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ONLINE TESTING CHALLENGES FOR LECTURERS AND STUDENTS

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***Abstract.** The new situation worldwide raised a lot of questions concerning not only teaching ESP in the virtual environment but testing students online as well. Workshop and forum discussions pointed out that the biggest challenge for both lecturers and students turned out to be online testing. The report tackles some issues related to online testing at Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy - Varna, Bulgaria. Summaries and conclusions are made from the current situation and some ideas are presented for further development of the online English tests on the basis of the results obtained.*

***Keywords:** ESP, virtual environment, online testing challenges, development of online tests*

INTRODUCTION

The challenges the world faces are constantly increasing especially during the last year and a half due to the unexpected COVID 19 pandemic which has a great impact on our lives. Schools and universities were closed for months which called for an „emergency” online teaching. Different LMTs (Language Management Tools) were offered, so teachers and students had to adjust themselves quickly to the new way of teaching and learning. The computer became the only means of communication among them. Even though distant teaching and learning proved not to be the biggest problem. Conference and forum discussions with colleagues from all over the world pointed out that online testing turned out to be much more demanding for both teachers and students.

EXPOSITION

Online testing poses challenges for professionals because it is done in an environment difficult to supervise and proctor with the uncertainty whether the students are trustworthy enough to do online tests at home. Teachers have to rely entirely on something beyond their control - the internet connection or software maintained by someone else and very often they have the feeling of being limited by the capabilities of an artificial intellect to do their job the way they are used to.

In order to try to ensure a seamless online examination process and to minimize cheating during online exams lecturers at Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy in Varna, Bulgaria started exploring the inherent features and functions, they can leverage, of the Google Classroom platform which is used at the Academy to test the students studying general and specialized maritime English.

The platform has a special Google Form quiz which is quite teacher-friendly and has a number of functions. The **quiz can be assigned to one or more classes or to individual students** which is a good option for the teacher to split the class into groups while doing a test. It can be **scheduled** to be posted later in the Classroom, **added a due date and time** or **added an attachment**. It can **automatically grade the quiz** and import the grades immediately into the Classroom.

There are certain requirements to be followed to **import grades**:

- The quiz must be the only attachment to the assignment.
- Students must be limited to one response and must be in the same domain as the teacher.

- The form must collect students' email addresses.

If any of these settings are changed or edited after posting the assignment or if the form is attached as a link in the Classroom, it will be impossible to import the grades. In such cases the grade can be written manually by the teacher as a comment to the quiz with the only inconvenience that it is quite time-consuming.

Another useful function, which can be effective in reducing cheating during the test, is to **lock the quiz on Chromebooks**. When enabled, the lock mode prevents students from accessing external resources while taking the quiz. Their tabs, extensions, chrome apps and screenshot functions will be disabled during the duration of the quiz. If the students exit the test or open any other tab, the teacher is notified via email. Locked quiz mode is a valuable tool to minimize cheating and to protect the integrity of the test to a certain extent.

In the attempt to prevent students from previewing the whole test, the teacher may add **sections to the quiz**. The sections divide the form into pages which cannot be viewed until all questions on a certain page have been answered. A step further is to **add a "password"** to the form to prevent students from moving ahead until the teacher decides. An easy way to do this is by adding a password validation data, requiring a specific number or phrase, which will give access to the quiz questions.

However, the transition from an "emergency" remote assessment to a valid online assessment requires extensive efforts from teachers, for e.g. creating a **large question bank**. The bank size often needs to be huge to make the overlap of questions negligible among tests. The basic inconvenience is that it takes a lot of time to build and sometimes may be even impracticable to update frequently.

In addition to the functions of the platform which facilitate proctoring of the assessment process, the way tests are designed and adapted to the virtual environment is of great importance. Changing the mode of the test delivery requires an alteration in the test design in comparison with the one in the face-to-face teacher - proctored environment. Using the experience, gained at the Naval Academy during the last year and a half, the following tendencies in the test design were found functional and constructive in the assessment of the students' knowledge:

- Devising **questions which require intellectual efforts** are much more effective than just factual recalls which can be simply done by Google search. Instead of having students respond to questions by a simple web search or even by finding the answer in their textbooks, questions which require explanations, analysis, inference, composition and demonstrate mastery of course content proved to be much more effective.

- Usage of **various question types** is a good option to assess the knowledge of the students. The Google classroom quiz offers a number of options - Multiple choice questions (MCQs), open-ended questions requiring a short answer or a written paragraph, checkbox grid, dropdown menu, linear scales, and multiple choice grids. It is more difficult for students to give the same response as their friends when they have to explain their answers for the open-ended questions by using specific details and supporting narratives which show their own understanding of the course materials.

- **Changing the test question sequence** is a good option from the test settings which provides a different order of test questions and a different order of answer choices for each test item in the quiz. The fact that students must give an answer to each question within an **allocated time frame** makes it more difficult to collude with friends and share answers because the time is limited and the questions are not the same.

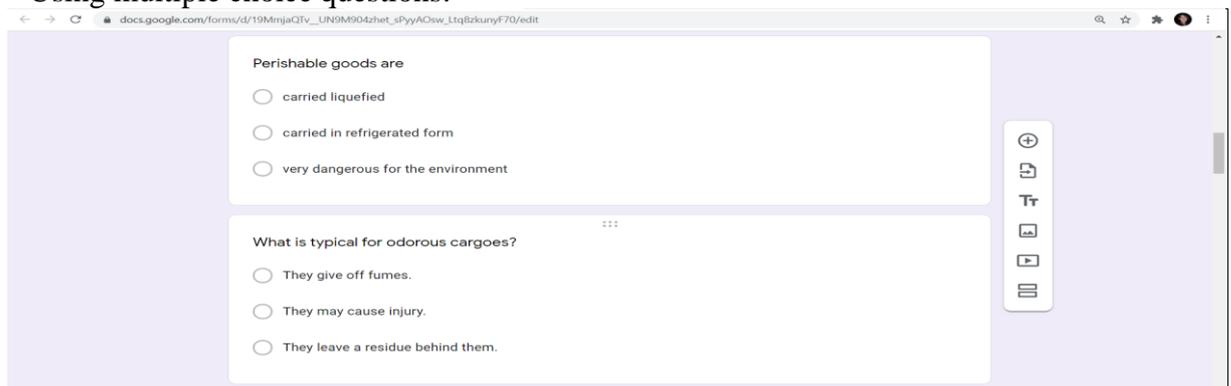
- **Prohibition of backtracking** gives students the option to focus entirely on one question at a time, give a final answer and only then move to the next question. Prohibiting backtracking can reduce students from using extra time at the end of the test, checking answers with friends and trying to cheat. Of course, they have to be very careful not to make a technical mistake when choosing an answer because they will not be able to correct it once they continue doing the test.

- **Taking the test once** is an important feature especially when it is a final exam and the goal is not to learn from the mistakes made. Taking the same test again is impossible but if necessary to retake an exam, a different test can be generated and given.

• **Protecting test question answers** is of significant importance when trying to maintain academic integrity. It limits students from being able to copy and download all the exam questions with their answers.

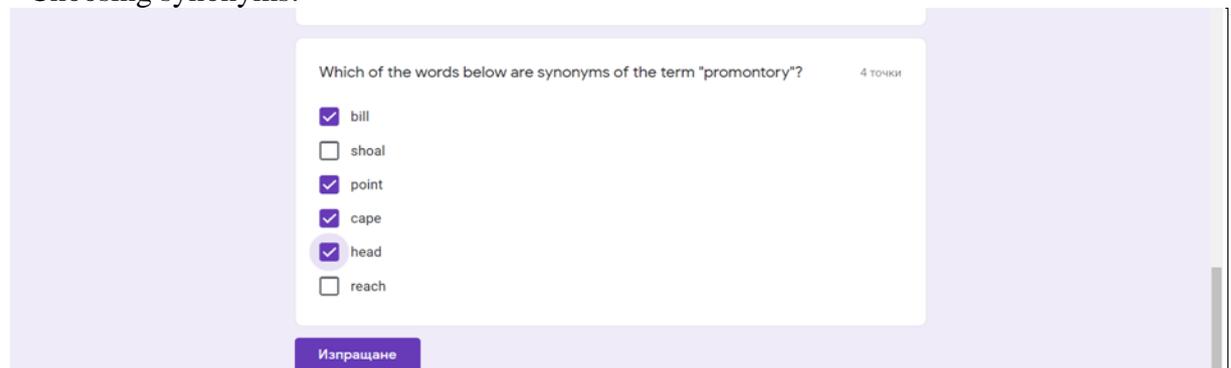
The design and construction of online tests and test items calls for deviation from the traditional techniques and strategies which we use in the bricks-and-mortar classroom (Fontanillas, Carbonell, & Catasús, 2016). For example, the grammar translation method is still implemented in face-to-face English language teaching at the Academy, especially when trying to check the students' knowledge on specific maritime terminology. Although there has been an ongoing process recently to diminish the implementation of that method to a minimum or even to make it obsolete, we still find it useful in a residential environment. However, with the increasing need to examine students online, the efforts had to be directed towards a different attitude due to the fact of the grammar translation method being inappropriate in such an environment. Virtually, the present situation - online teaching and testing, led to the use of its advantages and naturally replaced the old ideas with new ones, that is the grammar translation method was completely phased out in online testing. In spite of the disadvantages online testing has and the challenges it evokes we believe that we should focus on the advantages it presents and opportunities it gives. In other words the platform does not limit the test designer in terms of examining and assessing the students' knowledge to a certain language competence. The report tackles issues related to checking the knowledge of the students on terminology, therefore the presented examples focus on exercises designed to test English maritime terminology. Logically designing online testing materials is set on the basis of using the advantages of the Google classroom platform at its utmost being in line with the opportunities it gives:

• **Using multiple choice questions:**



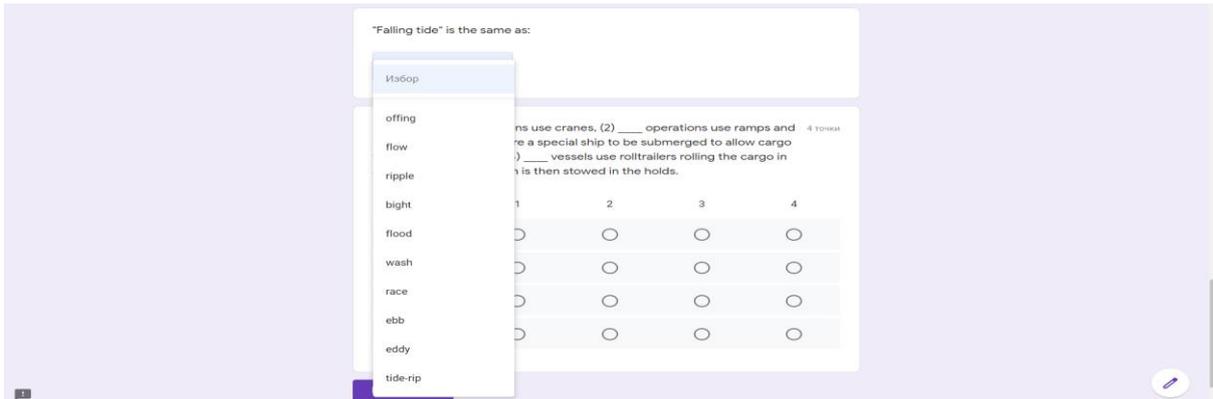
A very effective method for checking students' knowledge and understanding of the course material. The advantage of using multiple choice questions (MCQs) is the opportunity to examine terminology from a great variety of topics for a short period of time. It is an approved method that has already been implemented in computer testing.

• **Choosing synonyms:**



The benefit of the exercise is that there are partially correct answers compared to MCQs where each answer is valued as fully correct. As there are several fully correct answers, students' knowledge can be assessed more precisely.

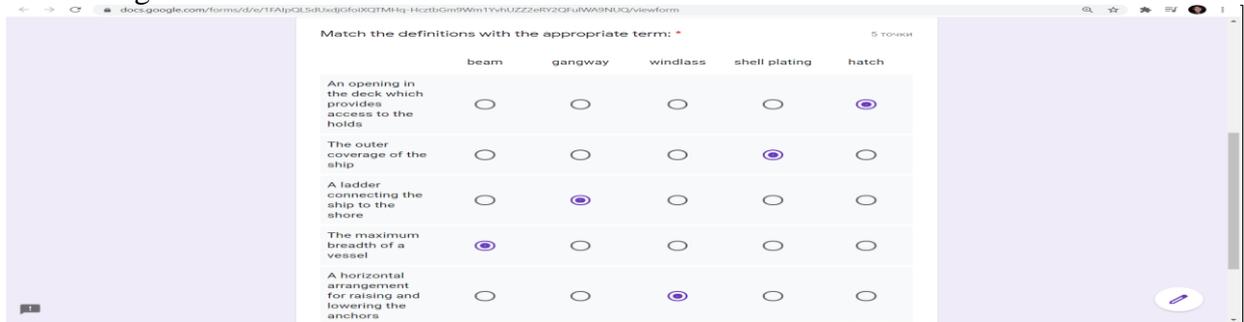
- Choosing a term from a dropdown list:



Providing a term using a definition:

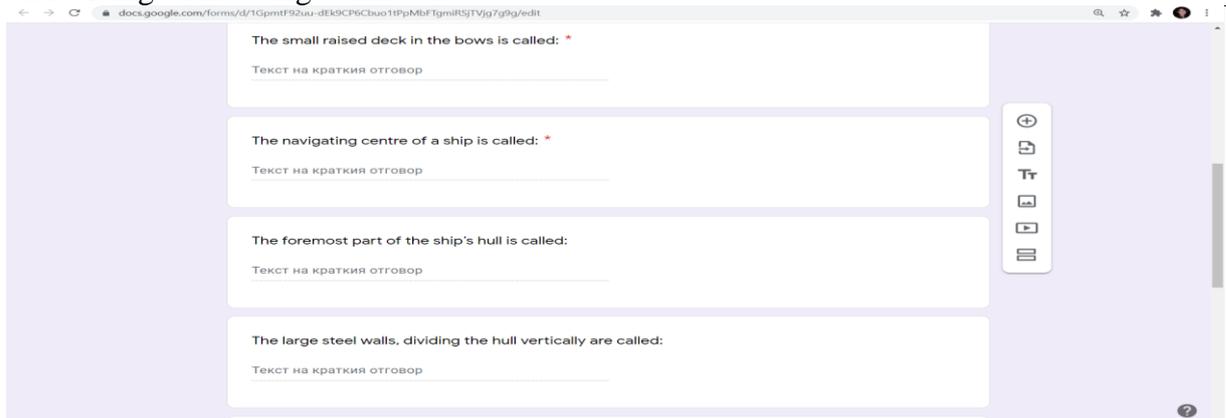
The exercise aims at increasing the level of difficulty by offering a greater variety of answers to choose from. It is more difficult than MCQs because of the wider range of options and the less opportunity to guess the correct answer by chance.

- Matching terms and definitions:



Employing matching exercises in the tests allows comprehension and item association to be assessed even for a great variety of course content. To make it more sophisticated, extra terms may be added to the definitions given.

- Providing terms using definitions:



This type of exercise requires identification of specialized terms on the basis of good knowledge and understanding of certain explanations or definitions. One of the major issues for learners is producing a word in addition to recognizing it (McCarthy, O’Keeffe, & Walsh, 2010). While recognizing words includes differentiating words from others and recalling the meaning, producing the words might pose serious issues since it includes not only forming and writing words but also recalling the meaning.

Since terminology is related to concepts, it is important for learners of Maritime English to be able to identify the terms assigned to them in a certain professional context. The following

exercises may assist in assessing students' reading comprehension skills and knowledge of terminological concepts.

• Gap - fill in a short text:

docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdUxdjGloXK2TMkq-HcztbGm9Wm1YvhUZZ2eRY2QFuWA9NLIQ/viewform

In short, (1) ____ operations use cranes, (2) ____ operations use ramps and (3) ____ operations require a special ship to be submerged to allow cargo to be floated on or off. (4) ____ vessels use rolltrailers rolling the cargo in and out of the ship which is then stowed in the holds. 4 точки

	1	2	3	4
Flo/Flo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sto/Ro	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Lo/Lo	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ro/Ro	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Изчисляване на избора

Изграждане

Fill in the correct verb form:

Описание (незадължително)

Charts detail waters areas, 1. _____ (show) depths, features of the seabed, details of the coastline, navigational hazards and structures such as harbours, docks, bridges, etc. In order to build charts, cartographers 2. _____ (use) projection techniques. As it is impossible 3. _____ (project) a three-dimensional object upon a two-dimensional surface without distortion, several methods 4. _____ (develop) to represent the Earth's surface on a plane, controlling the distortion as much as possible. Different types of projections 5. _____ (use) according to the areas to be represented and the purpose of the chart.

Вашият отговор

Назад Изграждане Изчисляване на формуляра

• Gap-fill by word formation:

Fill in the gaps by using word formation:

Maritime Signal Flags These flags are used at sea for communication between ships. They can spell out short messages, and individual flags and 1. _____ (vary) combinations of flags also have special meanings. On 2. _____ (ceremony) and festive occasions the signal flags are used to decorate ships. This signalling system was drafted in 1855 and published in 1857, and was gradually adopted by most 3. _____ (seafarer) countries. It was revised in 1932. Usage • One-flag signals are urgent or very common signals • Two-flag signals are mostly distress and 4. _____ (maneuverable) signals • Three-flag signals are for points of the compass, relative bearings, standard times, verbs, punctuation, also general code and decode signals • Four-flags are used for 5. _____ (geography) signals, names of ships, bearings, etc • Five-flag signals are those 6. _____ (relate) to time and position • Six-flag signals are used when necessary to indicate north or south or east or west in latitude and longitude signals • Seven-flags are for longitude signals containing more than one hundred degrees.

Вашият отговор

Назад Изграждане Изчисляване на формуляра

Fill in the appropriate missing words given after the text:

One of the latest release of chart plotter software has two new features for AIS. The first is to show different types of vessel with different icons rather than all being the same. This depends on vessel type being correct on the sending vessel but it can now /1/_____ between sailing, power, fast ferries, commercial vessels, SAR helicopters and Atons. The second feature which is a major step forward is the addition of "/2/_____ areas of danger". The chart plotter will show a vector /3/_____ direction of your vessel and one for a crossing vessel. It will then show and hatched red area ahead of the other vessel. If your vector /4/_____ through this area, there is a collision risk. If it passes ahead of the area, then you will pass ahead. If astern of the area (not necessarily astern of the AIS target) then you will pass /5/_____.

	1	2	3
/1/ 1.differ, 2.differentiate, 3.different	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
/2/ 1.predicted, 2.predicting, 3.predict	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
/3/ 1.indicating, 2.indicated, 3.indication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
/4/ 1.pass, 2.passing, 3.passes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
/5/ 1.stern to, 2.astern, 3.stern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The gap-fill format provides teachers the opportunity to construct questions that assess learners' production of vocabulary. Unlike MCQs and matching formats, the gap-fill format allows creating items that encourage learners to produce vocabulary. Word formation items are mainly used for assessing lexical knowledge; however, structural knowledge is also required.

Gap filling normally allows the testing of sentence bound reading skills. If assessors want to check skills including more extensive ones such as skimming, then additional format (extra answers) of gap filling is a better variant.

To benefit our research the following inquiry has been made and performed among 52 students, whose last academic year was online and a number of online tests for assessing their progress during the year as well as their final skills and language acquisition were given. The inquiry includes the following questions:

1. How do you find Google platform testing?
2. Define the degree of difficulty of online tests.
3. What are the difficulties which you experience most often when having an online test?
4. Rate the following exercises according to their difficulty.
5. Compare paper tests with online tests.

Fig.1 shows that the productive based items such as gap-fill and open questions are much more challenging for them than the recognition based ones, namely MCQs and dropdown lists.

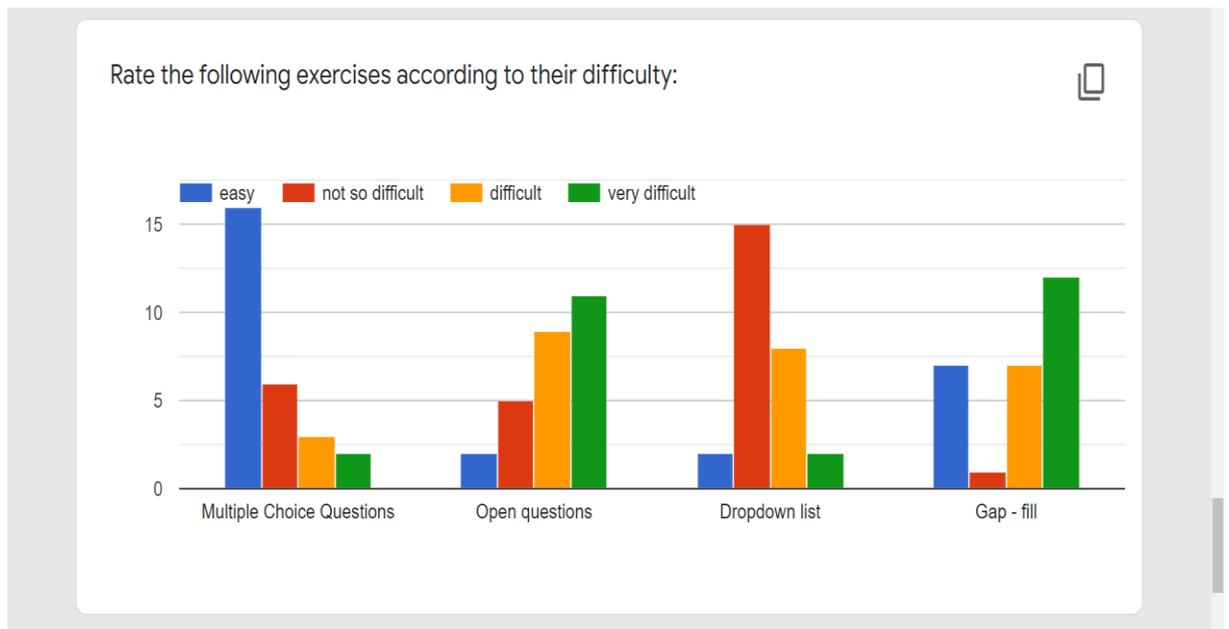


Fig. 1. Diagram of exercises' level of difficulty

When asked to compare the standard paper tests with online tests they found them either very similar, or not so different.

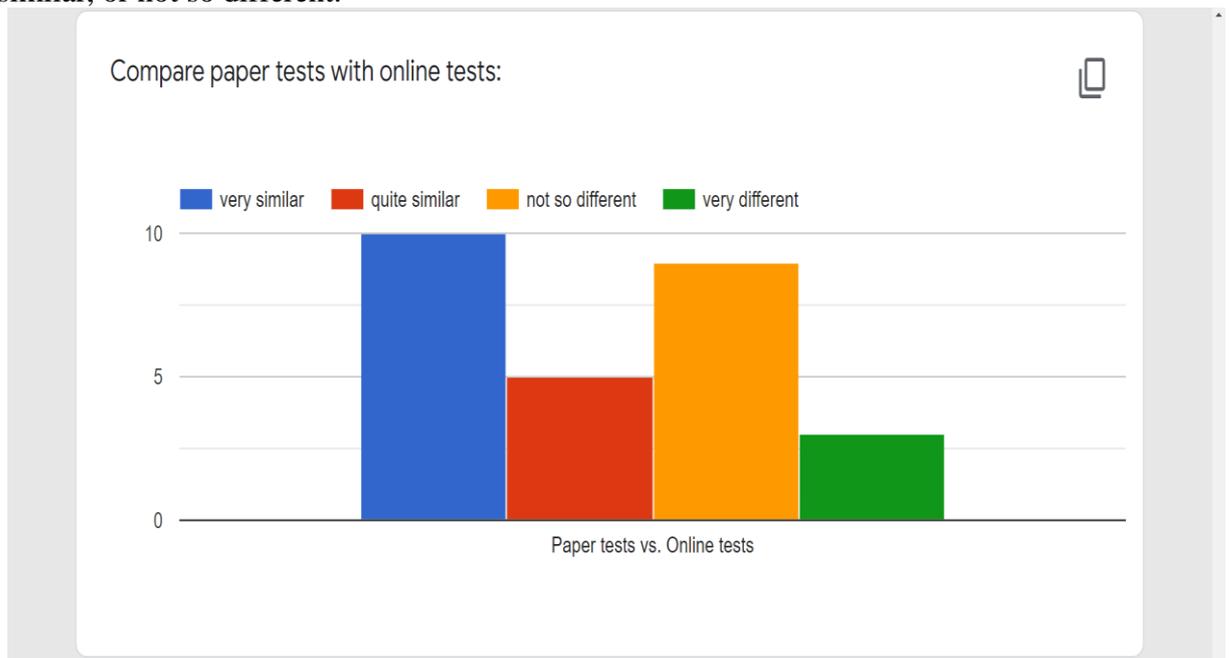
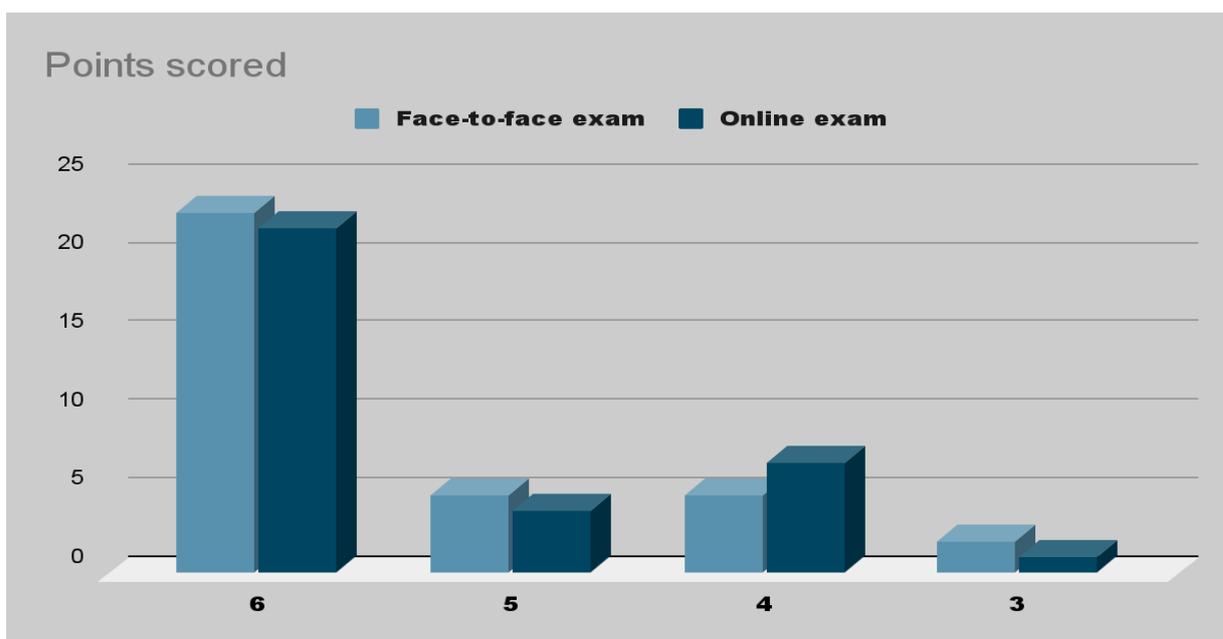


Fig. 2. Diagram of comparison between paper and online tests

A further point in the statistical data gathering is connected with a comparison of the assessment marks of two groups including advanced students who were examined in the traditional face - to - face mode and a year after in the virtual environment. Analyzing the data the following results were obtained and the respective conclusions were drawn:



There is no significant statistical difference in the results from the paper and the online tests. The diagram shows that the online format results are slightly higher.

Knowing the disadvantages of online interaction and the type of communication online which is indirect i. e. it may be defined as non-spontaneous/indirect communication whose function is connected with modern communication aids designed for sending a message (Vicheva, P., 2019). A research among the students and the information obtained proves clearly that educators can rely on online testing and should continue the process of online testing improvement because there is no doubt that the situation in education has changed and the direction of progress can only be in line with quickly adapting to the new challenges.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above, it should be stated that online testing is not a drawback in examination of students' knowledge. Moreover it can serve educators even better and for that reason the efforts should be directed towards improvement of online examination tasks and the skills of evaluators to work with different computer tools.

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