

Student Perspectives on Collaborative Assessment in a Global Health Virtual Postgraduate Course

An example of student voice informing the assessment process in online learning

Evelyn Balsells, MPH PhD
Course Director, Programme Coordinator
On behalf of the Global Health Challenges: An introduction
June 16th, 2026

Course context

Global Health Challenges: An Introduction

- Fully online 10-week, 20 credit postgraduate course
- Diverse international student cohort
 - annually 25-30
- From a mix of online and in-person programmes
 - Global Health, Landscape and Wellbeing, and Clinical Management programmes
- Focus on:
 - Planetary Health
 - Health inequalities
 - Climate change
 - Global health governance



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Global Health Academy

GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

an introduction



Applying critical global
health perspectives to
real-world challenges
through collaborative
learning

Course context

Global Health Challenges: An Introduction

Have you ever wondered why the information in Wikipedia is extensive for some topics and scarce for others?



Teaching Week	Start date		Main topic and deadlines
--	September	9 th	Welcome week – no teaching
1		16 th	Defining health and health challenges <i>Mark your country of your choice in the Padlet map before Monday 23rd noon UK time.</i>
2		23 rd	Understanding the global dimensions of non-communicable diseases
3		30 th	Understanding the global dimensions of infectious diseases <i>Magazine style article (marked assignment) due before Monday October 7th noon UK time*</i>
4	October	7 th	Fragile states of health: natural & human-made crises
5		14 th	<i>Wikipedia editing group starts (marked assignment)</i>
--		21 st	Reading week – no teaching
6		28 th	Health & Illness inc. Exploring Big Tobacco
7	November	4 th	Health & Illness inc. Exploring Big Food & Big Alcohol <i>Optional: submit request for feedback on Wikipedia page draft before Monday November 4th noon UK time</i>
8		11 th	Health & Illness inc. Exploring Big Pharma
9		18 th	Climate change and Global Health
10		25 th	Planetary Health: a new world order <i>Wikipedia page group project (marked assignment) due before Friday 29th noon UK</i>
--	December	2 nd	--
		9 th	--
		16 th	<i>Final assignment due Monday 16th before noon UK time*</i>
		23 rd	<i>University closes at 5pm UK time (until 6th of January)</i>

Wikipedia Editing Assignment

Creating Public Knowledge Through Collaborative Work

- **Over the years**
 - 100+ distance-learning students
 - Wikipedia editing training
 - Disaster-related Wikipedia "stub" pages into articles of 1,500+ words
 - **Assessment of students' contributions**
 - reflection pieces, peer-assessment
- **Currently**
 - Groups of 5–6 students
 - Each student: 500 words contribution
 - Six-week collaborative project
 - Includes: training and feedback
 - Worth 20% of final course mark
 - Individual and group criteria

Marking rubric

Individual marks

User and registration in dashboard
Coverage of the topic (course concepts)
Critical analysis of the evidence*

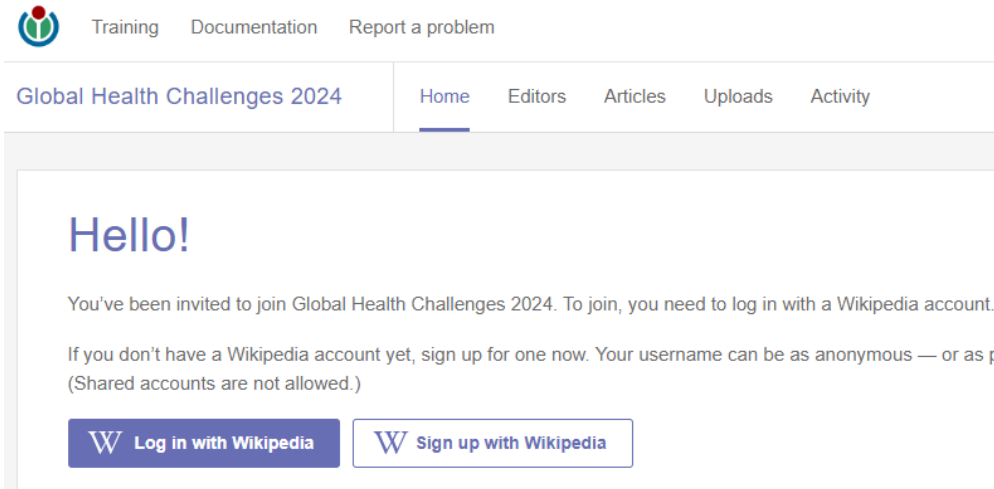
Peer assessment

Group marks

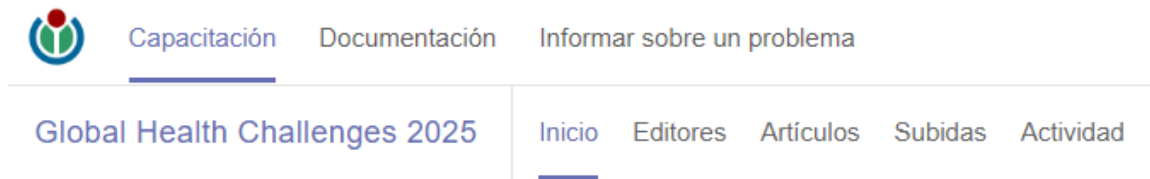
Critical analysis of the evidence *
Overall presentation
Referencing

Wikipedia Editing Assignment

Creating Public Knowledge Through Collaborative Work



Supported by Wikimedian in Residence Ewan McAndrew (thanks!)



2025

5 Articles edited

319 Total edits

16 Editors

23.8 mil words added

296 references added

3.2 mil articles views

Wikipedia Editing Assignment

Developing digital and critical literacies

Title	Words Added ▼ ?	References Added ?	Views ?
			Cumulative Daily Avg
2024 Yemen migrant boat disaster (history)	7087	104	459
2017 dengue outbreak in Peshawar (history)	6217	69	319
2022 Imo-Rivers explosion (history)	5735	80	708
2016 Egypt floods (history)	2594	21	570
2016 Egypt migrant shipwreck (history)	2196	22	1162

- Evidence appraisal skills
- Source credibility evaluation
- Digital content creation skills
- Collaborative online working practices
- Understanding of misinformation risks
- Awareness of knowledge inequities and representation gaps



Writing as public outreach

Contents
[Add languages](#)

2024 Yemen migrant boat disaster

[Article](#)
[Talk](#)
[Read](#)
[Edit](#)
[View history](#)
[Tools](#)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



This article is written like a research paper or a scientific journal. Please help rewrite it in a neutral, encyclopedic style and simplify overly technical phrases. (November 2025)

(Top)

- Background and details of the disaster
- Context and background
- Details of the disaster
- Etiology of the disaster
- Geographic barriers and physical impacts
- Shipwreck debris and environmental impact
- Geographic barriers, maritime hazards and fragile life infrastructure
- Body recovery and post-disaster management
- Dynamics and cascading

The **Eastern migration route** – from the **Horn of Africa**, crossing over the **Gulf of Aden** through **Yemen** and on to richer **Gulf States** such as **Saudi Arabia** – is a dangerous route for migrants to take. The **International Organization for Migration** (IOM) recorded 558 deaths on this route in 2024 alone, of which most (462) occurred through drowning.^[1]

One example of this occurred on June 10 2024, when 49 migrants drowned when the boat carrying them across the Gulf of Aden sunk. The boat was carrying around 260 Somalis and Ethiopians, of which 90 women. It capsized around 3.30am with 49 deaths immediately confirmed and many more missing.^[2]

Local fishermen were the first to help, followed by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the IOM. It had numerous health consequences for the victims and impacted local health services.

2024 Yemen migrant boat disaster

Date	10 June 2024
Time	3:30 a.m.
Location	Gulf of Aden
Casualties	
A total of 260 migrants from the Horn of Africa were on the boat when the disaster occurred.	
Deaths	49 deaths, including 31 women and 6 children
Missing	Up to 140 migrants were reported missing

Body recovery and post-disaster management [\[edit\]](#)

This site's remoteness and sparse infrastructure hindered effective body recovery, [emergency management](#) and [disaster response](#). Reports show bodies drifting ashore in similar incidents posed public health and logistical challenges.^[22] In this disaster, local villagers and fishermen both assisted search and rescue and had to undertake urgent burials due to inadequate morgue capacity.^[23] From a health security perspective, limited [state capacity](#) exacerbated body management bottlenecks.

Dynamics and cascading humanitarian impacts [edit]

There were no reports of large migrants displacing Yemeni communities in this disaster. However, the migrants involved in this disaster were part of a **broader displacement dynamic** with socio-economic and political dimensions, environmental and climate change causes.^[24] The eastern route from the Horn of Africa represents a continuum of displacement – individuals displaced from native African countries face *danger en route*. Despite Yemen's ongoing civil war with its cascading humanitarian implications for the region, it remains a major transit route for migrants seeking passage to wealthier Gulf states with this disaster highlighting health insecurity from the structural vulnerabilities of regional irregular migration routes.

Local and international responses [\[edit \]](#)

Local fishermen were the first to raise the alarm after spotting bodies floating in the sea and bringing them ashore.^[25] Working with residents from nearby coastal communities, they provided immediate humanitarian support to the 78 migrants they helped rescue from the water, demonstrating solidarity and community resilience despite the severe hardships faced by Yemenis themselves as a result of more than a decade of civil-war.^[26] Local NGOs and volunteer groups then joined the fishermen in the search for the missing migrants. These community-led efforts involved informal

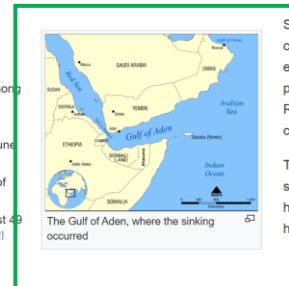
Background and details of the disaster [edit]

Context and background [\[edit \]](#)

The Republic of Yemen is a country in the [Middle East](#) characterized by political instability and [civil war](#), which has been raging since 2014.^[3] However, despite this instability and ongoing turmoil, Yemen remains a valuable transit route for many people migrating illegally to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.^[4] These people, mostly men, but also women, and children, generally come from countries in the Horn of Africa, specifically, nationals from [Somalia](#) and [Ethiopia](#).^{[5][6]} They are assisted by smugglers who take them across the Gulf of Aden with life-threatening transfers.^[4] Another route links Djibouti and Yemen.^[5]

Details of the disaster [\[edit\]](#)

The year 2024 was marked by several maritime disasters involving migrants coming from the Horn of Africa and leaving for Yemen.^[6] Among these, there is the shipwreck of June 10, 2024, which occurred in the province of *Shabwah*, not far from Alghareef point.^[7] This shipwreck involved a boat that departed from *Bosaso* in *Somalia* on Sunday, June 9, 2024. It occurred at 3.30 a.m.^[7] The statistics of the IOM state that there were a total of 260 migrants on this ship, including 145 people of Ethiopian nationality and 115 of Somali nationality.^[7] They were 90 women on board.^[7] After the ship sunk near the Yemeni coast, at least 49 migrant deaths were counted, including 31 women and 6 children.^{[7][8]} 140 were reported missing.^{[7][8]}



Short- and long-term health consequences [edit]

Migrants traveling in close quarters on boats, are at an increased risk of various health risks that include, being infected with **infectious diseases** (communicable), **tropical diseases**, physical injury and even death.^[34] Migrants face dehydration, starvation, as well as human rights abuses, violence and exploitation by smugglers and human traffickers.^[35] Adding to the deleterious health effects for these individuals are negative mental health effects as a survivor of such a disaster and the uncertainty of the future they face.

Immediate rescue and medical response after the disaster [\[edit\]](#)

Directly after the boat capsized the IOM assisted the 71-78 survivors (reports on the number of survivors differ), including the 6 children.^{[7][36][26]} Two mobile clinics with medical teams provided first aid and minor physical trauma treatment to 63 of them, while 8 individuals were referred for treatment to a [Shabwah](#) hospital and discharged from hospital a couple of days later.^{[7][36]} As many of the survivors were [in shock](#) a [psychologist](#) working with the IOM medical mobile team provided further immediate [mental health counselling](#) and support to 38 of the survivors.^[7]

The local community and fisherman played a significant part not only in the search and rescue but with the burial of between 49 deceased individuals (12 men, 31 women, 6 children).^[7] Later accounts confirmed 56 deceased.^[36]

In the long-term IOM Voluntary Humanitarian Return programme provides support and services which includes health care and food distribution along key migrant routes, for those who reach Yemen.^[37]

Infectious and tropical diseases consequences [edit]

On migrant boats the risks of contamination with and spread of infectious and tropical diseases are further

Geographic and physical impacts [\[edit \]](#)

Shipwreck debris and environmental impact [\[edit\]](#)

In addition to the loss of at least 49 lives, the *marine pollution impact* from this disaster arose from boat wreckage, scattered debris and spilling of pollutants into oceanic waters.^[12] The sunken vessel's leaking fuel and debris therefore had the physical impact of polluting seawater, potentially harming marine life (e.g., coral reefs).^[13] Recovering human bodies along this vast shoreline imposed an economic cost, while recurring migrant boat disasters in the Gulf of Aden establish cumulative environmental risks, further compounded by the ongoing Houthi anti-shipping campaigns.^[14] Repeated small-scale oil spills, debris, vessel wreckage degrade marine ecosystems and exacerbate challenges faced by Yemen's conflict-weakened communities with minimal environmental hazard response capacity.^[15]

Geographic barriers, maritime hazards and fragile health infrastructure [edit]

Strong currents and seasonal rough seas make the route from Somalia or Djibouti to Yemen hazardous. The challenging terrain and infrastructure gaps amplified this disaster's impact.^[16] Years of conflict had left Yemen with extremely limited capacity for *maritime domain awareness* and rescue.^[17] The IOM directly cited lack of operational patrol boats and other incident response resources as constraints to post-incident search and rescue efforts.^[18] Reliance on local fisherman for post-disaster search and rescue is indicative of lack of formal rescue services and capabilities.^[19]

This disaster overwhelmed Yemen's southern coast health infrastructure, with small health posts treating dozens of survivors and at least eight admitted to hospital for treatment and care.^[20] Yemen's ongoing humanitarian emergency had already **weakened local medical facilities**, and this sudden spike in caseloads further strained already minimal healthcare facilities. This incident therefore amplified the negative externalities of fragile health systems in conflict-

Lessons learned [\[edit \]](#)Public response [\[edit\]](#)

The Mixed Migration Center and the IOM expressed concern regarding the reoccurring nature of these kinds of incidents.^{[43][44]} Ayila Bonfiglio, head of legal opportunities for migration in the United States, added more risks to the journey.^{[43][44]} He stated that routes that would be more closely surveyed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection would be more closely surveyed by their home country.^[44] Other similar trends have been noted in other regions, such as the focus on sustainable development in the Sahel region and networks.^[47]

Refugee status as partial sol

Many of those fleeing Ethiopia have been given refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)^[48] and the UN has repeatedly urged European countries to collaborate on providing refugees equitable long-term care.^{[46][49]} Within the Horn of Africa, the International Rescue Committee has been working in Ethiopia since the year 2000^[50] and Somalia since 1981.^[51] Those seeking asylum must undergo refugee status determination (RSD) which takes into account criteria such as personal circumstances and country of origin information.^[52] Any person who migrates for reasons other than a fear of being persecuted or facing violence from their country of origin will not be permitted refugee status.^[53] For this reason, many are calling for a holistic approach that can bring support to those who are struggling economically or not receiving healthcare.

The **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** is a United Nations agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.

Challenges

Assessing collaboration

Mostly positive feedback over several years



[Wikimedia in the Curriculum 2022 University of Edinburgh Digital Skills Festival](#)

How do we assess the collaborative process, not only the final Wikipedia page?

...but recurring concerns:

- Uneven participation within groups
- Limited visibility of individual contributions
- Remote collaboration challenges
- Different time zones and schedules

Responding to student voices (re-) introducing peer assessment

Changes implemented

- Blackboard WebPA introduced
- Peer assessment completed after project submission
- Contributed 20 point to assignment's mark
- Designed to recognise engagement and collaboration

Rationale

- Recognise individual effort
- Encourage sustained participation
- Respond directly to previous student concerns

WebPA OS Preview Form

[back to assessments list](#) <<disabled in preview>>

Taking This Assessment

Please complete the assessment below. For each question you must give a mark to each group member, including yourself.

To save your marks, you must click the **Save Marks** button. Once you have successfully submitted your responses you cannot go back and change your marks.

To leave this assessment without saving, click the [back to assessments list](#) link above, or choosing an option from the menu.

Marking Your Team

For each criterion you must rate your teammates using the scale provided. High grade indicate better performance in the criteria.

Introduction

<< Your introduction text will go in here >>

Assessment Criteria

1. Selection of the stub
Score 1 : no contribution
Score 2 : not satisfactory
Score 3 : adequate
Score 4 : adequate
Score 5 : satisfactory

	1	2	3	4	5
Yourself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bob	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Claire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
David	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Development of the outline
Score 1 : no contribution
Score 2 : not satisfactory
Score 3 : adequate



3. Individual section:
Shared within the timeframe agreed by the group and with references.
Score 1 : no contribution
Score 2 : not satisfactory
Score 3 : adequate
Score 4 : adequate
Score 5 : satisfactory

	1	2	3	4	5
Yourself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bob	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Claire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
David	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Contribution to editing process
Score 1 : no contribution
Score 2 : not satisfactory
Score 3 : adequate
Score 4 : adequate
Score 5 : satisfactory

	1	2	3	4	5
Yourself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bob	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Claire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
David	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

That concludes this peer assessment. To finish and submit your response click the **save marks** button below.

Once you have successfully submitted your responses you cannot go back and change your marks.

[save marks](#)

[close preview](#)

Supported by Matt (DEU) and Rosemary Admin
GHC (thanks!)

Responding to student voices

(re-) introducing peer assessment

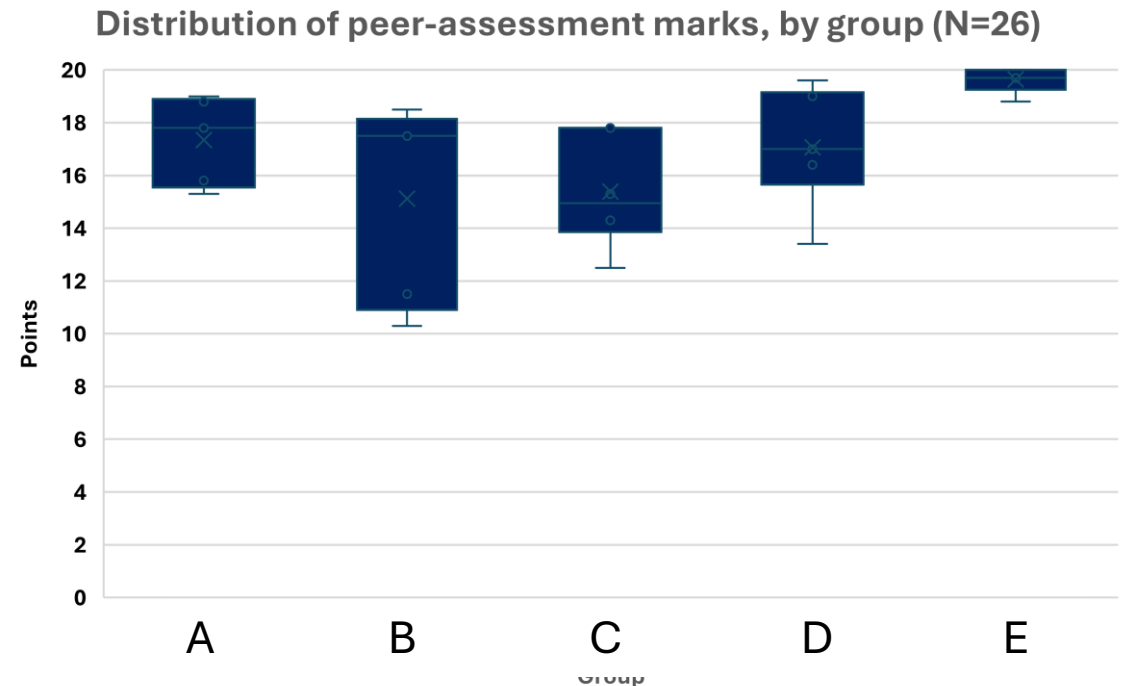
A quantitative assessment of students' own contributions and those of their group's members

Four key steps to complete the task:

- selection of the stub
- development of the outline
- individual section shared within the timeframe agreed by the group and with references:
- contribution to editing process

Final peer-assessment mark:

- average of peers' marks
- Standardised scale



Listening to student voices

Postcourse survey (28 enrolled students, 8 responses (28%))

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Influenced how much I contributed	5	1	2		
Motivated consistent engagement	6	1	1		
Fairer sharing of workload distribution	4	1	2	1	
Increased accountability	3	2	2	1	
Impacted collaboration in the group	2	3	1	1	1
Peer assessment rubric allowed to reflect differences in individual contributions	3	4			

6 responded that without peer assessment, their level of contribution would have been “about the same”

4 responded that they had no significant challenges completing the webPA form

1 reported difficulty understanding the criteria

Closing the feedback loop

Student perspectives on peer assessment

Responses suggest:

- ✓ Peer assessment appears to influence individual's behaviour
 - more than group dynamics
- ✓ WebPA tool did not pose major challenges to students

But:

- ✗ Accountability is not automatically improved
- ✗ Collaboration remains challenging in asynchronous environments

Considerations:

Limited number of responses

Biases cannot be excluded (selection, timing)

Assessment alone cannot solve group-work challenges

Listening to student voices

Student perspectives on peer assessment

What changes would most improve the Wikipedia editing assignment, including the peer-assessment process for future students?

"Further ways to incorporate buy in by students as working on a group project for such a small percentage of the total grade can be very difficult, especially across multiple time zones."

"Make it abundantly clear how critical that component is for assessment purposes, and the significant marks/percentage it contributes to the total mark of the student."

Need for greater motivation in collaborative assessment

Need to communicate more clearly how peer-assessment works and their impact on the final grades

Closing the feedback loop

Discussion thoughts and take home message

What changes should we make to the rubric and the timing of completion

Should a discussion board on what fair cooperation in remote group work looks like be included in the course prior to the Wikipedia assignment?

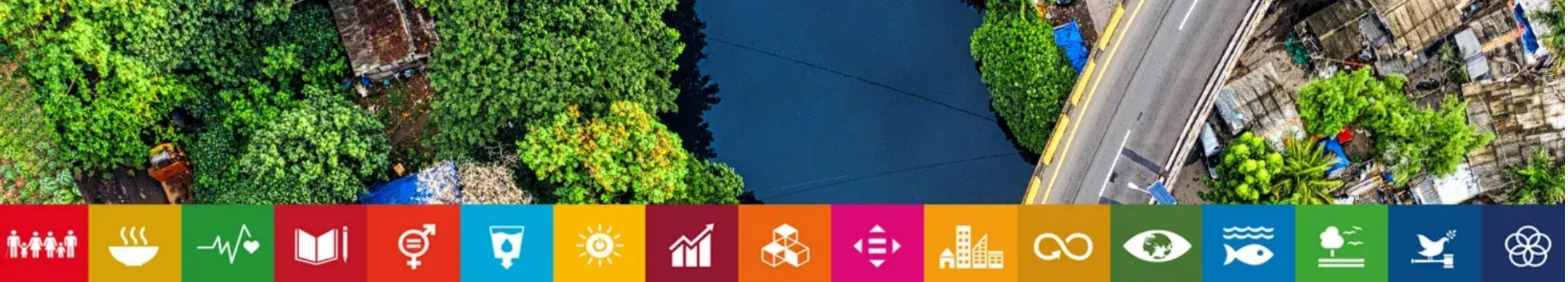


Should we increase how much peer-assessment weighs upon the final assignment mark/grade?

Should how much peer-assessment influences final assignment mark be increased? (e.g. individualising teamwork scores proportionally --[Shishavan & Jalili 2020](#))

To what extent would it be possible to incorporate open-ended questions for qualitative feedback?

- **Student voice helps improve assessment design**
 - Quantitative peer-assessment successfully implemented
 - Student voices will be useful to develop the rubric for peer-assessment
- **Peer-assessment can influence individuals' behaviour and affect grades**
 - It does not eliminate structural challenges of collaboration



Thank you for your attention!

Evelyn Balsells, MPH PhD
Course Organiser
Global Health Challenges: An introduction
June 16th, 2026