

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' DISPOSITIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The study aim was to assess teachers' dispositions towards student assessment based on national standards. National Standards for teachers' professional development were developed under the Federal Ministry of Education; Government of Pakistan in 2009. For this end, interviews with 32 teachers working in elementary schools were conducted. It was observed that most of the teachers have different valuable viewpoints regarding the process of student assessment. However, this study explored that mostly teachers were involved in administering the verbal assessment and on paper assessment, and practical tasks, i.e., debates, demonstrations, individual as well as group activities effectively. The study further also revealed that teachers gave the same attention to all students and showed nothing likes or dislikes during assessment. The rubrics and answer keys were prepared in advance by teachers to ensure the accuracy of the results. Besides this, student learning outcomes, fairness and objectivity in assessment, etc. were assessed to authenticate the quality of education in the region. The given study also added the recommendations.

Keywords: Teacher evaluation, beliefs, practices and student assessment

Introduction

Teachers demonstrate their professional ethics and thoughts through their non-verbal and verbal interactions with students. Such behavior helps them interact with them in a more meaningful manner. In addition, encouraging activities can help pupils learn (Wang & Odell, 2002). According to Crowe (2003), positive beliefs in teachers can help ensure that their pupils make the necessary changes. This is because they can consistently demonstrate a pattern of behavior that helps achieve the goals of the school (Bryan, et al., 2012). Moreover, teachers' encouraging beliefs affect the learning progress of students positively (Alrabai, 2014). Furthermore, teachers' positive beliefs assist students learning and help to provide an encouraging environment in the classroom (Quiping et al., 2005).

In addition, students' learning can be improved based on effective classroom environment as well as the quality of instructions. Therefore, teachers should keep in mind that hopeful beliefs are mandatory to improve the quality of instructions as well as students' learning (Sergiovanni, 2015). For this purpose, Educational Authorities should develop appropriate criteria for assessing teachers' beliefs at the time of their recruitment. There are small studies in the field of assessment to assess teachers' proficiencies and professional practice. It is therefore clear that teachers' beliefs affect positively students learning and classroom environment resultantly whole education system. That's why there is an imperative need to conduct research in this area of effect e. g. students' assessment (Singh & Stoloff, 2007).

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Additionally, a competent teacher may have constructive beliefs for improving the learning process of students (Wasicsko, 2002). To this end, researcher wants to examine teachers' beliefs and determine whether they are dedicated to assessing students' abilities. Teachers may compile data on pupils' academic progress to use in making further improvements. Before beginning an unfamiliar subject or piece of knowledge, the objectives of learning for the class must be determined. It should be assessed whether or not proposed SLOs were attained at the result of teaching a certain topic. The provision of learning opportunities and the revision of instructions may be based on the learning outcomes attained by students (Coubergs et al., 2017). According to Memon (2007), the current system for evaluating teachers is not based on established standards. A framework, methodologies, or processes for evaluating teachers' professional performance are lacking.

In order to assess teachers' proficiencies concerning their profession, the Federal Education Department under the Government of Pakistan in 2009, approved national standards for teachers involving students' assessment. Standard "assessment" includes themes such as student learning outcomes, fairness and objectivity in assessment, etc. for assessing teachers' beliefs concerning these competencies. The students' learning outcomes may be defined as a statement with the intention of a particular period of time or learning, student will be able to understand and express. It can also be said that the knowledge, ability and skills that students must achieve at the end of the learning process and participation in highest learning experiences can be used to define appropriately the learning outcomes of students (Goddard et al., 2015; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015).

Fairness is a morally just and crucial aspect of evaluating pupils' achievement. It is connected to common notions of similarity, equity, integrity, authenticity and consistency in the process of students' assessment. For ensuring such aspects in the evaluation of students' academic performance, it is important to provide equal opportunities for all students to learn in a nurturing environment and special attention (Tierney, 2015). To maintain fairness in the assessment process, the teacher may continue the arrangement of openness and equal learning chances for all pupils (Tierney, 2016).

The type of data gathered from students' assessments is what is meant by an assessment's objectivity. It is the capacity to assess student achievement unbiased by personal characteristics (Zosh et al., 2017). Similar to this, proficiency minimize teachers' bias while grading students' performance. It is essential for teachers to escape from individual judgments and justifications that could influence the grading process and their interpretation. Many things, like personal impressions, prior information, and divergent ways of thinking, can interfere with a teachers' ability to be objective (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Reporting on assessments is the process of disseminating data on the current state of pupils' academic development for a variety of purposes. It is part of the collaborative learning process that involves parents, students, and teachers. Additionally, assessment results show the progress and success of students in their academic work (Mertler, 2016).

In order to share information on the current position of students' academic achievement for a variety of purposes, assessment reporting is a process. It is a part of the collaborative learning process that teachers, students, and parents engage in. Additionally, evaluation results show the success and advancement of pupils' learning (Suhaini et al., 2021). It is important that the classroom teacher thoroughly prepare detailed information about each student's performance after marking papers and send it to their homes. They may also have the chance to talk with the teacher or anybody else who prepared the progress reports about it. Parents are welcome to actively engage in the assessment process on a regular basis. As a result, it is the duty of teachers to contribute to their pupils' learning growth (Bonner, 2016).

The assessment procedure must be meticulously carried out, and teachers must conduct themselves incisively to examine the pupils' performance. Every task that pupils complete while learning is observed by teachers. Additionally, based on observations in the classroom, they create diverse opinions on students' performances. As a result, appropriate feedback that cannot be offered with the aid of any other form of assessment may be given based on the observation (Witherspoon et al., 2016). Similar to this, the teachers should observe the learning engagement of students for the reason that the students' learning outcomes cannot achieve without their active participation in all types of classroom activities. Moreover, classroom teacher might further observe learners' participation, enthusiasm, and concentration in numerous kinds of learning (McComb & Eather, 2017). Teachers keep an eye on students' participation in learning process and provide appropriate guidance, but it is important to determine whether or not students are paying complete attention to learning since, without students' attention, all efforts are useless (Martin et al., 2016). Without dedication, keenness, and manners as an astute spectator of students' learning improvement and helpful comments, teachers cannot perform all the aforementioned proficiencies effectively (NeSmith, 2021).

It appears necessary to analyze whether teachers are assessing students in accordance with above mentioned national standards. For that reason, the study aim was to analyze the dispositions of teachers working in elementary schools in Punjab toward the assessment of students based on NPST.

Objective of the Study

- To assess the teachers' dispositions toward student assessment in light of the standards outlined in NPSTs.

Research Questions

- How do teachers think that by using learning outcomes, students' learning can be improved?
- How do teachers demonstrate impartiality when grading their students?
- How do educators ensure objectivity when grading their students?
- How do teachers inform students and parents about assessment results?
- How do the instructors watch the pupils when they are being assessed?
- How do teachers provide pupils feedback?

Methodology

The nature of this study was qualitative. The objective was to investigate elementary school teachers' attitudes toward students' assessment through standard-based teacher evaluation. 32 elementary school teachers were chosen to participate in the interviews (16 males and 16 females). In the selected district, there were four tehsils and eight teachers were randomly selected from each. Boddy (2016) claimed that the recommended sample size for conducting interviews is between 20 and 30. Additionally, saturation is a key idea of calculation the sample size for conducting interview. Aim of adopting such approach is to obtain sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon, and the saturation process for qualitative data occurs after the first 12 interviews (Malterud et al., 2016). Each of the 32 elementary school teachers participated in structured interviews lasting 25 to 30 minutes. These interviews were carried out in January and February 2019. According to the interviewees' availability, the interview schedule was set up. An informal conversational manner was used to conduct the interviews in a welcoming setting (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Each respondent was encouraged to express his or her opinions on how pupils are assessed. Digital voice recorder was used for recording interviews with participants' consent. According to the preference of the interviewees, the English/Urdu language option was given. The researcher examined all interview transcripts to ensure that the content was accurate (Caruth, 2013).

Instrumentation

According to Barnett (2007), interviews are useful for obtaining more precise information and data clarification. It gathers respondents' perceptions and gives them the chance to express their opinions in their own words. A good interview will express the respondents' true perceptions (Tesch, 2013). In order to learn more in-depth information about teachers' feelings toward student assessment, structured interviews with elementary school teachers were undertaken. Interview questions were organized to keep in mind the criteria set by national standards, include learning outcomes for students, teachers' fairness and objectivity in assessment, reporting to parents and teachers' role as observer, and constructive feedback.

Results

The objective of this qualitative study was to know more specifically about teachers' viewpoints about the process of students' assessment. Standards developed by the Government of Pakistan in 2009 served as the basis for the preparation of the interview questions from the literature. Experts verified the validity of the interview questions. Expert advice and the results of pilot testing were taken into consideration when modifying the questions. Interviews were done and digitally recorded after the interview questions were decided upon. The researcher took considerable care to manually create the themes, sub-themes, coding, and decoding in order to assure its accuracy. These themes, including learning outcomes for students, fairness and objectivity in assessment, reporting to parents, the instructor role as an astute observer, and constructive feedback, emerged from the interview data. The following presents an interpretation of these concepts:

First, it was asked that how the teachers assess students' learning progress. More teachers were also asked how they utilized achieved learning outcomes to improve students' existing level of performance. The teachers said that they give students practical projects e. g. group discussions, debates, demonstrations as well as oral and written assignments. Teachers also explained that they engage the pupils in group competitions and other tasks (write something on the given topic, class presentation etc.). Moreover, teachers reported that they check children' learning progress at the end of each unit to gauge learning outcomes. Teachers pointed out that achieved learning outcomes are kept in mind as evidence for assessing the effectiveness of instructions, modifying teaching methods and students ranking toward learning achievements. Teachers further explained that they prepare future action plans based on the learning outcomes.

In order to become familiar with assessment fairness, an effort was made to learn the teachers' perspectives on how they demonstrate justice when conducting students' assessments. Further were asked how they prevent favoritism when evaluating students? Additionally, how do they handle both high and poor achievers at the same time throughout the assessment? Teachers said they give each student the same amount of attention. Throughout the assessment procedure, they don't exhibit any elements of like or dislike. To ensure authenticity and accuracy of results, rubrics and answer keys were used to mark subjective as well as objective type papers. It was further informed that they allot provisional roll umbers before marking papers to make the results more reliable.

It was investigated whether equal time was given for preparation prior to the assessment. Each group of pupils includes brilliant, average, and dull students. Pupils are divided into small groups. It was also investigated whether all pupils have a supportive learning environment. During the instructions, both high and low achievers are praised. Slow learners are given more time and simple assignments, while high achievers are given challenging ones. Moreover, it was recommended that slow learners sit in first benches; the difficult topics were repeated again and again to make them easy to understand. Intelligent students help mediocre students learn in groups. Therefore, teachers use instructional techniques, including talks, debates, demonstrations, and creative activities, to deal with all.

Teachers were questioned on whether a student's character attributes have an impact on their achievement results in order to determine the objectivity of the assessment. Teachers said that a student's characteristics, such as frequent attendance, punctuality, cleanliness, writing, and engagement in class activities, influence how well they perform on assessments. They were unable to lessen their prejudice or shield evaluation scores from the impact of the aforementioned student characteristics. Some teachers claimed that because they offer grades based solely on a student's performance without taking into account their characteristics, the attributes of the pupils did not have an impact on the results. Additionally, teachers said that children exhibit anxiety when it comes to assessments, namely those that are long, obscure, and comprise questions that they find challenging. The pupils lament the lack of time if the test contains lengthy, essay-style questions.

Teachers were questioned about how they let the parents know about their children's performance in order to evaluate the procedure of reporting to parents. They were asked to list the information other than grades that is contained in progress reports. Teachers were also questioned about how they keep track of their pupils' performance. It was discovered that they inform parents of their children's performance via mail, email, text messaging, and meetings. According to a few educators, checked papers are sent home with the pupils so that the parents can sign them. Parents receive result cards that have been prepared and sent. A few pupils' parents may be contacted for meetings if they deem it necessary. In some circumstances, notes from parents are written in students' papers and notebooks.

Additionally, teachers mentioned that in addition to the grades received, the progress reports also include the phrases exceptional, superb, well-done, very good, and satisfactory. Performance reports also include the students' achievement ranks, proper uniform, punctuality, and the annotations of other teachers regarding the students' compliance and character. The regularity, neatness, homework, health-related factors, and participation in extracurricular activities of pupils are also mentioned by the teacher in progress reports. In addition to assessment scores, several instructions and recommendations for improving students' learning are also provided on progress reports for the parents' information. Few teachers claimed that they prepared weekly and monthly reports on students' performance and that annual summaries of performance were included in final reports. Teachers claimed they record some information; students' names, parents' names, contact information, and achievement grades are recorded and kept in a private locker along with the students' grades. All relevant information about each student is stored in a few folders that are created in soft formats. It was further informed that the checked papers of children and their award lists are kept in separate files in the examination department.

It was questioned that how the teachers prepare students before starting the examination and how they provide instructions to the students during the test. It was informed by the teachers that they prepare the students for examination by conducting daily, weekly and monthly tests and similarly half-course and full course test. They divide the students in different groups, i.e., A, B, and C. Few teachers claimed that brief questions are frequently asked in class and that everyday exercises are undertaken to review previously learned information. Teachers also mentioned that the children are told to study the question papers attentively and write down concise replies with all the required elements while taking an assessment. Furthermore, they clarified that challenging and hidden questions are read aloud. A teacher explained that throughout the evaluation, pupils are directed to answer all questions, but easy or simple ones should come first. It was also said that students are given instructions on how to appropriately answer unclear questions and that the questions are clarified. Teachers were instructed to provide some assistance for questions that were unclear so that students would attempt all questions correctly.

Besides this, constructive feedback helps individual and groups identify their strengths and weaknesses, leading to continuous improvement. It is essential in guiding students' progress and helping them understand areas that need attention. For this purpose, teachers were questioned that how to motivate failed students, and how to appreciate those students who show good

performance? These questions were posed to teachers to learn more about their attitudes toward providing constructive feedback. Teachers were also asked how they made sure that the students followed the feedback they were given. Teachers claimed that instead of discouraging, insulting, or lowering the morals of unsuccessful students, they motivate them with positive reinforcement. They make an effort to help failing students to overcome their difficulties. Teachers viewed that simple tasks are assigned to the failures. Failures were also encouraged by giving examples of those students who have shown exceptional performance in the academic field. Failed pupils are encouraged and given success tips for the purpose of helping them prepare for their upcoming exams. Sometimes, typical pupils retake the same exam in the correct direction. It is suggested that students develop a habit of working hard and grasping complex ideas. Teachers said that successful pupils utilize terms like "supper," "excellent," and "well-done. They also receive some economic incentives.

A teacher remarked that the students who perform well are praised in front of the whole class as well as their parents for motivational purpose. Constructive comments also recommended for successful students for sustaining high position in academic. The failure students are helped with other students to learn the difficult lessons or complex tasks. Moreover, the best performers are told to revise the text loudly turn by turn for slow learners. The positive effects of feedback are examined by revising students' assignments and the results of written tests, the positive impacts of feedback are examined. Teachers said the students are advised to follow feedback given. The active participation of students in learning activities reveals how feedback is beneficial. A teacher claimed that testing is planned out in a systematic way both before and after providing specific feedback.

Discussion

According to the study's findings, teachers were committed to utilize learning outcomes of students as support for modifying instructions. They coincided that the assignments requiring oral, written, and practical work, such as group discussions, debates, and demonstrations, can help pupils learn their lessons. They demonstrated a readiness to accept that the learning outcomes may be used to improve teaching strategies and student learning. Teachers also concurred that the students learning performance teaching strategies might be improved based on the learning outcome of students. This capability of teachers was seemed more reasonable.

Fairness should be considered while constructing a test, according to many teachers. Teachers noted that in order to ensure impartiality in assessment, they prepare answer keys and rubrics in advance. The practice of assigning provisional roll numbers to each student prior to marking their papers was investigated. Additionally, it was indicated by the respondents that all students are given an equal amount of preparation time. A study by Wang & Matsumura (2019) also explored the same perceptions of teachers as in this study. Moreover, the study showed that standardized scoring rubrics and answer keys may be created to ensure impartiality in assessment. They also list a number of factors that make students anxious and uneasy during the test. Teachers advised pupils to follow the essential instructions and be well-prepared before the test. Additionally, the study's findings showed that students' features and characteristics, such as

attitude and behavior, had an impact on teachers' attitudes. Such notions held by teachers that characteristics of students influence their grades are also supported by several studies (Harlen, 2005; Read et al., 2005; Dennis, 2007; Tao, 2014).

In terms of teachers' opinions towards informing parents of their children's development, this study's findings showed that most teachers employed a variety of successful methods to do this. Parent-teacher conferences were the primary means of contact. The students' assessment preparation was successful thanks to the tactics implemented. Teachers gave the pupils the right instructions and gave them the information they needed to take the tests during the assessment. Both high and low achievers were given encouragement by teachers. High performers were also encouraged to maintain their current performance levels, while low achievers were counseled to keep up the fight for success. Teachers' perspectives on the value of constructive criticism in improving both teaching methods and student learning were discovered. These findings are consistent with several researches (Hamid & Mahmood, 2010; Duffy, 2013). These studies showed how giving students constructive comments improves their performance and helps teachers grow professionally. Teachers also indicated that pupils receive constructive criticism and that a methodical assessment approach is used to determine whether or not the students apply the feedback.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, recommendations have been made that may not only help teachers become more open-minded about student assessment but also aid in their professional development, especially for those who teach in public elementary schools. Most importantly, however, are those who create the curricula for teacher education. The National Professional Standards for Teachers and their outlined purposes were unknown toward a lot of teachers. For this purpose, a system for teacher education that complies with NPST requirements be developed if we wish to compete on a worldwide scale in the field of education. Furthermore, NPST deployment in the actual phase needs to be properly planned for. The evaluation method for teachers in public schools is not any more in-depth or thorough. A thorough framework for teacher education programs and the appropriate accreditation have been designed by the Federal Education department under the Government of Pakistan. It is recommended that the method for evaluating teachers be entirely changed and that a suitable system be put in place based on the NPSTs' developed mechanism. The aspiration of high-quality teaching and learning cannot become a reality without adequate NPST implementation.

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