

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON MONITORING, EVALUATION
AND REFLECTION SYSTEM OF STUDENTS
AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES IN PAKISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

It is imperative to determine the gaps exist in extant education system to assess and measure the student's performance. The aim of this paper is to bring about the significant components of assessment system for students' effective learning. The major focus is to determine how students' performance is monitored, evaluated and reflected at higher education institutes of Pakistan and compare current methods with the ideal education systems, other countries 'experiences, professional testing standards that inculcate all values of a 21st century graduate into its students. The study used qualitative methodology using focus group technique from 10 participants. Results provided thoughtful insight into phenomenon of monitoring system by identifying existing gaps and proposing solutions. The results of study will be helpful in terms of providing a solution and significant indicators for discussion, analysis and will create harmony among policy makers, educationists, university staff and stakeholders. It will improve the learning environment and provide quality education for all to create sustainable assessment system for students.

KEYWORDS

Assessment systems, class room assessment, examination, monitoring quality drivers

1. INTRODUCTION

The Higher education system is taking a shift globally to align with industry and business needs in order to boost economic sustainability. The academic institutions are making steady reforms to enhance employability of graduates and meet market needs by instilling outcome-based teaching pedagogies and developing appropriate system of monitoring and evaluating students' performance. Summative assessment was the main focus since Pakistan came into being. The famous three universities (Punjab (Lahore) 1882,

Sindh (Karachi) 1947, and West Pakistan (Dacca) 1921) were following the policies of British Oxford for annual system by practicing the summative assessment procedure (Forest & Altbach, 2006).

External examinations are the main forms of summative assessment. These universities were responsible for conducting external examinations which include Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) examinations while Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education was established later in 1954. Shirazi (2004) has explored the advantages and drawbacks of external examination. Linn (2008) suggested that assessment measures may be of paper-pencil-tests, protracted responses like essay writing and presentation of authentic tasks, that is, laboratory experiments. The uniformity of standard to meet the goals regarding students' achievements and competencies does have the positive impact on external examination. Nevertheless, effective assessment has a bad influence on learning due to direct contact of examiners with their students and the main focus is on getting marks. This scenario hinders the true spirit of teaching/learning process.

Such shortcomings in exam system need to be addressed. The government took the initiatives in previous years and introduced semester system at tertiary level. For instance, Karachi University changed the annual system into semester system in December, 1973 and so on (Khurshid, 2013). Since 1976-77, the system is working in Agriculture University Faisalabad (Agriculture University Faisalabad, 2009).

According to Mahmood 2001, the Government of Pakistan, in 2001, engaged all higher education institutions to change their academic annual system into semester system. In 2002 when Higher Education Commission (HEC) established the system successfully, it started giving training to faculty members of each university to the new semester system so that they could play their roles effectively. Now, the major essence to promote the teaching learning process is continuous formative and internal assessment. This method of assessments would be a great source of retaining good teacher-student relationship. It will also improve learning through teachers' constructive feedback and positive comments.

This type of association is the part and parcel of teaching which enhances students' acquisition and teaching pedagogies. Although internal examination system has some positive aspects yet it has some drawbacks as well. In terms of money and time, this type of system is economical, flexible and direct (Satija, 1996; Shirazi, 2004). To improve the teaching learning process, the results will be helpful and can be used. On the contrary, lack of knowledge on internal assessment techniques and competencies on the part of teachers can be a hindrance. The research on 'Problems and Prospects of Higher Education in Pakistan' reveals different issues of teachers and students in university education by stating that the education system is weak and the new construction of uniformed exam system needs to be addressed (Shah, 2010). For running the successful and purposeful system, identification of barriers and gaps in skills, knowledge and abilities (SKA) is mandatory.

Although there is an element of interest regarding student assessment, there are few countries which have made some policies, designed structures and tools for effective assessment system. The Third-World countries have the particular case which try to take benefits from systematic efforts to quantify learning outcomes. The standardized assessments of students' learning process and achievement levels have been experimented

by some of the countries, but these are mere ad hoc experiences which are not the part of proper strategies and are not sustained as well over time. In this research study, the focus is on understanding existing educational assessment system, comparing with international standards and suggesting sustainable student assessment system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three types of assessment activities i.e. examination, classroom assessment, and system level assessment which are the main focus of research. This study draws attention on best practices and principles of assessment, its system and its analysis. (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010) has reviewed the practices of the execution of education systems around the world (for example, Australia, Finland, Singapore, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) and pointed out student assessment activities as:

- Demonstrate the value of assessment as student learning rather than a separate entity in education system;
- It is beneficial in career decision making process by providing feedback to teachers and students on learning and ‘feed forward’ information to shape the future prospects;
- The alignment of curriculum with students’ performance criteria along with desired learning outcomes;
- The engagement of teachers with student learning and achievement has been noticed in scoring and assessment development of teachers to improve their capacity and professional practices;
- To improve students’ learning and motivation, students have the opportunities to engage themselves in authentic assessments;
- A wide range of assessment and instructional strategies has been formulated to enhance higher order thinking and problem-solving skills among students;
- The importance of standardized testing has been given to quality over quantity;
- For developing 21st century skills, open-ended performance tasks and school-based assessment has been given priority in examination system so that students would be able to write extensive material.

Scholars (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010) offer a comprehensive idea of how does an effective assessment system work; it does not tell us what it takes to get there. There are other studies which have tried to investigate the process, planning and implementation issues. Ferrer, 2006 offers some sustainable assessment system based on his analysis on the existing system in Latin America. Bray and Steward (1998) have explored the same analysis for secondary school examinations. Others (Lockheed, 2009) appraise the status of donor activity in the area of assessment and discuss how to improve effectiveness of support countries. Still others delve into the politics of how to create justifiable and authentic assessment systems (McDermott, 2011).

This research draws attention and conclusion on how a real and effective assessment works by providing evidence, the key factors and challenges to turn them into an

incorporated framework. This will also give an insight on how other countries can work on building such system.

Framework for Student Assessment Systems

There are two main dimensions of assessment system that have been identified as a useful framework in a systematic way. These dimensions are types/purposes of assessment activities and their qualities.

Dimension 1. Assessment Types/Purposes

The assessment system includes three major types of assessment activities which corresponds to three main information needs/purpose which are described below:

Classroom assessments are considered real time criteria for students' assessment for decision making in their learning process in individual classrooms examination. This includes monitoring of assessments, allocation of 'scarce' educational opportunities at large scale, and provide the relevant information to practitioners and policy makers on overall system's performance. This ensures the factors of change and contributing factors in those level. Apart from that, such assessment types are dependent on each other i.e. they do not come under these labels, but at the same time in majority of education system, they are being used as the main types of assessment activities around the world.

One research says that classroom assessments are carried out by teachers as formative assessment as daily activity in class (Alexander et al., 2014). Students' learning and achievement are assessed through a variety of standard and non-standard tools and procedures by interpreting and collecting oral and written data as evidence. Oral data include oral questioning, presentations and interviews while written data comprise of quizzes, assignments and diagnostic tests. The main aim of such assessments is to bring about the 'real time' information to help out teaching and learning.

Examinations are identified as 'public', 'external', or 'end of cycle' which provide information about each student's learning—for example, whether they should be allocated to a certain type of school or academic program, graduate from high school, or gain admission to university (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Either they are assessed externally or school-based, such standardized nature ensures equal opportunity to each student to demonstrate their knowledge and identify their skills (Clarke, 2011).

Large scale, system level assessments give information on system performance levels and related or contributing factors (Kifer, 2000), on agreed upon set of standards or learning goals in order to inform education policy and practice. Different types of assessment activities are emphasized on different levels in any education system in different countries. For instance, the education system in Finland puts emphasis on classroom assessment to check students' learning and achievement. While China puts great emphasis on examination as a selection criterion from the large student population (although some changes are being made). The factors vary from achieving the vision and goals of any country's education system to the economic structures and opportunities and needs of key stakeholders. There is no one ideal profile for assessment system which will fit in all contexts. Moreover, for evaluating the performance on each indicator, the

qualitative comparison on assessment system can be useful at different levels of advancement to check the characteristics of assessment.

Dimension 2. Quality Drivers

To support decision-making, individual and combined quality of assessment system is given the significant consideration instead of providing its one ideal profile to ensure students' success in learning (Shepard, 2000). Enabling context, system alignment and assessment quality are three main drivers of information quality in an assessment system (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010).

The enabling context raises the point of discussion on assessment activities to the broader context which are conducive to learning environment. It covers some areas like public engagement and policy-making framework with assessment activity, leadership, designing institutional arrangements. Other areas include sufficient sources of funding and availability of competent staff who understand the real essence of assessment. The enabling context has a crucial role to derive excellence in quality and success of assessment system as its absence means there is no assessment system (Bank, 2012).

The government is responsible for providing policy framework, leadership and vision to establish the enabling context. This can be implemented through partnership of public and private sector, for example, the contracting administration of the assessment program can contact to any outside firm. The autonomy from political influence would be the trademark of mature assessment system (Waqas, Rehman, & Rehman, 2019).

For implementing, analyzing and developing resources on tests, some of the education systems combine federal context to generate enabling context. Designing a common test item bank to reduce the cost for individual state for their specific purposes can be used as an example. The alignment of system with other components is necessary for overall education system. This involves teacher training opportunities in connection with assessment goals, curriculum and standards (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995). The alignment of assessment activities with education system is important so that the quality of education can be ensured and collaborations can be created. This alignment contains what is being tested and what does the official standard or envisioned curriculum state to give information of student learning and achievement.

The quality improvement in education system can be analyzed by the correspondence between any country's curriculum and international assessment standards like PISA and TIMSS which might be low in assessment but still be aligned with goals of the specific education system. Brazil, Jordan and Poland are the best examples which, despite of their diversities, have utilized the data from the above-mentioned standards to monitor their performance and improved their achievement level.

The assessment activity depends upon the psychometric quality of assessment procedures, processes and tools (AERA, APA and NCME, 1999). The assessment quality has an importance in assessment activities: examinations, classroom assessment, system level assessment or large scale. It also tries to resolve such issues like designing the assessment activities and their implementation, questions being asked in examination, survey items etc. The reports of interpretation and analysis of students' performance and

response on those specific activities are generated by keeping in mind their appropriateness (Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Shepard, 2000).

The judgements on assessment activity may differ. A poor decision making can happen if the assessment is not appropriate in terms of its design, interpretation, reporting, analysis and implementation in student learning and quality system (Wolff, 2007). In fact, if there is any disbelief in approach, poor assessment quality may destabilize the whole assessment exercise.

As teachers and students are the main stakeholders in assessment process, the shift from Established to Advanced will give them the priority in terms of inputs, practices and reforms (Darling-Hammond & Wentworth, 2010; Shepard, 2000). This can relate to the daily classroom activities as powerful type of assessment by teachers and students for capacity building and focused attention on quality issues.

In different areas, there are different levels of development for assessment. For instance, a system is emerging in large scale, system level assessment but is established in examination area or vice versa. While, it is unclear which one area can be more functional at what level. For example, one may think the Established level is more suitable and appropriate than advanced level for desirable outcomes or vice versa.

Appendix 1 outlines generic profile for the development of assessment systems at emerging, established, and advanced levels and Appendix 2 refers to assessment types.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

Three research questions guided the focused groups discussion which are as follows:

1. Which institutional policies are used to monitor and evaluate the quality of education being provided to the students?
2. How existing national and institutional policies are similar and dissimilar with the international models?
3. What are key elements of a coherent model for monitoring, evaluation and reflection in Higher education of Pakistan?

3.2 Participants Details

This research used qualitative research method. Data was collected through brain storming session and focused group discussions on various academic arenas including Students' monitoring, reflection and evaluation. Superior university organized its 2nd Rectors Conference with the theme of 'Transforming Higher Education Institutes to produce 21st Century Graduates'. The Rectors conference 2019 envisions devising a framework in order to transform higher education institutes (HEIs) to produce 21st Century Graduates. To achieve this agenda, the legends across multiple fields participated in conference. The conference engaged major stakeholders of academia and industry including more than 50 vice chancellors (VCs), rectors, policy makers, 25 industry CEOs, 10 government regulatory representatives and 15 international delegates from USA, Sweden, Germany, Indonesia and UAE participated in the conference. Out of these 10 persons were selected to have focused group discussion.

3.3 Focus Group Discussion Questions

Focus group technique is deployed because collecting qualitative data on topic of *monitoring and evaluation of students at higher education demands group* interaction and has potential to produce insight into a phenomenon.

1. What are the approaches to assess ongoing learning used for monitoring and evaluation?
2. Do you think reflection can be done through using learning probes?
3. How do you see teachers' skills in monitoring student learning?
4. How we can compare between national and institutional policies with the international models?
5. Does gap exist between industry needs and education provided to students?

3.4 Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The Rectors' Conference was divided into three phases. Three phases were conducted before conference which encompasses meetings with the VCs and Rectors and regional rector's round tables.

First Phase: Meetings were conducted with VCs and Rectors of public and private universities. The agenda of Conference was shared and the interested VCs were given working group themes as per their interest.

Second Phase: The working groups were gathered at the regional round tables where the research on respective themes including Students' monitoring, reflection and evaluation was presented and discussed with the fellow members in the regional round tables. Three regional round tables were conducted in different cities of Pakistan (Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar).

Third Phase: Rectors' Conference was organized in which the discussions of round tables were summed up in the form of panel discussions and future guidelines were given for 'Transforming HEIs to produce 21st Century Graduates'.

The focus groups analyzed the existing monitoring, evaluation and reflection models of HEIs of Pakistan and brainstorm guidelines for a better model that aligns with the HEC Vision. Focus group members (n=10) discussed on (a) institutional policies to monitor and evaluate the quality of education being provided to the students, (b) comparison between existing national and institutional policies with the international universities, (c) suggesting an ideal assessment framework. The participants were divided into two groups. The length of the two focus groups was ranged from one and one-half hours. Data were collected by using a tape and video recorder to record program participants' responses. The data were transcribed by using a professional transcriber.

To get the overall gist of the information, the researchers were thoroughly involved in reading data process. Then, the same segments of information were identified across focus groups. Different Microsoft Word tools (highlighting, comment bar, theme format) were used to analyze and manage the data. The initial coding organization was done with open-ended and focus group questions. Themes were drawn from open coding of participants'

responses. Some additional codes were identified by using inductive approach for such remarks which were not fit into initial categories. Explicated themes were compared between groups under selective coding in the final step.

3.5 Results

Theme 1. Approaches to assess ongoing learning used for monitoring and evaluation

Experts discussed, analyzed the existing education assessment system and proposed better ways to evaluate students' performance. They suggested that the usual approach to assess ongoing learning is for the teacher to ask questions or give written tests in class. The comprehension level of students does not clearly signify from the recitation of what they have learnt. Just the memorization of five-step conflict resolution model cannot give any indication whether the student is able to apply it in real life situation. This is the reason where the teachers need to ensure that assessments, including written exams, must include comprehension as well as application level of learning (e.g. questions relating to a simple story). Face-to-face and group discussion can be effective ways to assess students' performance and achievement regarding the development of their critical thinking skills and how much they have developed their attitudes and values. One more point has been highlighted by the researchers that there are no up-to-date courses and teachers are not giving opportunities of professional development workshops on setting exam paper.

Theme 2. The use of learning enquiries has a useful impact on student achievement

Learning enquiries from the students can produce beneficial results. Setting questions at an appropriate level of students can be a useful technique in which students can easily give answers according to their experiences and knowledge. Another technique can be used by keeping an eye on those students who are answering the questions during discussions in class and call upon non-volunteers. Asking students to give their opinion or comment on others' responses. Content and students' achievement have a strong relationship with each other. Teachers' continuous monitoring in class can alert them to pick up instructional pace and cover the material.

Theme 3. Teachers' skills in monitoring student learning

There is a strong connection between teachers' monitoring and students' academic performance to assess students' learning and achievements. For this, teachers' training in classroom monitoring practices is important in assessment system, but this problem is not being addressed, unfortunately.

The study on classroom-level monitoring and assessment indicates that:

- Decision making on students' allocation and instructional pacing depends on monitoring by teachers' ongoing classroom practice. While assessments are made on the basis of standardized achievement test results.
- Assigning homework regularly or frequently, seatwork monitoring, record completion assignments and conducting questioning of different kinds help to monitor learning which many teachers do not do in classes.

- Teachers do not get the opportunity to receive pre-service training to conduct formal and informal assessments.
- There is inadequate administrative support for in-service training to be skillful in monitoring and assessment.

Theme 4. Comparison between national and institutional policies with the international models

The policy document is not available publicly and therefore universities are facing trouble in winning funding. We need funding that covers research and development activities. In comparison to international universities, our universities have less physical and technological resources, effective infrastructure and capacity building frameworks.

Theme 5. Building and facilitate a strong stakeholder network for bridging gap between industry and academia

The focus groups analyzed the existing monitoring, evaluation and reflection models of HEIs of Pakistan and brainstorm guidelines for a better model that aligns with the HEC Vision. Few of the participants from academia committee commented that

- “When we talk about the higher education, the major stakeholders are HEC, Academia and Industry. If these stakeholders are on board in decision making then quality of higher education in Pakistan will ameliorate”.
- “It is a challenge to have all staff members ‘be on board’ with encouraging rather than denying diversity.”
- “Academia identifies that industry is not much interested in the academic projects. They are not inclined towards commercialization. Even if they sign MOUs for the purpose, they usually leave the projects in middle without completing them”.

Industry people contributed to a large extent to the debate by sharing their ideas on extant system. They view that current market needs applied research rather than just empirical studies that only test already existing theories in our Asian context. One of CEO’s asserted that

- “Industry highlighted the lack of alignment of academia projects towards industry problems. The academic projects are usually only research oriented and theoretically based. Industry will likely to support academic projects that are aligned with industry problems”.

4. DISCUSSION

Focus group participants discussed on how to bridge gap between industry requirement for employability of graduates and university education system. Most of common points were on teachers’ skills and how students were evaluated. They identified the lacunas and issues in current assessment system and how these can be eradicated. Following suggestion were made to improve the education quality provided at higher educational institutes

- Teachers should be given training on setting assessments including projects, assignments, quizzes, exam papers from various levels of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning objectives

- Examination system should be revamped since teachers don't even know how to set question items such as multiple choices, industrial projects or open examination system.
- Grants are given for certain period of time but this doesn't mean that collaboration ends there when fund is over. All resources that one tapped are still there and eager to work with you.
- There is problem in utilization of funding, because of regulation in universities. University rules should be different and their management bodies should monitor these.
- Universities should apply for funding from foreign bodies and authorities

5. CONCLUSIONS

Assessment is the main tool to know and understand whether the desired learning outcomes in education system are being processed or not according to intended ways for the betterment of students, economy and the society at large. The research identified the gaps exist in present education system. This study also has tried to extract strategies and principles by investigating other countries' experiences and create a framework to develop effective assessment system for students. This framework will be helpful for policy makers and other stakeholders to build consensus and discuss priorities and major inputs for their assessment system. The framework will also help other countries to inform and identify the key quality drivers which are necessary to be addressed to strengthen the excellence and efficacy of activities in assessment system. This is crucial as the main goal of any kind of assessment is to provide authentic and timely information to teachers, students and other stakeholders for the betterment and improvement of the quality education and learning outcomes. Selection of kinds or types of assessment needs consistency with information and decision-making needs.

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APPENDIX 1

Student Assessment Systems at Different Levels of Development			
	Emerging	Established	Advanced
Enabling Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No or limited policy framework or guidelines Weak leadership/public engagement • Few trained staff; high turnover • Unreliable/irregular funding • Unclear or unstable institutional arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of clear policy framework or guidelines • Strong leadership/public engagement • Training programs/trained staff with low turnover • Stable/regular funding • Clear and stable institutional arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same as for Established • + strong focus on: • Assessment for learning • classroom assessment • Role of teachers • Innovation and research-based System practices
System Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments not fully aligned with learning/quality goals, standards, curriculum • Assessments not aligned with pre- and in-service teacher training opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments aligned with learning/quality goals, standards, curriculum • Assessments aligned with pre- and in-service teacher training opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same as for Established • + strong focus on: • Assessment for learning • classroom assessment • Role of teachers • Innovation and research-based System practices
Assessment Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited awareness or application of technical or professional standards for ensuring assessment quality and effective uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and application of technical or professional standards for ensuring assessment quality effective uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same as for Established • + strong focus on: • Assessment for learning • classroom assessment • Role of teachers • Innovation and research-based System practices

APPENDIX 2

Assessment Types and Their Key Differences				
	Classroom	National	International	Examination
Purpose	To provide immediate feedback to inform classroom instruction	To provide feedback on the overall health of the system at particular grade/age level(s), and to monitor trends in learning	To provide feedback on comparative performance of the education system at particular age/gender levels	To select or certify students as they move from one level of the education system to the next (or into the workforce)
Frequency	Daily	subjects offered on a regular basis (such as every 3-5 years)	For individual subjects offered on a regular basis (such as every 3-5 years)	Annually and more often where the system allows for repeats
Who is tested?	All students	Sample or census of students at a particular grade or age level(s)	A sample of students at a particular grade or age level(s)	All eligible students
Format	Varies from observation to questioning to paper-and pencil tests to student performances	Usually multiple choice and short answer	Usually multiple choice and short answer	Usually essay and multiple choice
Additional information collected from students?	Yes, as part of the teaching process	Frequency	Yes	Seldom
Scoring	Usually informal and simple	Varies from simple to more statistically sophisticated techniques	Usually involves statistically sophisticated techniques	Varies from simple to more statistically sophisticated techniques