, context	AI lacks higher-order depth
Ethical concerns	Fear of student misuse	Concerns about plagiarism
Workload reduction	AI eases marking load	AI saves time, trust issues
Student dependency	Overdependence risk	Students are more critical users
Fairness in Assessment	Unequal AI access issues	AI fairness is transparent
Digital literacy	Limited AI confidence	More literate, need training
Teacher Autonomy	Retain grading control	Judgement must remain central

The comparison between school and university teachers also raises issues about professional development. If university lecturers are venturing into greater interaction with AI, it is partly because they are coming into direct contact with students as they write, but also because they have more freedom to explore the possibilities of AI in their academic work. School teachers would also be bound by rigid rules, which may need more targeted training for using AI responsibly and confidently. This has important suggestions for teacher education programs, which must have prepared educators at all levels to think critically about technology and not passively accept or reject, as if they are not even enthusiastic about technology in the first place. The call is not only for technical workshops, but also for ethical, pedagogical, and reflective spaces where teachers can discuss how AI changes their professional qualifications and assessment practices.

A. Ethical implications and data protection

The use of AI-based assessment also raises severe ethical and data governance questions that go beyond the question of Plagiarism. Ethical risks are things like data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency in automated feedback. Teachers in both places stressed that AI systems, despite their efficiency, might inadvertently leak sensitive student information while being incorporated with online platforms for storing or processing writing samples.

At the university level, concerns of data protection are breached through academic integrity. Turnitin and ChatGPT, for example, process student-generated content which might be

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stored in order to train a machine learning algorithm, posing a challenge to compliance with law, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or local regulatory equivalents. The fact that there is no clear understanding about how AI tools gather, store and repurpose data from users is the reason why many educators wonder whether institutional adoption must be clearer in terms of policy.

Ethical AI integration also involves being transparent about the way algorithmic judgments are made. When AI tools provide similarity scores or language proficiency measurements, both teachers and students require access to explanations of such outcomes. Otherwise, there might be the risk that AI systems possibly aid the perpetuation of hidden biases in linguistic or cultural representation, especially for non-native writers.

Developing an ethical literacy, grasping the potential benefits and challenges of AI in assessment, is therefore critical for teachers at all levels. Teacher training programs should be open to addressing issues such as data ethics, consent protocols, and algorithmic accountability to equip teachers with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about AI use.

VII. CONCLUSION

The comparison of the perceptions of both school and university teachers about the application of AI in writing assessment reveals not only the mere differences in attitude between these two cohorts, but also depicts a picture of two educational contexts dealing with the same technology under very different pressure, expectations and institutional culture. Both groups accept that AI is here to stay; both express a mix of curiosity and caution. Yet the degree of participation and the type of issues raised vary in many respects. University lecturers, having to deal daily with AI-written work of their students, have moved further in experimentation with the integration of AI. School teachers, in the meantime, remain more speculative, accepting possible benefits yet restricted by policy, curriculum and their concerns for helping develop foundational skills.

The findings come from a specific set of participants and may not inform the full range of attitudes in different places or educational systems. Moreover, perceptions change rapidly with the changing nature of AI tools; what is true today might change in a few years. Future research could take longitudinal approaches to understand how attitudes change over time, or cross-country comparisons to understand the impact of culture and policies on adoption.

Another area to be explored is from the student perspective. If teachers are negotiating the role of AI, at the same time, students are also developing their own habits of use. An understanding of how these two perspectives intersect or clash with one another would give a full picture of the writing assessment. Additionally, research on collaborative approaches that make students and teachers interact with AI in an organised manner may highlight continuous pedagogical practices.

At its most, this study shows that teachers' perceptions of AI are not incidental and instead are foundational. They influence not only whether tools are integrated or not, but also how features of writing itself are conceptualised. For university lecturers, AI is already resulting in a redefinition of originality and authenticity when it comes to academic work. For school teachers, it focuses on how to carefully adopt innovation.

The comparison also tends to show a possible parting in educational tracks. And if university lecturers are to continue to use AI and school teachers are to remain hesitant, students may be faced with a discontinuity as they move from one level to the next. This prompts some important questions about the coherence of educational policy and the preparation students receive for higher levels of study in the universities. Connecting this gap will require dialogue across sectors to ensure that schools and universities are not working for different goals but for a shared vision of literacy in the age of AI.

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