

A Study on Assessment Practices at Beacon house School System in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is an integral component of learning and teaching. The main purpose of this study was to examine the current assessment practices of teachers and as well as examination system in the Beaconhouse school system. Six schools of Beacon house system of Lahore, Faisalabad and Islamabad cities and their male and female teachers were the population of the study. Fifty teachers were selected as a sample on convenient basis. Data were collected through developing a questionnaire to ask teachers report on their assessment practices. It contained 30 items, each at the 5 point Likert type scale ranging from 'always' to 'never'. The means and standard deviations were calculated for each item to find out the assessment practices being used in Beacon house Schools. The findings of the study revealed that Beacon house school teachers are informed about their use of assessment practices to examine learners' reading performance. The teachers always inform results to the students but keep confidential from the irrelevant-stakeholders. They do not interpret percentile bands to students and parents and they do not consider students' participation behavior or attitude in the promotion of next class.

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Introduction

The process of teaching and learning holds a pivotal place in building a quality educational system. Since the time of Pakistan's independence in 1947, seven different education policies have been introduced in the country but none of these were implemented in full scale. The main thrust of all these policies is to promote quality education and the improvement of teaching-learning process. Yet, the improvement in these areas has not been achieved to the desired extent (Rizvi, 2000). In Pakistan, assessments do not judge real competence or genuine educational accomplishment of the students. Instead, Pakistani education system encourages those who can best reproduce what they have learnt in class and fails those who are unable to do that. It seems that the whole system of education revolves around examinations (Khan, 2006).

Rehmani (2003) states that "For stakeholders such as schools the objective is to pass the examinations with good grades and to bring good name to school [and] for some schools, teachers, and students, passing examinations with highest positions becomes a question of prestige" (p.3). To be very specific to this issue, the author further identifies that teachers teach for testing, rather than for learning. The examination system reinforces approaches to teaching that reward memorization.

All educational institutions assess their learners according to their set policy which reflect various activities and time schedule for each. The different patterns of assessment may be short tests, quizzes, assignments, class presentations, home work, and class participation. The role of educators is very important in this process. For some time, there has been a perceived misalignment between what is taught to pre-service teachers, in terms of assessment skills and techniques, and what in service teachers actually practice in the schools (Farr & Griffin, 1973; Gullickson, 1984, 1986).

Evaluation is an essential analytics part from taking in and showing. It alludes all the will at techniques utilized. Eventually Tom's perusing academic disappointments and outrage on his/her staff should settle on judgments around those accomplishment for understudies over units from claiming ponder furthermore in a course of study. These techniques incorporate making choices around what will be pertinent confirmation for a specific purpose, how to gather information. Also translate those proofs what's more entryway to speak it will be planned (students, parents, university administrators, etc.) (Harlen, 2005). Processes include: devising assessment tasks; writing criteria sheets (rubrics) based on learning outcomes; judging students' achievement on those assessment tasks; providing feedback to students; and determining grades. Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students (1990), it is organized around five interrelated themes: (a) Developing and Choosing Methods for Assessment (b) Collecting Assessment Information (c) Judging and Scoring

Student Performance (e) Summarizing and Interpreting Results (f) Reporting Assessment Findings. The Joint Advisory Committee acknowledges that not all of the guidelines are equally applicable in all circumstances. However, consideration of the full set of principles and guidelines are to achieve fairness and equity for the students to be assessed.

Rehmani (2003) identifies that, “teachers teach for testing, rather than for learning. The examination system reinforces approaches to teaching that reward memorization. The more reproduction, the better and higher are the scores or marks awarded by the examiners” (p.3). Consequently, it is presumed that in the current examination system, learners’ learning outcomes are absolutely ignored. However, testing of memorization is holistically measured. Accordingly, it is apparent from the above excerpts that assessment system suffers from multiple deficiencies such as fostering rote-learning, and not adopting critical or analytical approach for assessing learners. Whereas, Ministry of Education (MoE) (2009) documents that:

Student performance shall be based on assessing competence in a specialized area that requires a given skill set. There shall be periodic reviews of the assessment system. Multiple assessment tools in addition to traditional examinations shall be explored, to ensure the right balance between the uses of formative assessment approaches combined with the summative approach of high-stake examinations (p. 41).

Khan (1996) observed that “the research in testing highlights the decline in examination system, its ineffectiveness, and unreliability in diagnosing students’ weaknesses and assessing their abilities” (p.6). He reiterates that the “design and content of the test papers is such that students only have to rely on their memories, and do not have a beneficial effect, on syllabi and teaching practice” (p.6). Above all, tests lack validity and reliability (Khan, 1996, as cited in Imran, 1998). Similarly, “testing is not viewed as a vital component of teaching and is considered quite distinct from teaching and learning as well as practice” (as cited in Imran, 1998, p.6). In terms of reliability and validity of assessment procedures, Rehmani (2003) pinpoints that “Reliability and validity of examination papers in terms of coverage of curriculum, selection of paper setters, lack of training or otherwise of the paper setters and examiners, marking system and preparation of results, are considered dubious” (p.3). Moreover, SPELT (1986) also points out that textbook materials are prescribed by the teacher for their learners “to be learnt and explained word by word and sentence by sentence” (p.12). According to Shah and Saleem (2010) Pakistan’s educational system depends on rote learning that is confined to only one textbook. Due to this approach of teaching and learning, students become passive recipients of prescribed content knowledge of the textbooks. Khan (1995) also states that the questions after each lesson of the textbook are based on literal level that measures only low order thinking skills.

Assessment Practices at Beacon house

In Beacon house the individual need assessment occurs when the performance of any employee is below the required standards. The deficiency in performance may be due to lack of knowledge, skill, poor job design or any other reason. The problems like lack of skills and knowledge are improved through training, while the problems like poor job design or personal problems are removed by transfers and job redesign. Need assessment at group level occurs when a new policy is to be introduced by any department. A special meeting is conducted where all the briefing is given about the policy that is to be introduced. As the school system is large with almost 130 plus branches and many projects in process, so the policies tend to change continuously, either old policy is renewed or replaced with new one.

Staff Development Strategies

Beacon house provides on the job training programs which are informal and sometimes formal. The seniors provide training to their juniors as well as new comers. This method is more effective for trainees with no cost. Various training techniques are used whenever to expose to the trainees with new technologies. Audio visual technique is also used by the trainer who is externally hired for some special training. The trainer uses projectors, video tapes or films, whatever he thinks is best suitable for the training. Computer based training is conducted when new software is launched in department for some purpose or to give an outline briefing about software to internees. Beacon house mostly uses its own software's for all purposes. Employee Development Program helps strong performers to develop key competencies. Participating in Development Program is an excellent experience for employees, as they are confronted with new challenges and it encourages their long-term commitment to the organization. Development Program also enables organizations to set performance standards for each employee.

Statement of the Problem

Assessment Practices at Beacon house School System, is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. This study can be used to evaluate the overall system's efficiency focusing the students' performance.

Objectives of the Study

Following were the objectives of the study;

1. To identify the prevailing assessment practices in Beacon house

- school system
2. To find out the teachers' perceptions about assessment practices in Beacon house school system
 3. To suggest some guidelines for the improvement of assessment system in Beacon house school system

Research Questions

Following research questions were formulated to conduct this study;

1. What assessments practices are being employed in Beacon house school system?
2. What are the perceptions of the teachers about assessment practices in Beacon house schools?
3. What measures can be taken to improve assessment practices in Beacon house school system?

Methodology

The study was employing mixed-method approach, as a questionnaire was used to collect data on five-point Likert type scale and an interview protocol was developed by the researchers to seek opinions of supporting staff involved in assessment system.

Sample

Fifty male and female teachers from six schools of Beacon house schools from district Lahore, Islamabad and Faisalabad were drawn for the study using convenient sampling technique. Two support staff members were taken for the interview purpose about the assessment system.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire as research instrument was developed by the researchers for data collection. The first section of this instrument was about demographic data of the respondents and the remaining items i.e. from 1 to 30 were exclusively based upon assessment techniques, each on five-point Likert type scale. This section discusses teachers' responses to various statements related to their reading assessment techniques. Each statement was discussed according to the demographic factors of gender and school type. Teachers through survey technique were asked to give their responses on these thirty statements were on five-point type Likert type scale as: 1=Always, 2=Mostly, 3=Seldom, 4=Rarely, and 5=Never. The instrument was validated through experts' opinion and in order to measure reliability Cronbach Alpha was used. The Alpha value of the questionnaire 0.9 allowed the researchers to use it for actual study.

The second instrument of the study was interview protocol which conducted of the two support staff at Beacon house schools. The interview protocol was consisted of four open ended questions.

Data Analysis and Findings

The means and standard deviations were used for data analysis to determine the assessment practices being practiced in Beacon house school system. Following is given the item-wise analysis of the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. The analysis is presented in four tables. In table 1 analysis of 5 items is presented, in table 2 analysis of 12 items is given, in table 3 analysis of 5 items is presented, and in table 4 analysis of 8 items is given.

Table 1

Questions Relating to Course Work and Assessment

Sr. #	Course Work	Mean	SD
1	Close ended questions are best suited for assessment of reading comprehension.	3.3	0.9
2	Open ended questions are good to assess students' reading performance.	4.4	0.8
3	Teacher must ask questions during teaching learning process	4.3	0.7
4	In-class activities help to consolidate the theme of the lessons.	4.4	0.7
5	Teachers provide opportunities of questioning in the class to the students.	4.5	0.5

Table 1 shows that the most of the teachers always used question answer technique in their classroom to enhance the conceptual understanding of the students. It is also reported that the teachers of the Beacon house always provide opportunities of questioning in the class to the students. Most of teachers do not consider close ended techniques are best suitable to assess for student's reading performance as compared to open ended questions to assess students' reading performance the mean (4.4) and SD (0.8) of this statement. It was also assessed that in class activities also help to the students to understand the lesson and seek more knowledge.

Table 2

Analysis of Questions Relating to Examination System

Sr. #	Examination System	Mean	SD
6	Completion form is considered best to develop student's reading.	3.4	0.8
7	Multiple-choice' technique is best suited for testing students' comprehension.	3.8	1.1
8	Teacher may use oral questions to check students understanding of the lessons taught	4.1	0.8
9	Conduct of short-answer test is good to assess the students' comprehension.	3.8	0.9

10	All the teachers can identify students having comprehension difficulty.	3.7	1.0
11	The assessment system should include assignments to the completed by the students.	3.9	1.0
12	Use of uninformed test is a best technique of assessment.	3.8	0.9
13	Homework of the students is given proper weightage for assigning semester grades.	3.6	1.1
14	Teacher uses monthly tests	4.1	0.9
15	Teachers use lesson end test	3.9	0.8
16	Teachers use midterm test	4.4	0.6
17	Teachers use final exam.	4.4	0.6

Table 2 shows that the most of the teachers used most of the time final examination; mid-term, different techniques to assess students' classroom performance and in-class activities help to consolidate the theme of the lessons. Most of the teachers also used monthly test, uninformed test to assess students' understanding performance and they also give proper weight age to homework of the students for assigning semester grades. They do not consider that multiple choice techniques and completion form and close ended techniques are best suitable to asses for student's reading performance. It is also observed that the teachers of Beacon house schools also try to identify the problems of the students related to the subject matter. They consider that the assignments and projects must be completed by the students to enhance their abilities and skills and promoting them to next class, which is very help full to the students.

Table 3

Questions Relating to Sessional Work

Sr. #	Sessional Work	Mean	SD
18	Teachers use different techniques to assess student's classroom performance.	4.3	0.5
19	Problem solving skills can be developed through demonstration method.	4.3	0.5
20	The assessment system should include projects to the completed by the students	3.6	1.0
21	Homework of the students is given proper weightage for assigning semester grades.	3.6	1.1
22	Teacher uses weekly basis test.	3.4	1.0

Table 3 shows that the teachers of Beacon house schools rarely use model answers for scoring the assessment questions and weekly based test for assessing students' performance. It is also observed that the teachers of the Beacon house use different techniques to assess students' classroom

performance and also used demonstrated method to solve the problems skill and make students free from educational problems. Majority of the teachers do not consider that matching technique, completion form and close ended techniques are best suitable to assess for student's reading performance. The mean (3.6) and SD (1.0) shows that assessment system should include projects to be completed by the students. The students should be awarded grade after assessing the quality of their projects. For students' summative assessment project assessment should be considered. Likewise, majority of the teachers reported that proper weightage is given to students' home work. A little less majority opined that teachers use weekly tests for students' assessment.

Table 4

Questions related to Teaching Practices

Sr. #	Teaching Practices	Mean	SD
23	Matching technique is not suitable to assess for student's reading performance	3.2	1.1
24	Student's conceptual understanding is enhanced by using questioning strategies.	4.5	0.5
25	Teacher should use their personal experiences to clarify the student's concept.	4.1	0.9
26	Teacher may use any numbers of questions to assess the relevant contents	3.9	0.8
27	Teacher uses model answer for scoring the assessment questions.	3.2	1.0
28	Teacher uses assessment results to make decision about student's placement.	4.1	0.7
29	Teacher considers students participation/ behavior or attitude in the promotion of next class	3.80	1
30	Teacher should ensure the confidentiality of the student's results from non-stake holders.	3.27	0.79

Table 4 shows that all the teachers of Beacon house school do not consider that matching technique is best suited for assessing students reading performance. But large majority (Mean 4.5) believes that students' conceptual understanding can be enhanced by using questioning strategies. The most of teachers used their personal experiences to clarify the relevant contents at Beacon house school. They also include projects to be completed by the students for their final assessment. The teachers of Beacon house school do not interpret percentile bands to students and parents and they do not consider students participation behavior or attitude in the promotion of next class. This observed that the teachers of the Beacon house most of the time ensure the confidentiality of the students results from the non-stakeholders. The mean (4.1) and SD (0.7) shows that the teachers always use assessment results to make decision about student's placement.

More than half of the teachers consider the importance of students' participation and their behavior should be included while awarding them final grade. A little less majority was of the view that teacher should ensure the confidentiality of the students' results irrelevant persons.

Analysis of Interviews of Supporting Staff

Two supporting staff members involved in assessment of the Beacon house School System were also interview to elicit their opinion about the assessment practices. Here is given a brief analysis of the questions posed to them.

Q 1: How do you perceive assessment practices in your schools?

Assessment can be used to evaluate the overall systems, efficiency as well as students' performance. Without assessment quality of the instruction cannot be improved. Better assessment improves the system. While responding to this question, an interviewee said that;

Teachers who communicate what students should learn and the goals for their progression help students take ownership of their learning. Along with warmer weather comes the final opportunity of the school year to refine your teaching strategies and help your students learn and grow. While many teachers know that assessment can be a powerful tool for evaluating and supporting student learning.

Q 2: In your opinion, which types of assessment practices a school must opt for?

Assessment practices should not measures cognitive ability but also consider improvement in the personality development of the students. One of the interviewee reported in detail as;

Formative assessment is distinct from other types of assessment that take place throughout the year. It's a teaching practice focused on continual checks for student understanding, that can help you make informed decisions about the next steps in instruction for each student. Formative assessment might look like students giving each other feedback in pairs or small groups, a classroom discussion, student self-assessment or a quick quiz or poll. And at its best, formative assessment becomes an integral part of a teaching and learning cycle that helps both students and teachers grow.

Q 3: How do your staff and faculty participate in conducting, marking of papers and conveying the results to concerned persons?

While responding to this question, both interviewees showed satisfaction in the conduct of examination, marking papers and reporting results. One of the interviewee reported the procedure as;

1. Every person assigned a duty according to their job requirement or experiences.

2. People work before commitment of papers and even after papers.
3. All teaching and non-teaching staff performs his/her duty but also voluntarily cooperates with other staff.
4. They put their best beginning to end, especially result day and last days of results compilation are very hectic.

Q 4: How often and how do you review the examination/ assessment practices and policies of your school?

Examination policies and assessment practices are mainly developed at head office level. Anyhow in certain matters schools are free to add or drop some secondary importance item with the approval of cluster head. Normally head office reviews policies with regional and cluster heads contribution and later on these are convey to the schools. At school level, we annually revise our measures in the light of previous experiences. Generally these reviews are related to result compilation and announcement or test conduction etc.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the current assessment practices of teachers in the Beacon house school system. Specifically, the aim of this research study was to gain an understanding of the extent to which teachers use traditional and alternative forms of assessment practices in their classrooms. This study was successful in that it resulted in a moderately thorough description of these teachers' assessment practices. It builds on previous research by incorporating descriptions of assessment practices. Similar to previous research, it was determined that teachers do not spend much time conducting statistical analyses of their assessment data. Additionally, there are several statistically significant differences between teachers at different school levels, with differing years of experience, and different school locations with respect to their assessment practices. The teachers of Beacon house schools use these techniques more frequently. They use most of the alternative assessment techniques in their classrooms to enhance the students' abilities. They ask open-ended and close ended question in tests and also assess their reading comprehension through different ways. The teachers always keep confidential the result of the students from the non-stakeholders. The teachers of Beacon house school do not interpret percentile bands to students and parents and they do not consider students participation behavior or attitude in the promotion of next class.

It is concluded that assessment practices measure different cognitive abilities of the students and somehow their personality development is also considered. Every person is assigned a duty according to his/her job requirement or experiences. Everyone should be expert in his/her field of examination policies and assessment practices with are running in their

schools.

Recommendations

Based on small survey, in the light of findings and conclusion following recommendations are given.

- Teachers should continuously assess the performance of students in order to rank them according to their individual strengths and weaknesses.
- Classroom assessment should provide information to teachers for their own self-evaluation and the evaluation of their students.
- Information from assessment should help the teacher to discover areas where students have difficulties and can, therefore, be used to modify teaching methods and strategies in order to support students' learning.
- The teachers of the Beacon house should also try to use different methods/ or different teaching practices to solve the problem solving skills of the students and try to enhance their abilities.
- The teachers of Beacon house school do not interpret percentile bands to students and parents and they do not consider students participation behavior or attitude in the promotion of next class. They may consider this aspect for improving the assessment system.

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