

Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practices: Challenges and Opportunities to Classroom Teachers in Pakistan

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Abstract

Classroom is a provide platform for various learning activities where teachers spend considerable amount of time on students' assessment. This signifies assessment practices and therefore, the study was designed to investigate teachers' classroom assessment practices and the challenges and opportunities they have at secondary level. The researchers investigated secondary school English teachers of grade 10th in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Data were collected from two hundred and thirty five English teachers of District Mardan and Swat through a questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed by applying Mean, Std Deviation and independent sample t-test. Results of the study illustrated teachers mostly follow; objective type test, home work, oral presentations, question answering during the instruction, ignoring alternate assessment practices-one minute test, presentation, group projects, self, peer and portfolio assessment practices. Major challenges were; time management, lack of training in assessment, overcrowded classrooms and ensuring the psychometric properties of assessment tools. While opportunities in classroom assessment practices were recognized as; expertise of experience teachers, services of universities' education departments, training sessions with the support of Regional Institute for Teacher Education (RITEs), use of flip learning approach and center for teachers excellence may be utilize for the professional development of teachers in classroom assessment practices.

Keywords: Assessment tools; Learning; English; Challenges; Opportunities

Introduction

Classroom assessment practices of teachers connect curriculum, instructional mechanism and students learning outcomes, which is one of the essential elements of teaching learning process. Teachers use

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classroom tests, presentations, questions answer sessions, projects, and group activities to enhance student's learning. These practices enable students to practice learning contents, develop thinking patterns, activate their neurons and enhance their confidence on attained skills and knowledge.¹

Classroom tests and presentations provide hands-on opportunities to students to practice and reproduce the learned concepts and skills. Furthermore, it also enhances students' critical thinking as these tests ask for the implementation of learned concepts in a variety of situations. Question answer sessions, group discussion and group activities bring together the students and develop cooperation and coordination among them.² It plays leading role in instructional decisions. Students' strengths and weakness along with their learning styles are identified through these practices which results in changing the instructional method, medium of instruction, adopting alternative channel of teaching. Moreover, it facilitates the teachers to understand their own instructional strengths and weakness and obtain relevant information which are indispensable for academic decisions. The assessment of students, understanding of subject matters with poor assessment tools may influence teacher's decisions.³

The paramount importance of classroom assessment practices sensitized the importance of teacher's competencies in assessment practices. Teacher understanding and proper implementation of assessment strategies are directly linked to assessment results and instructional decisions.⁴ Therefore, teacher's familiarity with a variety of essential assessment tools, principles, strategies and procedure are indispensable. Similarly, they need to be skillful in designing assessment tools, development of rubrics, analysis of results and using assessment results for instructional purposes.

Assessment practices provide foundation for students' academic achievement in the form of scores they attained in written or oral examination. On one side it illustrates students' academic potentials and on the other it motivates them for further studies.⁵ Classroom assessment practices concentrates on the improvement of students learning and teachers' teaching. The results of these practices provide evidences to teachers concerning students' level of understanding, progress towards the desired goals and areas of students' strengths and weakness.

Further, research studies also showed that formal assessment techniques which include; written weekly/monthly term tests, presentations, individual projects and experiments has close relationship with students' anxiety.⁶ On the contrary, informal assessment techniques

which includes; rubrics, portfolios, group work and classroom discussion used in classroom assessment have positive contribution to students' achievement.⁷ Gronlund⁸ classified these tools into traditional and alternate types of tools. Traditional tools such as objective type tests (MCQs, fill in the blanks, true false and matching items). These tools are traditional as it needs less time and difficulty level is low as compared to alternate tools-portfolio, observation and other performances type tests which ask for more time and are more complex in nature. Results of studies revealed that students are intrinsically more motivated for alternate tools of assessment. The results also showed that majority of teachers carried out assessment practice without understanding these practices properly which negatively influence students' achievement and teachers' performances. Therefore, experts demanded teachers for more sophisticated skills and knowledge of assessment practices.⁹

Similarly, students are assessed before, during and after the instructional process aimed to assess students' learning progress.¹⁰ The assessment take place before the instruction helps the teacher to understand the true status and requirements of students which enable the teacher to lead the instructional plan accordingly. Assessments during instructional process focus on the improvement of instructional quality, students' interest, their involvement in the learning process and hands-on practices at classroom level. On the other hand, the assessment practices take place at the end of the instructional process in term of written test, oral examination and performances aimed at grading students performances, measuring students mastery of learning contents which are used for certain instructional decisions¹¹.

Keeping in view the multiple uses of assessment experts recommend classroom teachers to use multiple assessment tools to collect evidence of students' performances.¹² The alignments of recommended and practiced assessment tools have significantly negative relationship with students' academic achievement. Furthermore, students' familiarity regarding grading policy is imperative, as to motivate them for adjustment and overcome the gap in teacher and students perceptions. Experts are also of the view that in grading policy none-achievement factors such as neatness, classroom attendance and students attitude. Keeping in view the above literature this study intended to investigate classroom assessment practices and the challenges teachers' faces during the process.

Research problem and objectives of the study

Classroom assessment practices enable the teachers to use its' results for students' promotion, planning the instruction, informing parents and other stakeholders about students' educational achievement. Therefore, the current study investigated the challenges and opportunities to teachers in classroom assessment practices at secondary level in the subject of English.

The objectives of the study were;

1. To investigate the prevailing classroom assessment practices of secondary school teachers in the subject of English
2. To identify the challenges faced by secondary school teachers in classroom assessment practices
3. To pinpoint the available opportunities for secondary school teachers' for enhancing classroom assessment practices and
4. To compare the public and private sector teachers' classroom assessment practices, challenges and available opportunities in classroom assessment practices

Procedures and Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature. All secondary school teachers teaching English to grade 10th of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constituted the population of the study. The study was delimited to districts Swat and Mardan. The respondents of the study were teachers from public sector as well as from private sector.

A four likert scale questionnaire was used to investigate the research problem. The reliability co-efficient of the questionnaire was $\alpha = .78$ as calculated after pilot study. After that the data were collected from 235 English teachers of district Mardan and Swat. The collected data were analyzed through Mean, Std Deviation, and independent sample t-test.

Results

The questionnaire was framed on four options Likert format. Therefore, the mean scores interpretations was based as followed;

4.00	to	3.51	Strongly Agreed
3.50	to	2.51	Agreed
2.50	to	1.51	Disagreed
1.50	to	1.00	Strongly Disagreed

The demographic information of the respondents was;

Table No 1 Teaching Experience of the respondents

Ranges	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 to 05 years	79	33.6	33.6	33.6
6 to 10 years	78	33.2	33.2	66.8
11 to 20 years	41	17.4	17.4	84.3
21 to Above	37	15.7	15.7	100.0
Total	235	100.0	100.0	

The teaching experiences of respondents were categorized in four intervals. In first interval there were seventy nine teachers which were 33.6% of the sample. In the second interval there were seventy eight teachers which were 32.2% of the total sample. In the third interval there were forty one teachers which were 17.4% of the sample group while the last interval which was comprised of the teachers who has more than twenty or above years teaching experience they were only 15.7% of the total sample group.

Table No 2 Training of teachers in classroom assessment

Ranges	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Nil	196	83.4	83.4	83.4
One week	27	11.5	11.5	94.9
Two to five week	8	3.4	3.4	98.3
More than five week	4	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Table No 2 illustrates in-service teachers' training in classroom assessment. An astounding majority of one hundred and ninety six respondents which is 83.4% of the total sample group had not attended any in-service training in classroom assessment. Only 11.5% of the respondents attended one week in-service training, 3.4% respondents attended two to five weeks training and 1.7% of the total sample group attended more than five weeks in-service training in classroom assessment. To conclude majority of teachers had not attended any training in classroom assessment.

Table No 3 Major Classroom Assessment Practices Public and Private Secondary Teachers

Classroom assessment practices	Mean Scores	Std deviation	t value	P value
Paper pencil tests	2.44	.929	-.908	.365
Objective type tests	3.34	.675		

Extended response /essay tests	2.93	.816
Non-participants observation	2.43	.780
Question answering	3.47	.622
Students' oral presentations	3.17	.617
Home work/ assignments	3.36	.577
Group or individual project	1.21	.246
Portfolio assessment of students	1.14	.211
Written class summaries	2.20	.747

Table No 3 shows the mean scores of major classroom assessment practices of secondary school teachers. Objective type tests (3.34), question answers (3.47), students' oral presentation (3.17), home work/assignment (3.36) were the major practices that majority of teachers have adopted for students' assessment.

Non-participant observation/ checklists (2.43), paper pencil tests (2.44) and written class summary were those assessment practices which were not followed by majority of teachers while portfolio assessment and group/individual projects were those assessment practices which were strongly disagreed by majority of the respondents. The standard deviations of all values were less than 1.00 which shows that all the responses were not scattered from their mean scores.

Further, there was no significant difference in the mean scores of public and private secondary school English teachers classroom assessment practices. The t value is -.908 which is not significant as the p value is higher than .05.

In nutshell, majority of the respondents were following traditional classroom assessment practices where question answer sessions between teacher and students were on the top of assessment practices which was followed by students' homework and oral presentation. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between the public and private sector teachers' classroom assessment practices.

Table No 4 Challenges in classroom assessment practices Public and Private Secondary Teachers

Challenges in classroom assessment	Mean	Std deviation	t value	P value
Individualized assessment	3.15	.767		
Coping students' exam anxiety	2.52	.823	-.672	.502
Using assessment results for modifying	3.04	.649		

instruction		
Analyzing students' scores	2.82	.975
Psychometric properties of test	2.44	.938
Assessing overcrowded classes	2.89	.944
Scoring of students' assessment	2.66	.829

Table No 4 shows the most frequent challenges that teachers faced in classroom assessment practices. Majority of the respondents were agreed that students' individualized assessment (3.15), exam anxiety (2.52), using students' assessment results for instructional modification (3.04), statistical analysis of students' assessment performance (2.82), assessment in overcrowded classrooms (2.89) and scoring students performance (2.62) were the most frequent challenges that teachers faced in classroom assessment practices as indicated by the mean scores. The standard deviations of all values were less than 1.00 which shows that all the responses were not scattered from their mean scores.

Further, there was no significant difference in the mean scores of public and private secondary school teachers' classroom assessment challenges. The mean scores were almost equal and the mean difference is low, the t value was -.295 which is not significant as the p value is higher than .05.

Laconically, individualized assessment, assessment in overcrowded classrooms and the statistical analysis of students' assessment scores were the challenges that most of the teachers faced. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the public and private sector teachers' classroom assessment practices.

Table No 5 Opportunities for enhancing students' classroom assessment practices, Public and Private Secondary Teachers

Opportunities	Mean	Std deviation	t value	P value
Assessing students through rubrics	2.73	.753	.518	.605
Peer assessment practices	3.01	.610		
Feedback on assessment tools	3.24	.610		
Consensus between students and teachers	3.36	.540		
Share scoring criteria with students	3.43	.611		
Online resources in assessment	3.31	.533		

Table No 5 shows the opportunities available for making the classroom assessment more productive. Peer assessment practices (3.01), feedback from school colleagues (3.24), consensus between students and teachers

(3.36), the sharing of scoring criteria with students (3.43) and online resources on classroom assessment practices were the opportunities which can enhance the effectiveness of teachers' classroom assessment practices. In overcrowded classrooms the most reflective and effective assessment practice is peer assessment which not only reduce time factor but also enhance students' critical thinking.

To conclude, sharing scoring criteria with students, consensus between students and teachers on classroom assessment practices with online resources are the best opportunities that might be utilized for effective classroom assessment practices. Furthermore, the t value .518 which was not significant as the p value is higher than .05 illustrates that there is no significant difference between public and private sector teachers in these available opportunities.

Discussions

Majority of teachers were found untrained in classroom assessment practices which is considered the most devastating element of teacher's professional life. The attained assessment knowledge and skills by the teachers is based on trial and error, no formal training in classroom assessment have lead the teachers into falsified assessment beliefs which has negative impacts on the learning outcomes of students. All these lead to increase gap between the recommended and applied methods of assessment.¹³

Classroom assessment practices were the most important aspect of classroom instruction. Results illustrates that majority of teachers followed traditional assessment practices that was question answer, objective type tests, oral presentation and home work of students. Gronlund¹⁴ in his work on educational assessment revealed that traditional assessment practices needs less time and low level thinking of students which has less impacts on students academic. Besides, students were less motivated and interested for traditional assessment practices.

On the contrary alternate assessment practices such as portfolio assessment, use of rubrics for the scoring of students' performances and checklist/non-participant observations were not found in-practice in the classrooms. Alternate assessment practices were closely related to students learning, students interests and competence in the contents.¹⁵ Teachers who follow alternate assessment practices involves students in practical work, develop students' thinking patterns and stimulate the students for further studies¹⁶.

Teachers faced different challenges while implmenting classroom assessment practices, due to different reasons teacher faced

problems in statistical analysis of students performances, implementing self and peer assessment practices, exam anxiety, assessment of overcrowded classrooms and ensuring the psychometric properties of assessment tools. The statistical analysis of students performances and its use for instructional modification aimed to enhance students learning outcomes.¹⁷ Formal assessment practices results in students exam anxiety which has negative effects on students. Furthermore, the assessment of overcrowded classrooms and its checking is difficult for teachers which sometimes leads to careless attitude in marking and unable to ensure the psychometric properties of assessment tools which most of the time leads to wrong data and ends in wrong decisions.¹⁸

Recommendations

As shown by the results teachers were found untrained in classroom assessment which reflects their incompetence in classroom assessment practices. It is therefore, recommended that in-service trainings may be arranged for teachers in classroom assessment practices with the support of Provincial Institutes of Teacher Education (PITEs), Regional Institute of Teacher Education (RITE) and Institutes of Education and Research of universities.

As majority of teachers were following traditional assessment practices which has been identified a factor that has low contribution in students' learning outcomes. The reason for following traditional classroom assessment practices might be lack of knowledge and skills, lack of training, restricted access to online resources and lack of professional forums for teachers to share their successes and experiences. It is therefore, recommended that easy access to online resources on assessment may be provided to teachers and teachers' professional forums for the sharing their experiences may be established which may be helpful for teachers' professional development.

There is no significant difference between public and private sectors teachers responses related to classroom assessment practices, challenges and available opportunities to enhance students learning outcomes. This study was conducted at secondary level; therefore, future researchers recommended to investigate the same study at primary or university level with a variable change such as assessment beliefs and practices or assessment environment.

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